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CORTNEY
SKINNER



A Thief in Heaven

By Gail Regier

Art by Larry Blamire

Arlo becomes more and more demanding. I spend hours fondling her mantle but she's never satisfied. Each night she insists she must eat whatever I don't have in the galley, and I go out and search the boardwalk stalls for the particular type of live seafood she craves. She gets so bitchy when the phone chimes that I leave it on RECORD. But worst of all, she's starting to complain about my girlfriend Carmel coming over.

"Now don't be this way," I tell her. "Get in the hole, baby." I live on a boat because of Arlo. She has to sleep underwater, in case her lung slits close up. I cut her tank into the hull myself, covered it with a gasket hatch and a fake wall panel.

Not go, she thinks. *Not sleep. Not water. Rub.* Her mental language is mostly tastes and textures. I put my hand out for her; she uncoils her arms and slithers onto her side. We mock-fight for a minute, five fingers against her eight elastic arms. Arlo's from a heavy-gravity world and her tissues are incredibly dense; if she wanted to, she could snap every bone in my hand. Sometimes she flattens herself out to cover my whole hand like a glove, and her trapezius massages me. It feels good when she does that.

When I try to palm her rubbery head, Arlo flows around my wrist and shimmers up the wall. *Not go. Not work next time. Not crawl. Not fetch.* She hangs from the ceiling like a small live chandelier, her color trembling between rust red and sunrise orange. The nausea of her displeasure bleeds into my mind.

"Carmel is my fiancée," I tell her. I try to explain what that means. Arlo doesn't get it and doesn't like it. The lamps and cushions and tables begin to seem far away and flat, like dolls cut out of cardboard. I feel as if I were breathing underwater, and a taste of muscle-laced rubber flows my mouth.

Shaking my head makes it go away; then I go vomit. When I come back, Arlo is in her tank, curled like a Möbius strip among the rocks and shells that line the bottom. I reach through the salt water to rub her mantle.

"It's okay," I say. "I love you, baby." Inside my head, she answers with a caress. From outside, I hear a siren of whistling air: Carmel swooping to a landing. I seal up the hatch, check the filters and thermostats, fasten the sliding panel.

Carmel and I stretch out on cushions, feeding each other pasta. "We need at least twelve spires, maybe sixty rooms," she says. Lately all she talks about is our future household. But I like to talk about it too. She stretches out on a couch and sips nectar from a crystal cup. She's wearing new body chains filled with iridescent bacteria, and the colors flicker whenever she moves. Of course I told her I love them, though after Arlo's shimmerings, anything else seems tame.

"I worry about Daddy," she says. "He's studying

religion again. He talks about taking narvo."

"He's not a fool." Carmel's father has everything. Why would he choose suspended animation?

"I thought about it once," she says, "when I was twelve. I had a crush on one of the stableboys. He was so gentle with the horses." She picks a thread of pasta from the pink of her lower lip. "Haven't you ever thought about it?"

"Sure," I say. But I haven't, ever. If they want me in a coffin they'll have to kill me.

Carmel says we're going to be late, so we put on our cloaks and go up on the roof. Other sailing craft jostle gently against the slips. Strings of lights mark the docks, and darkness swallows the ramble of slums beyond. Above us the Forbidden Gardens shimmer.

The Gardens are where I make my living. The owners — like Carmel's father — have labyrinthed their homes with security systems no ordinary burglar can pass. Each new moon brings them the pleasure of discovering in their traps the remains of some kid with a zipper torch and a wiring kit. They go to sleep at night secure, leaving their jewelry in rolltop desks and on top of dressers.

Carmel and I are engaged, but she isn't used to kissing yet. She blushes as I pull her to me.

"I love you," I tell her.

"Me too."

My cloak is black, webbed inside with the bare silver of its gravity mesh. Carmel's is dyed with arabesques of a hundred colors. I kiss her one more time and we flutter up into the sky.

All those years I stared yearning up at them from the ground, the Gardens seemed a single massed heaven of light. Up close, their ram's horn towers are far apart. We glide, hands locked, among the blinking lights of minarets, above graves that are always green.

The party we're due at isn't a masque, but my lady has a whim for a cat's visage, so we stop at a face shop along the way. I stay on the roof while she slips inside. By the railing, some troopers in armor are shooting into a crowd of strikers on the bridge below; they have hot-wired a vortex and ridden it up. The troopers are joking the way I used to when I was one, to quiet the bite of guilt inside. Around their boots, brass shell cases glint on granite.

Now come two copters to strafe the rabble. Some in the crowd try to climb the gates at the end of the bridge, though the facets of the bars are sharp as razors. Some leap from the bridge and drop through the blue air. The choppers make their runs and the crowd goes down like grain when the combine sweeps by. After the second pass there is nothing to see but dark shapes in white flame.

"Oh, I missed it," Carmel says. The body chains are gone; tiger stripes web her thighs and shoulders. Slit eyes,





W. H. Fleming 70

a pink button nose, tiny fangs. "I wish you had come and got me."

Forty harlequins with halberds guard the gates of the palace. Inside, the ballroom is a winter carnival. We leave our cloaks with the maids and shuffle through warm synthetic snow, tilt back our throats to catch the sugary flakes. Skaters strop along the veinwork of ice and salute us with their wands. In the kitchens, slabs of beef and bear sag on the smoldering pits.

"My parents sneaked out," Carmel says. "We won't be able to hang around." A footman brings two cups of steaming cider.

Except for her large and mysterious eyes, Carmel isn't really beautiful. Glancing about the room, I see women with features more sharply etched, with throats more slender. Where I grew up, these women's hands and skin would be ruined from work. Their breasts would sag from nursing, their teeth blacken one by one. Carmel, whose innocence seduced me, would have children of her own by now, would be growing bent and shrill.

"Old places have an aura," Carmel says. "Can you feel it? It's wine spilled on old stone steps. Rooms where the drapes have kept out the sun for a hundred years." She shivers a little. I'm so used to Arlo I wonder that I can't feel the shiver in my mind. "Your boat is haunted too," she says. "It's like someone was buried alive there once. Sealed in the hold and drowned." Her eyes are glassy and faraway. "She went without struggling. She had no real choice."

"I'll have to quit taking her to the boat. Arlo's starting to touch her mind.

A covey of giggling women snatches Carmel off on some errand, condemning me to mingle with the other bachelors. They talk about mines and factories they own and have never seen. I can ape them — all those hours I spent studying those made-for-children courtesy tapes — mastering the correct postures, pronunciations, table manners. I'm always on my guard, but not like I used to be, when I'd throw up from nerves before every party.

They think I have a trust fund. They look up to me, because after the wedding I'll be richer than any of them. Carmel is heir to more money than they'll ever have or I could ever steal.

Carmel and her train return, laughing at some practical joke they've just played on a cousin. She wants to swim, so we leave our clothes with a footman and take a vortex down twenty floors to the oxygenated pool set like an eye in the rambling grotto. The water bubbles sluggishly, but feels cold when I put my foot in. Below us, other swimmers sport with the tame sharks; above, planes of watery light waver across the ceiling. We slip in — it's only my second time, and I try not to let Carmel notice my delight in the bodiless rapture of breathing water. How Arlo would love it here. We dodge and tag through the rocks and fronds of the bottom. I kiss her beside a mesa of coral and she laces her white limbs around me. My trembling jewel. My little mermaid.

The planet was covered with water and had no name, only a catalog number I've forgotten. Its composition was terrestrial, but the gravity weighed in at over four G's, so we installed heavy-duty antivagr chips in our armor. Down we floated toward indigo water the planet's mass made flat and still, and which seemed uncannily

thick as we swam through it.

4-Tiger Robotics wanted to set up mining machinery on the sea floor. When observers discovered villages built by an octopus-like race, they sent for troopships. We had expensive gas-lasers, and chemical bombs that poisoned the water, forcing them out of their coral dwellings. Their weapons couldn't hurt armor, but the adults are bigger than a man, and if they got hold of you they were strong enough to pop instruments and seals.

We killed a lot of them. After awhile you get numb to killing. But with the numbness comes a sickness that grows until it fills you up.

One day or night — they're the same, in those depths — we were ambushed by some big ones who came boiling up from the rocks at our feet. My buddies died, but I got back to a rock shelf and burned them down. They wouldn't retreat, just kept trying to reach me as my lasergun sliced them to pieces. When I went down into the cave they had died protecting, the glow of Arlo's breathing caught my eye. She was no bigger than my wrist then, curled up in a ceramic bowl, stunned with terror. I stood there for a long time, watching her skin ripple with waves of vermilion and gold. Her mind was open to me, soft and clinging as a woman's body, and I couldn't stop watching her colors pulse and wrinkle.

It was easy to smuggle her back aboard ship, hard to keep her alive and hidden. She slipped effortlessly from any aquarium I could build, but she always came back. I had thought to sell her — in space, a pet comes high — but soon she was more than a pet to me. We played together, and her mind smoothed out the nightmares that had plagued me since childhood.

I had done some housebreaking back on Earth, after I ran off from my apprenticeship at the glassworks and before I got on with the troopers. When I realized how intelligent Arlo was, how much she loved me, I realized what a treasure she could become.

Every day I spend four hours taking care of Arlo. She plays on the carpet while I clean her tank. She likes almost any kid's toy, especially ones you take apart and put back together. She likes me to sit on the floor and play with them too, and then when her arms get tired she likes me to massage her. At sundown I go out for what she wants and she feeds, never breaking the shells, only cracking them at the joints and using her suction-layered arms to clean out every shred of meat inside. Nights we're not working she goes to sleep in her tank then.

Tonight we're working. Here I go, in my coat of many pockets, with Arlo zipped into the deepest one. Each tool is snug in cotton so I don't jangle, and I drape my cloak over it all. Arlo is terrified of heights and never peeks out while we float to our destination. When I started, I had to use a car and then gaff the vortex circuit; servoguards almost shot me several times. Now, unconcerned, I watch them putter through the grid of streets as the steep roofs rise to meet me.

With a stud finder I make sure this part of the wall isn't wired. Arlo stirs in my pocket, and I put a hand in to calm her. Her skin is warm with impatience and her thoughts are the black bark of dread. There is an animal in the house, a cat or ferret. Arlo can kill them easily, but hates

(Continued to page 48)

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A crazy alien

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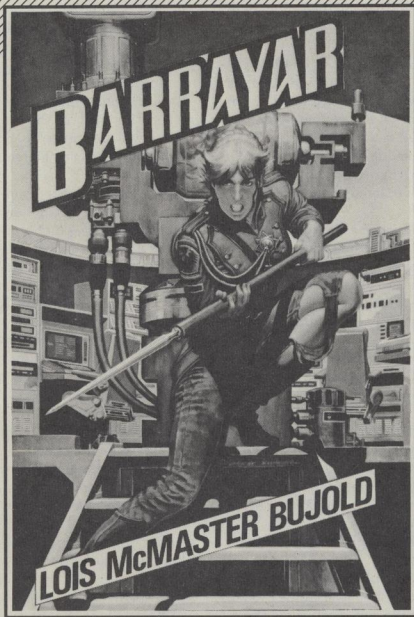


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Neighborhood Watch

By Ann K. Schwäder

Art by David and Lori Deitrick

Alavarez Block 27, this is Gate 3. Need assist with one intruder. Repeat, assist needed Gate 3 ..."

"Block 27 acknowledging. On my way."

Switching off her helmet comm, J.G. Alvarez swore.

Even at 0100, one intruder was nothing to call in assist for — not in an Enclave this well-equipped. Ten to one he wasn't armed at all. Most weren't, beyond flick knives and rage.

Most of them wound up as meat.

J.G. stepped away from the streetlights and blinked twice to trigger nightvision. Block 27 showed clear as noon, every house and luxury scrap of yard quiet. Even Althea Godwin's across the street showed no lights: for once, she'd logged off at a half-sane hour. 2300, if J.G. remembered correctly. She tried to, when it came to Ms. Godwin. Enclaves were safer than Outside, safer than nearly anywhere ... but a woman living alone still meant special security risks.

Fighting ugly memories, she ran one gloved hand down the stock of her flechette rifle, checking the patchcord. Connection solid to the pack on her belt. Gas grenade launcher mounted, cleared and ready — though there'd be no need for it, by the time she got there.

By the numbers. Use your cover, approach from shadows, one warning only. Three years since she'd started here, and she still ran the drill every time. It was easier than thinking about what she might find, who she might know. Outside was East Fringe L.A. Home, once; to Juana Guadalupe Alvarez.

J.G.'s hands tightened on her rifle as she moved. East Fringe was a three-room apartment, Mama and whoever-this-week and three sibs. Maybe four now, Fed money was good. East Fringe was Blood Hand territory; terrs running streets and stores and projects. Terrs enforcing every night, taking what they wanted.

At twelve, it had been her. She'd been lucky, Mama said. Only a small patrol, only five.

The police had abandoned East Fringe twenty years ago. Juana Guadalupe washed off the blood, gulped vodka for the pain. Mama gave her pills, but she flushed them. Mama had a habit she didn't want.

Hell, a whole life she didn't want.

Crouched in the shadows near Gate 3, J.G. swallowed hard. Past was past. Now was the Enclave, a job and a future. If keeping those meant shooting somebody tonight ...

Looked like it didn't. Even from here, her optical mods were picking up detail: single male body sprawled inside the fence, chest torn and flechette-peppered. What wasn't blood on his face was Hispan skin — brown like hers, like Luis's who was rage-crazy enough to try it.

Sprinting across the grass to confirm the kill, she felt her throat close. Luis. Her last link with Outside, sometime lover, alltime problem. Luis whom she'd met at sixteen, still crazy enough herself to believe the street had

answers.

Breath came again as she pulled up. Tower's kill tonight was a stranger: a good 3 cm taller than Luis, scarred face like a warlord's. No pulse at the wrist; confirmed. Craning her neck, she caught the tower guard's eye and gave him thumbs-up. His job now, to call cleanup detail and file some report Security Complex would lose by morning. LA's overloaded court system didn't want Enclave reports.

"Thanks, Alvarez. Got it under control now."

Taking a deep breath, J.G. turned back toward Block 2. Just another night's duty; another story not to tell Luis when they met in the park this afternoon. Still didn't know why he wanted to see her, either. Money was the likeliest reason any more, but this month she had none to spare.

The daywatch chief had told her just this morning that she'd be up for promotion within the year. She already had the basics — nightvision optics, primary nervespeed mods along her spine — but to qualify she'd need more. Upper-torso muscle enhancements at least, maybe a full secondary nervespeed series. The Enclave would pay most of it, but she'd still be expected to kick in a chunk. Thanks to Luis, her savings were damn thin right now.

She didn't want to know what the money'd gone for, any more than he'd want to know about her mods. Luis didn't understand mods, aside from the garbage terr warlords got themselves wired with — if some blackside wire artist didn't kill them doing it. Luis didn't understand much of anything lately, except what *he* wanted.

Maybe he never had.

The streets stretched empty in nightvision, clean and quiet. Quiet as the 'chette rifle she carried, or the kill at Gate 3 tonight. Quiet was what the Enclave residents paid for.

Digging in her uniform pocket, she clutched the flick knife Luis had given her when she left. It helped, for a while.

The blade flashed open in Luis's brown hand, withdrew and flashed again. *Click. Click.* He was nervous sitting on this plascrete bench, in this park which was more Enclave than Outside. Outside didn't have green grass, or benches without Blood Hand graffiti. Outside also didn't have Security Complex cameras on the fence, watching everybody and everything.

Half-grateful for the surveillance, J.G. sat at her own end of the bench and kept her mouth shut.

"Wouldja quit starin' at me?" Luis complained. "I'm tryin' to think, here."

No use denying the stare: metallic sheen from her optical mods made it hard to tell where she was looking.



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David Johnston

Better to stay quiet, try to figure out what was eating him. She hoped he wasn't dusted on chem or drunk. Even in this buffer zone, Towers sometimes got picky.

Luis finally put away the flick knife, moved closer.

"Juana," he said, reaching for her, "it's like this ..."

Evading his grasp at twice-human speed, she suppressed the combat burn along her nerves.

"My name's J.G.," she replied, as evenly as she could. "And no matter how 'it is,' I don't have any money to spare. None."

"Did I ask?"

J.G. did her best to ignore it. "Not yet," she said, "but you must want something. You're here."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

No, no, no. Taking a deep breath, J.G. tried to ease up. Last thing she wanted was a show for the cameras — not that she and Luis hadn't provided a few before.

Luis was flicking his knife again.

"Talk to me," she insisted. "You need something, and it's not money. It is important, or you wouldn't have come here this afternoon."

The blade kept moving. "Something like that."

J.G.'s stomach clenched. Three years away, and she still tasted fear like blood in her mouth.

"Blood Hand?" she asked quietly, turning away from the fence cameras.

Luis nodded. "They might bring me in."

Now she did stare, mods catching the afternoon light. Bringing in meant brotherhood (seldom sisterhood), protection, control. A percentage of the territory — and patroller's "rights" to more. Luis had been busy since she'd desperate on. She didn't want to know the details.

"So what do you need me for?" she asked.

The blade stopped moving.

"It's not easy gettin' in any more, Juana. J.G. You gotta impress people, make them know you've got it."

J.G. kept staring across a widening gap.

"I want to do something different," Luis continued. "I got to. Everybody enforces, everybody breaks stores and runs chem."

His eyes narrowed. "I need better than that, understand? I need a raid in there."

The gap between them closed, shoving insanity in her face.

"Right," she said. "You need a chestful of 'chettes? A fragged-off leg in the sensor mines? I know easier ways to snuff, Luis. Lots easier."

He shook his head, tied-back tail gleaming.

"I'm not gonna snuff. I got contacts, special equipment. Everything goes tonight ... if you come through."

Only the cameras kept her from heading doublespeed for the gates. Inside was sane. Outside was crazy expectations, dependence she no longer understood.

"You always did," he continued, speaking low. "Always when it mattered, when I was bleeding an' hacked up in the projects. When I went warrin' first time out an' got jumped comin' back ..."

She remembered. And cursed them both for it.

"You like the Enclaves, Juana? They make you like the ones inside, white an' rich?" His gaze roved from her eyes to the faint scars creasing her nape. "You still look brown to me. Brown an' poor an' about half machine. You still a woman, Juana?"

Not your kind.

Luis clicked his knife again. "You still work 27, right? Closest to Gate 3, side gate. Side gates got only one guard. What happens if that guard don't get help?"

J.G. turned away. "There's still mines inside," she reminded him. "And dogs, if Complex panics."

"They won't."

The possibility turned her spine cold. Luis wasn't stupid, and he hated the Enclaves. Hated them worse since he'd tried to hire in. They'd both applied, but Luis's record snuffed his chances.

"So what are you asking for, exactly?" she said, drymouthed.

"That guard at 3 don't need no help tonight."

J.G.'s muscles twitched, nervespeed reacting to her stress. It wasn't just the Gate 3 guard that Luis wanted. It was everything and everyone past that gate, all the lives he'd never have. Althea Godwin.

"You just want to hurt people," she said, facing him again. "You want that worse than anything. Even Blood Hand."

He laughed, not meeting her eyes.

"Maybe ... but that's part of the idea, right?"

J.G. channeled the nervespeed into her hands, watched them clench and unclench. She knew what "part of the idea" was: she'd learned it at twelve, lived it till eighteen. Luis had kept her from the worst, sometimes.

Althea Godwin lived alone.

Remembering her house in the darkness — *the body in Gate 3's fence* — J.G. felt something rip inside. Of course Luis had waited until the last minute to ask for help. Sometimes he didn't even ask, simply turned up desperate or bloody or broke. Since sixteen, she'd done what she could; just to know he needed her. That was how life worked Outside.

She looked down at her hands again.

"This is my part of the idea, Luis. I look the other way ... and you leave someone alone. Her and her property. I've told you about Ms. Godwin, Althea Godwin. *You don't touch her.*"

Luis quit flicking his knife. J.G. waited almost a minute, watching him. She had no idea how he felt about Ms. Godwin. She'd mentioned her months ago, when they'd still talked about something besides money.

Luis laughed again.

"That all you want, Juana?" Reaching out fast, he curled one arm around her shoulders and pulled her close. "No souvenirs?"

She knew she could break his hold.

She could break his arm.

"No," she said, bracing. She did not close her eyes. "Just leave her alone."

His kiss was hard and demanding and no answer at all. She broke it off quickly, scrambled to her feet. "You going to do it?" she asked, staying out of range.

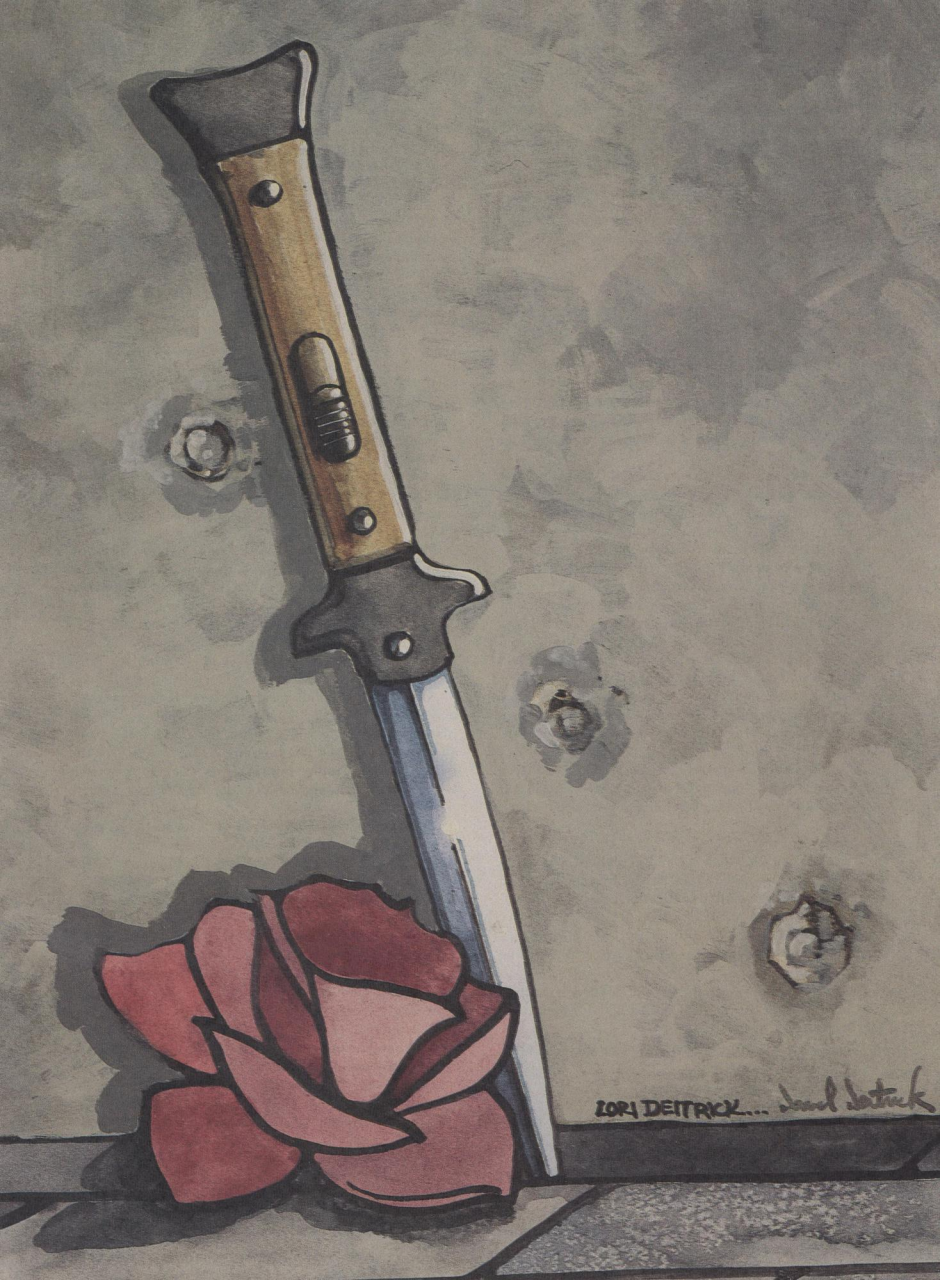
Luis frowned, scared-sullen. "Yeah. But you'd better come through."

Nervespeed still burned in her muscles, getting hard to control. J.G. glanced up at the Enclave fence.

"I said I would." The cameras kept watching. "I'd better be getting back."

She walked away at twice human normal, fear clenching her gut. At the main gate, a sensor op scanned her wrist tattoo for entrance.

Reject it, half of her thought. Please.



ZORI DEITRICK... Zori Deitrick

He didn't.

The evening breeze carried the scent of roses. White roses, the old-fashioned unaltered kind. Althea Godwin was working in her yard tonight, behind the high iron fence she called NeoVictorian Revival. J.G. called it security sense.

No help this time.

"Evening, J.G.," said Ms. Godwin, brushing grass off her knees. "You're on early tonight, aren't you?"

Looking through the fence at the roses, J.G. felt her throat tighten.

"Maybe a little." She was nearly fifteen minutes early, for reasons she didn't want to admit. "I never get to see those, otherwise."

She pointed with the hand that wasn't steadying her rifle. Althea Godwin brushed blonde strands from her forehead, streaking it with dirt. Ms. Godwin was twenty years older than J.G., tall and thin and breakable-looking. Aside from her home office job — writing software for some SilVal company — roses were one of the few things she cared about.

Sometimes she seemed to care about J.G., a little. Most residents never spoke to Enclave Security. Security was like the water and the sewers, the maintenance systems all their houses had. They paid for it; it worked.

But Althea Godwin always spoke to J.G. Alvarez.

J.G. had wondered why at first. Even asked around the Complex barracks, when she was too new to know better. All she ever learned (before being put on report) was that Ms. Godwin had come to the Enclave after a divorce years ago. Somebody who'd known somebody who knew said she'd been in medical rehab before that. Her husband had beaten her half dead, more than once.

Ms. Godwin smiled. "You've got good taste."

Stooping by the bush J.G.'d pointed to, she picked up a clear glass bowl. There were three roses floating in it. "Have a sniff."

J.G. slung her rifle across her back and stepped close to the fence. Ms. Godwin lifted the bowl over. It felt egg-fragile in J.G.'s hands, water and flowers inside sloshing gently.

Damn you, Luis.

If she warned Ms. Godwin tonight, all her roses would be safe. Block 27 would be safe. Everything she'd worked and hoped for here would be safe at last ...

And Luis would probably be dead.

J.G.'s hands tightened around the thin glass globe. Handing it back over the fence, she came close to dropping it.

"Careful," Ms. Godwin said, speaking through the high iron fence. Always the fence. "They are a little overwhelming, aren't they?"

Remembered stink of blood and spent flechettes lingered in J.G.'s nostrils.

"At least," she agreed, stepping away.

Some minutes past 0200, Gate 3's call for help finally came.

Alvarez Block 27, this is Tower Gate 3. Need assist immediately: three intruders sighted. Repeat, need assist immediately ...

Slugfire spattered over her helmet comm. J.G. swore. Luis hadn't mentioned illegal weapons, hadn't mentioned

killing at all though she knew there'd have to be ...

Hold together, damn it!

J.G. shoved her rifle back, clamped hands on unsteady knees and fought sickness. Nothing she could do for Tower 3 now. She'd agreed to his death this afternoon.

When her stomach stopped making threats, she blinked up to full nightvision and headed for Gate 3. If anyone at Complex had been listening in, they'd expect her to ... but slowly.

Houses nearest the gate were showing lights: slugfire wasn't silent like 'chettes. There's be a half-dozen calls to Complex tonight, but no witnesses. Witnesses had to make reports, maybe even testify if the city stuck its nose in. People didn't buy into Enclaves to be inconvenienced.

One by one, all the lights went out again.

J.G. waited in the shadow of a tall privet hedge near the gate. Five minutes until the cleanup detail, ten if Complex was still handling resident calls. The tower guard's corpse hung half out of his box. He'd left a window open tonight to cool off.

Security lights still illuminated the gravel below. Underneath lay a wide strip of sensor mines, triggered by any weight not accompanied by a specific radio frequency. Had Luis's contacts been ready for these? She hadn't heard any explosions; but she hadn't spotted any raiders, either.

Movement across the street caught her eye. Pivoting with her rifle, she suppressed a curse. Luis's "special equipment" had been more than talk, after all. He and two younger Hispanic men crouched outside somebody's privacy fence, speaking too quietly for her to hear.

Wishing they'd start whatever they came to do, J.G. swallowed self-disgust. Whatever she'd promised Luis, Outside was too close now.

After nearly a minute, the three men rose and headed down the sidewalk. Luis led, slug pistol shoved through his belt and a thin smile on his face. J.G. froze. They shouldn't have been heading anywhere, except over the nearest fence. Trophy hunting was dangerous enough without pushing their very questionable luck.

No.

Cold crawled down J.G.'s spine, triggering nervespeed. In the full daylight of her vision, Luis was leading his group down the one street she'd warned against. At the end of that street white roses grew behind NeoVictorian Revival ironwork, and a woman lived alone.

Luis, why?

She didn't wait for the answer. One hand found her rifle's safety, released it as she moved. When her nerves sang combat, she used it. There were maintenance alleys she'd never told Luis about, and her soft-soled boots carried her along noiselessly.

She thought of calling for backup, then snuffed the idea. Whatever happened here — or did not happen — was her responsibility alone.

Peering around one corner of Ms. Godwin's fence, she watched Luis's group approach the house. They were walking noisily, half drunk or dusted. Luis's eyes were very bright. Leaping for the top of the ornamental ironwork, he swung himself over.

As the others followed, security lights flooded the yard. Concealed behind every bush and overhang, they silhouetted the intruders, nearly blinding them. J.G. bit her lip. *Get out of here, damn it!*

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"Hey, she's waitin' for us, Luis!"

Cursing in disbelief, J.G. broke cover. As she rounded the corner, Althea Godwin's shadow appeared and disappeared on the front window curtains. J.G. swallowed hard, concentrated on scaling the locked gate herself.

Luis's companions whistled.

"That yours?" one asked, staring at her. The 'chette rifle pointed directly at him, humming; but his eyes weren't seeing it. Weren't tracking too well, either.

Luis glanced over his shoulder.

"Yeah," he said. "Get out of here, Juana."

They continued toward the house, joking and laughing. Luis did not look at her again. He was dusted on worse than chem, O.D.ing on power and hate and frustration. Enclave women, he said loudly, were no different from Outsiders. Easy enough to prove it ...

J.G.'s fingers tensed on her faceshield as she snapped it into place. She was twelve again, and the project hallways were very dark.

"You sure you can prove it alone, Luis? Want help?"

Mama held her, cried with her, fed her vodka. *You were lucky, baby, lucky. Only five.*

Slugfire cracked against Althea Godwin's front window. Monofil-reinforced plastic bent and held — this time. Luis fired again, changed clips. "You volunteering?"

Blood on her legs. Blood in her mouth. Blood Hand terrors still enforcing the projects, claiming other victims. J.G. disengaged the rifle's grenade launcher. Too late for riot gas now.

Luis's companions nodded and grinned. Slugs spat-tered against the window, cracking monofil webbing. Luis laughed.

"Well, come on then!"

J.G. flicked the rifle's controls to full-auto and leveled it. *One warning only.* Hard to manage even that, with memory choking her.

"Trespassers, halt!" Her voice echoed in the helmet. "Drop all weapons and turn slowly!"

Two of the group froze. In the ruined window, a shadow flickered and retreated. Luis shrugged, turning to face her with the pistol still loose in one hand.

Disbelief twisted his face.

"You gotta come through, Juana," his voice thick with chem and shock. "I know you said leave her alone, but I can't. They wouldn't let me, when I told them ..."

J.G. stared. *When I told them.* He'd told Blood Hand about Althea, offered her up to get what he wanted. He'd taken it for granted, as he'd taken her savings and nearly — tonight — her future. That was how life worked Outside.

J.G. glanced at the window. At Luis's face, still disbelieving.

Touching the trigger of her rifle and braced, hosing them all.

Alvarez? Alvarez, can you hear me?"
Somebody had landed a shell in her forehead; a white-hot, five-kilo shell which hadn't detonated. Yet. Bracing herself on one elbow, J.G. cried her eyes open.

There were uniformed people all around her, stamping their feet and shouting into comm and making her head hurt worse if that was possible, which it wasn't. She was sprawled on her back in wet grass. Her rifle was lying half a meter away, and she was missing her helmet complete-

ly. If Complex found out, she'd be fined ...

"You got lucky, Alvarez. Another couple centimeters down, they'd be carting you off with the meat."

A voice she almost recognized — no, did recognize. She blinked into focus, felt her night vision respond. Complex's chief medic stood in front of her, holding her helmet. A slug had cracked the laminate above her faceshield.

Luis.

Memory forced its way through the fire in her head. Easing herself up, she stared past the people around her. Three bodies lay crumpled in the grass, dark and shining with blood and silver. There'd be a pistol beside one of them.

The medic knelt beside her, shining light into her eyes and watching them track.

"No obvious damage," he said, "but you'd better come back to Complex for some tests. Concussions are tricky, especially with mods involved. Can you walk?"

J.G. managed to stand, nervespeed making the pain worse. There were uniforms on both sides of her now. More were spreading tarps over the bodies, preparing for the cleanup crew. No need for residents to see the mess, particularly when it happened in somebody's yard.

"Ms. Godwin ... is she all right?" J.G. asked.

One of the guards helping her to stand nodded.

"She's the one who called. Scared half silly, of course; but she'll be all right in the morning. Nightwatch chief's taking her statement now."

One more lost report. J.G. glanced toward the porch. Althea Godwin stood there, wearing a fashionable lounging suit and shivering a little. Beside her, the chief made notes on her electronic pad.

The cleanup van arrived, hovering silently. Its crew took the bodies away. For the first time since she'd come here, J.G. wondered where they went.

The group around her began breaking up, returning to their patrols. She knew she ought to be grateful they'd come, grateful and relieved. Security Down was supposedly an all-call, but in practice people came if it was convenient — or if they liked you. She'd drawn a full circle.

Which meant nobody knew the truth.

"I'll be in my office," the medic said, clipping his light on his beltkit. "You're relieved for tonight, but don't push yourself getting back — and whatever you do, don't try sleeping before we run those tests. You might not wake up."

On the porch, Althea Godwin finished her statement to the nightwatch chief.

The cleanup crew sprayed the grass with disinfectant before driving away.

Shaking his head, the medic returned her helmet before he left. J.G. traced its webbing of cracks with one finger. Traced it again.

You got lucky, Alvarez.

You were lucky, baby, lucky. Only five.

Ms. Godwin still stood on the porch, staring at her lawn. Nightvision didn't show much color, but her face looked pale as her roses. Brushing off her uniform as best she could, J.G. retrieved her rifle and headed toward her. She wasn't sure what to say, but she had to say something. You didn't just lose three people in somebody's yard to save her and then walk off.

"Hope you feel better tomorrow, Ms. Godwin." The rifle

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bumped uncomfortably across J.G.'s back. "If there's anything you need ..."

"I don't think there will be." Her voice was a tight whisper.

J.G. stopped. Ms. Godwin's knuckles were white on the porch railing. Her face was a narrow mask of tension trying to control itself. Glancing at the disinfected grass, J.G. Alvarez swallowed hard and understood.

"Then I guess I'll be heading back to Complex. Got one godawful headache."

Turning slowly, she met Althea Godwin's eyes again. Pain echoed pain for a single moment.

Then Ms. Godwin was at her door.

"J.G. ... thank you. I'll be calling your superiors, of course; first thing in the morning."

Her shadow flickered behind ruined plastic, vanished. J.G. shifted her rifle to a more comfortable position and turned away. *Stupid*. Her headache was way beyond anything people kept at home, even in Enclaves. *Stupid* to hope for tabs and a glass of water brought out to the porch.

But she had.

There was a rosebush by the gate. On her way out, she stopped and picked a single rose. Not one of the best from the top of the bush. Not one anybody'd miss.

She pressed it to her nose, tried to forget 'chettes and blood and slug powder. A block later, she gave up trying. Crumpling the white petals, she shoved them deep in her pocket with a flick knife she'd carried three years. □

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The Larkie

By Phillip C. Jennings

Art by Larry Blamire

Dawn mist still hung over the lake when Uncle Hunin jogged off to the fish-weir.

Little Borso followed, to the limit of his mother's sight. Back near Winter House, the passage of time was marked by the sounds of blade against sapling, and the click of pebbles.

"We could use a kettle of moss." Gazing at her new stretching frame, Camee's mother spoke vaguely: her daughter had no need to be ordered about. Borso was distant, so any remark was meant for Camee alone, and Mother was never ignored. The girl looked up from her pebble-game. "The brown-dye kind? Or the orange?"

"Orange is an interesting color, don't you think?"

Every job was an adventure. Camee skipped happily off her string bag and digging stick, heading from the beaten grasses near Winter House into the deep woods, to a secret place where bricks from the Olden Times rose in a long reef through time's accumulation of muck and oak-leaves.

Smoke roiled out of the building behind her, a kind of a turtle-monster with hairy thatch between its carapaces, made of timbers, sticks, mud, straw, bricks, rocks, and tattered hides, whose interior floor was dug two feet into the ground. The smoke was meant to rid the house of summer vermin, and to preserve buck and boar for future eating.

Camee felt like smoked meat herself, her lean body soaked in the smell, because one of her tasks was to wriggle into Winter House and put green wood on the hearth, wetted to smolder and darken the house's pillars to the blackness of tar.

Smoke made her less tasty to the few mosquitoes not killed by the recent chilly nights. Camee was grateful, because places of moss were normally protected by thousands of biting furies. But in any case a long summer had toughened her. Even outside the protection of fire and smoke, she could hunker for minutes without being pestered into a frenzy.

She did so now, brushed off a layer of leaves, and dug near the brick-reef. Beneath inches of humus she found colored lumps, pieces of glass, and crumbly bits of metal. She went to fill her net bag with moss, and then came back to her excavation site, cupping her hands to carry these Olden treasures home to camp.

Nothing would be wasted. Wet clay and the residue of boiled dye-moss would patch the cracks in Winter House. Where the walls were softened Camee planned to use her plunder to make a decoration.

It was not yet noon when she returned. Mother swung from the buckskin to greet her, naked to the waist in the brief midday heat. Camee frowned, seeing the high bulge of Mother's stomach.

Mother had explained it to Camee and her young brother a few days earlier. "*Uncle Hunin wants his own child. Now that your father is dead I have to make a new*

life with Hunin, who kills the meat that feeds us all."

Uncle Hunin called Mother "Weela," a name her children had never heard before. Until that day Camee hoped Mother was just getting fat, a fat belly to go with her wide hips and big breasts, autumn being the fat time of year —

"*But if we are three children, then the Larkie will come,*" little Borso complained.

Eyes turned to Camee. "*It will be me she takes,*" the girl whispered. Her heart beat fast. "*Always the girl first.*"

"*Now, now,*" Mother said soothingly. "*Not all pregnancies come to term. Anything could happen. The Larkie might remember a special rule. Three children of two parents is one thing, but you'd be three children of three!*"

A jewel dangled between Mother's breasts. The jewel had been dark for all Camee's memory, but someday it would glow, and that meant the Larkie was coming to take her away. Sighing, she dropped handfuls of moss into the kettle suspended above the outdoor campfire. "I'll get some clay," she volunteered.

"See what Borso's shrieking about down by the lake."

Borso had impaled a large snake, and proclaimed himself a mighty hunter at the age of five. That evening the family ate Borso's snake and Uncle Hunin's fish. Mother promised to turn the serpent's skin into a belt. As Camee picked at her meal she wondered how long that belt might span her thickening waist.

A sour thought. Camee had never been betrayed before, but now? The adults she depended on had sullen her, and before she grew up her life would end. Ten moons to make a baby, five gone already — the child would be born inside Winter House, and then spring would come.

Her last spring! With a sudden gesture Camee flung the remnants on her eating-shingle to the dogs of the outer circle.

Uncle Hunin stood from his place at the fire, and reached out his hand. "There's a little light left," he said, staring west as if embarrassed to meet Camee's eyes. "Weela says you patched Winter House. Can I take a look?"

He followed her around the side of the house. Camee explained how she'd widened the crack, and wetted it, and then roughed it with a stick, and made a slip of clay for the bonding: "I know how to do these things, Uncle, and I'm happy to work. It's not fair."

Uncle Hunin pretended not to hear her protest. "Where did you find the glass?"

"On the slopes below the crest-trail, twice as far as the sugar trees."

"Glass, from Olden Times." Hunin tried for a thoughtful face, but with his young features, there was no great distance between "thoughtful" and "blank."





So different from Father! Nevertheless Hunin was a huntsman in deeds, if not in face, and even Mother deferred to his experience. Camee waited for his words. "When I was a boy our family traveled with neighbors on a summer hunt. They were man and wife, and one daughter, and never could have more. Yet they were four, because the Larkie brought them a brawny son. We played and he told me dream-stories of long ago. In Olden Times they had glass, but they were plagued with many ills. Too many ills to go on.

"And so the world changed." Hunin paused. He seemed caught up in a trance Camee shivered to see. Suddenly he caught the girl by the shoulder. "Believe this. There are many families of less than four. The Larkie takes, but she also gives to make the numbers right. Those are the rules, and she always obeys the rules."

"But she eats too!"

"She is — complicated. All the complications of Olden Times live in her. Camee, I know you're frightened, and in my ignorance I credit all the rumors. I've put you in peril, but because of my guilt I like to think of the good that might happen. You'll dream the visions of long ago. What my friend said made no sense to me, but his eyes shone as he spoke, and sometimes he even talked about going back to the Larkie — going back to *help* her!"

Camee bit her lip. "I could run off. When the winter snow melts —"

"Where in the world will you find a place without larkies? Do I admire the deer who escapes my traps? No, I pit my wiles against his, and bring him down with special zeal."

"But not always."

"You can't live as a wild animal, Camee," Uncle Hunin said softly. "Life is easy for a family with house and hunting grounds, but for a single wanderer, not easy at all."

All this left Camee with no refuge except magic. There were spirits in the forest, and patterns by which forces could be invoked, but praying taught her nothing. The leaves dropped, the first snows flew, and her family retreated into Winter House with Camee no wiser about chants and spells.

Certainly she could not ask Mother, against whom those spells would spin. But perhaps by serendipity the decoration she'd made on Winter House's wall was a pattern of power. Camee collected that power and made a wish. That someone would die?

Rather than Mother never be delivered of this excess child, who would live inside her, held in by Borso's snake belt, a vehicle of magic. She'd grow bigger and bigger, a fitting punishment — so big in girth Uncle Hunin could no longer have the pleasure of her!

"Inside" and "out" were concepts Camee understood from one example: she now lived in Winter House's womb. Outside this refuge a moat took care of the runoff when the snows melted between storms. Inside was a paradise of furs and skins, painted with words and pictures. Haunches dangled from the roof beams, and the low hearth-walls were molded around great bulls' skulls, with curved horns thrusting in the four directions. Above the fire the family kettle bubbled constantly.

Uncle Hunin was a visitor here, for he hunted often. Camee and Borso sometimes went outside on errands. Mother emerged only to answer calls of nature. When she

cursed at the difficulties of crawling through the entry-tunnel, Camee relented in her witchcraft. Perhaps as a result, Mother bore her baby shortly after the tenth moon.

Deeka was a disgusting object, but Camee softened, her better nature working against her with the pass of days, forcing her to admit that Deeka was turning out fairly cute, as babies go.

And she was a girl. Would the Larkie take Deeka in place of Camee? No, Camee thought sadly. *Better it be me*, for at last she grew reconciled. It gave her a saintly feeling to face the inevitable, a feeling preferable to the twisted anger that led her to magic so many moons ago.

Hunin no longer spoke much to her, and Mother made minimal demands. That was good, for if they'd confused her with chimerical hopes Camee didn't know what she'd do — something ugly might resurrect itself. But how strange to make these discoveries: that there were layers to her soul, dangerous layers. The thought made her feel old. If she had to live out her span in two more moons, she'd live as an ancient one, Deeka's premature grandmother.

Camee made digging her hobby, excavating Winter House's interior floor. She found lost beads and bones, and tufts of skin with indecipherable letterings. Not far from the entry, the packed earth resounded like a drum to the pounding of her digging-stick. Concentrating here, she broke through. A hole no bigger than a bison's nostril exuded a windy stench. Camee covered it with old skins, then pasted the spot over. When Mother took Deeka out to enjoy the mildness of a warm March afternoon, Camee opened it up again, using a stick to probe this gate to an Olden underworld.

Then Mother returned, crawling through the opening, her heavy breasts swaying, and the jewel penduluming between them...was that mere sparkle, a glint from the hearth-fire, or did the Larkie stone have a hint of glow?

"What's that you're doing?" Mother asked, for the way Camee sprawled across her diggings was hardly natural.

Camee had to say what she'd found: "Winter House is built on top of some Olden place. There's a bad stink of trapped wetness."

"Then close it up. Camee, my mother told stories from when her grandmother was a girl. Winter House was first built of brick, and was still brick halfway up the walls in those days. Has Hunin ever taken you into the Swamp? It was like that everywhere once, brick buildings scarcely overgrown, but now you have to go into the Swamp to see them."

"Why do they last better in the Swamp?"

"Because they were bigger there?" Mother guessed. "Some magic of the Larkie?"

"I see Larkie-magic in your jewel, Mother," Camee answered.

Mother nodded. "It's death to move to a new stage of life, Camee. Not always real death."

"But sometimes."

"Hunin risks death when he hunts," Mother answered evasively. "There are bears now, even here. They used to live only in the mountains. When the Larkie comes we will complain, and she'll answer some strange way, talking rules and numbers."

Camee shuddered. "What does she look like? — Dark, I know."

Deeka nuzzled at Mother's breast. She bent, and began

"Let the people know their shepherd, know th' auspicious great black Larkie, in her hands all Olden powers.

Matted hair a mounded cloudbank covering her strange strong features. Loud she screams, and loud she laughs, frightening the foolish scofflaws..."

"But you've seen her," Camee continued. "She has teeth?"

Mother shook her head. "Nothing you've seen has hair and a beak, but it's no beak either. It blends into her face, not like bird-beaks. But now you're frightened. Which way is best — to tell you nothing? You think about her constantly, but don't make her a monster. In her way she's beautiful."

Spoken with reluctant sincerity, these words brought turbulence back into Camee's soul: to know that Mother admired the Larkie! Adults seemed capable of incompatible emotions, growing mysterious when asked whether they loved Borso more than her, and saying that feelings couldn't be compared like heaps of berries. But this was the strangest love of all, because adulation of the Larkie made all the difference. Larkie-love on the one side, and Hunin's desire for a child on the other, and Camee trapped between, innocent victim of it all!

As the hours wore on, she grew more disturbed, because Mother's jewel was more brilliant than before. When Uncle Hunin came home, he saw the knowledge in her face. "It won't take her long through the Swamp," he said, making his words sound like a comfort.

And Camee was comforted. Mother's magic? Something in her food? The girl fell asleep after supper, and slept through the noises of morning. She woke to Hunin's rough hand on her shoulders, and sat up in sudden terror. "Is she here?"

"Coming by boat. Time to dress — excuse me. Put on something for warmth, but she'll give you a new covering."

"Where's Mother?"

"Outside."

Camee dressed and ran out, fastening on a skirted hip because Mother's arms were full of Deeka. She turned to follow Mother's gaze and saw the Larkie pulling into shore. Tall, dark, her every motion springy and vital, something like a mane around her shoulders...

Quick tiptoe strides on long, long legs. A face rendered vague by Camee's awe, dark, yet glowing. Tapered stringbean fingers, now pointing to Mother's jewel. "How does the new child prosper?"

"She does well," Mother spoke huskily.

The Larkie reached an invisible boundary, and angled her head quirkishly. Mother nodded permission, and she pranced forward to cradle Deeka in her arms. Her belt had pouches: she pulled out a morsel wrapped in silver skin like Olden metal.

Letting peeled foil drop to the ground, she thrust the object into Deeka's mouth. "This one is of your good stock. These next two years will tell. If she prospers, well and good. Camee will come with me."

"Camee had a different father," Mother said earnestly — hopelessly? "There must be a special rule, three children for three parents."

The Larkie answered in a voice pure as the ring of metal. "Rules can be fair, or simple. Your ancestors preferred simplicity: Come, Camee. This is your new life, so shed those hides. Good. Now, down to the boat."

Trembling violently, Camee took the Larkie's hand and stumbled downhill. Behind her she heard sobs, then the gasp of one determined to talk through her tears. "Hunin?" Weela spoke to her new husband. "Ask about those bears."

"What? — Oh, yes." Uncle Hunin jogged after Camee and the Larkie, and stood near when the Larkie pulled an assemblage out from her boat, aimed it, and sprayed the girl with mist.

"Uh, Ma'am? We have bears hereabouts, in your territory. They never used to come this far south."

The Larkie turned from her work. "There will be only eight bears in my land. I'll see to it."

"Eight? But that's even more —"

"I give you leave to hunt them. Humans are a match for bear, but kill only what you eat."

Uncle Hunin stood dumb, his eyes widening when Camee's lank brown hair fell from her head in great handfuls. Naked and bald, the girl shivered pathetically. "That takes care of nits and parasites," the Larkie told her. "Get into my boat. You'll find clothes — check that green package on the seat."

Moments later they launched. It was a test of dexterity and intelligence for Camee to dress without rocking the boat, learning how to use her jubbah's sticktape fastenings, and how to tighten her hood. The craft purred on without oars. When Camee looked up after her labors she saw swamp all around her, trees masking strange looming regularities.

And she saw the Larkie's face more clearly; sloe eyes, nostril slits, and the shape below, half beak, half snout. "Listen now," the Larkie said, "for every word I say is important to me, and what is important to me is important to you. I do not want to talk to you after we reach ENPA, because you'll be distracted by the other children, and by things you've never seen before."

The Larkie paused and quirked her head. "I will listen," Camee responded.

"First: I was designed by your ancestors, and my purpose was cannibal — to eat people. To take you off the top of the food chain before your kind impoverished it completely. Cruel, said one way; antiseptic, the other. What would happen if no larkies cropped the human herd?"

Camee failed in her attempts to answer, and shrugged.

"I eat three out of five of my harvest, but never right away. That would be stupid. You weigh thirty kilos. If you cooperate I'll get you up to eighty kilos in ten years. If you don't cooperate I'll eat you sooner, to cull bad attitudes out of the herd."

The Larkie looked away, recognized a landmark, and reached behind. The boat altered course. "But no matter how you act, for two years you will be educated; tapes and books will be your foremost entertainment. And this may continue. In some cases it continues beyond ten years. Those who can help me ... but don't think I'm making promises. Don't mistake my benevolence for friendship or love, and don't believe that any love is strong enough to make me bend a rule. There's a rigidity to my character I've never seen in humans; I'll not be manipulated by you in any way."

"Y-yes. But why?"

Camee sometimes angered Uncle Hunin by asking questions seemingly without reference. But the Larkie understood: "Why do I exist? Think of mice in a trap, with only so much food to eat. Humans are mice, and the world is a trap. A long time ago your ancestors overpressed the world's limits. Remember that word: 'limits.' One of the limits was energy. See ahead, that forest of dishes? That's ENPA — *Energy Park*. I keep it running with human help. There's a station in the middle of ENPA; that's where I live, and now you too. You'll have a room, and food, and facilities for exercise, and those tapes I mentioned. When you play them you'll hear about limits again and again."

"And there are other children?"

The boat trolled toward a dock. "Older, less savage. They'll help you learn."

Someone stood on the dock, a creature as alien to Camee as the Larkie herself. He was dressed in a jubba-and-hood, but there the similarity ended. The boy was huge and pale, and he nodded cheerfully as he reached for the boat's painter, his chins bobbing. "Welcome! Take my hand. We have a hike ahead of us."

"What about —" But the Larkie was up and off at a pace no human could match. Certainly the boy wasn't up to it; the "hike" kept him gasping for air.

They entered a region of patterned sun and shadow, dishes dwindling off in four directions. "Don't think I'm weak," the big boy puffed. "I just don't get much chance to beat the bounds."

"How long have you been here?"

"Six years. I've passed my Primaries and Secondaries exams, you know. Except you don't, of course." The boy grinned and Camee saw how he'd been impish, once. "If I pass my Quaternaries before I'm eighteen I might be chosen for a helper."

Camee waited before asking her next question. "What about going back into the world?"

"To be breeding stock?" The boy stopped to rest, slumping onto the pediment beneath one of the high, wide dishes. "My name's Treffin. You —?"

"Camee."

"Camee, you'll learn not to talk about that. We all have parents, shameful overbreeders who should have known better. Some of us have to go back, to the mud and the bugs. We have to learn how to hunt all over again. Why? Because we were good, and smart, and gained weight easily."

"But that's the Larkie's decision, and no arguing with the Larkie. Come on." The boy heaved to his feet. "Just a little further now. You can see Barracks A."

Barracks A was long, two levels high, with rooms connecting to interior corridors. Camee blinked when she came inside, but the air was free of smoke — the frowst of the place was exotic: strange materials, strange foods, strange sweat.

Two faces peeped out of different doors, but before Camee could say hello, Treffin tugged her around a corner. "Come upstairs. You'll have Shalla's room — you'll hear about her. Flunked her Secondaries, thought bloot could make the difference. Took the Larkie a week to polish her off. Excuse me, I know what you're thinking, but we're hard here. Give people an excuse to despise you, and they'll latch on. It makes things easier. I'm just

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learning that; psychology's part of the Tertiary curriculum."

Treffin opened the door and they turned into a room. "That's called a bed. Here's your viewer. This is your servo. To be sociable we eat in the Mess, but you can order snacks through your servo. Eat more than you want, and in a matter of weeks it'll get easy."

"And I'll get fat," Camee whispered miserably.

"Not as fat as you think. You have to exercise. Beef's the idea, and the Larkie's a fiend about exercise. Come, let me set up your viewer for your introduction tape. Watch it, dress like it says, and then wait. I'll be back, and I'll show you to the exercise room. You'll meet new friends down there. Workout friends are the best kind — it's something special."

Treffin performed a few inexplicable magics, and left before Camee could protest about all the things she didn't understand. She bent to look beneath the bed and into the corners of her room, and then the fire — the fire that burned somewhere to keep the place so warm — burst into flame on the screen of her viewer.

She sat mesmerized. Images flicked into existence, one after the other. The tape spoke of limits, veered off into numbers, and told her that she'd be learning arithmetic. She'd learn other things too, all Primary, all eventually contributing to the Larkie's work. Increasingly practical, the viewer voice talked about clocks, then detailed the features of Camee's room.

There was even an unnecessary lecture on how to wear clothes, which made Camee hope she was smarter than average. Coached by the tape, she turned her faucets on and off, used her servo to order a Claw Pastry Type Two, and struggled into her Size XS Sweatsuit.

When Treffin came she was ready. "Grab a towel," he told her, and led the way. A covered passage ran from Barracks A to the core station. In the station's basement Camee saw glowing bulbs and webbed pipes, and big laughing children, wet or sweaty; changing clothes among their benches, or standing stolidly beneath steaming cones of rain.

The smell was ancient; fungal here, less so in the workroom. Treffin led her around a thing of tubes and cables. "Always use your towel on the benches. Nobody wants to lie in your sweat."

He showed her how to change the settings. They trailed a broad-shouldered girl whose manipulations involved ten to fifteen ingots of metal. Camee found she could handle two, and over her protests Treffin increased her burden to four.

Then, just at the end — "I have something to prove." He'd taught her how to do squats, and now he took her place. "Maybe I've got a blubber stomach, but ..."

With a grunt he stood, shouldering twenty-eight ingots. Up and down and up again — twelve reps. "Time to move up another notch," he gasped. "Sorry, I had to show off. Truth is, we envy new kids for being so light and easy. We tease you about your table manners, but that's because we're jealous."

"Layers inside the mind," Camee muttered. "I understand. Is there a time for exercise when it's weak ones like me?"

"Find friends. Together you can agree on your times. Can you swim?"

Treffin showed Camee the swimming pool, led her to

the showers, and then they climbed back to Barracks A. "Meet you at the Mess tonight," he told her, then she turned into her room and changed into her jubbah.

Alone in silence for the first time since coming here, Camee sat on her bed. After a minute she decided not to cry, got up, and left. She had no idea where the Mess was, but that didn't bother her. She meant to explore all the corridors of ENPA station, refraining only from opening closed doors.

"My name's Camee," she announced to the first person she met on this journey. The woman looked down, startled — manners must be different here than in the wide world. The woman's jubbah was white, and it struck Camee that she was of higher quality than those who wore green.

"I'm Sister Inra," the stranger answered after a pause. "New? Now run along. Mess is that way."

At Mess Camee found a girl shorter than her, and only halfway beefy. Juno seemed to need a friend as badly as Camee did. The two ate and talked of savage life, and the Primary curriculum, and how hard it was to be young and small.

And Juno gossiped about "matchings," girls with girls, boys with boys. "The older ones start pairing up boy-girl, though. And when you tease them they look at you funny. Ish! Sex — no babies here. If you get pregnant, you're meat."

The possibility seemed remote. Camee dismissed it, as she could not dismiss this hothouse phenomenon of pairing up. "What about you, Juno?"

"See over there? Kelsen thinks she can run with the boys. She's crazy; I could tell you things about her ..."

Fate paired Camee with Juno, whose flaws included a strange hate-love for boys, tardiness, and a tendency to see everything in terms of friends and enemies. No doubt all the other kids had flaws too. Camee shrugged. Next morning she shrugged again when Juno came late to her room to help set up her viewer. She shrugged a third time when her fickle friend left her alone, bored by a lecture she'd heard many months before.

"In the Olden days Earth's population was already in decline from a peak of fifteen billion, but though people died of hunger, war and disease, the Earth died faster. Poisons accumulated in the overworked farmlands ..."

No, this wasn't boring. It was terrifying and incomprehensible. Especially it was terrifying, if the tape voice meant what Camee thought. Those were people, weren't they? Bony, sunken-eyed, hopeless, crowded into buildings and streets, herding toward the camera with outstretched bowls.

The tape took focus on numbers. A flailing of lean fists, and then: "If Muhmut's mother has five bowls of meal, and the street bosses steal two, how many are left?"

Pause. The camera eye shifted to the street. "If there are six corpses in the deathwagon, and the monitor of towerblock 3A adds two more corpses, how much does that add up to?"

Pause again. "If Muhmut's family is allowed a two-liter water ration —"

Treffin knocked at the door, opened it, reached into Camee's desk, and slapped a black brick into her hand. "You're supposed to answer. Punch the right number."

He seemed apologetic about teaching her something so basic, and stayed until Camee got it right. Waving at the viewscreen he spoke again. "In Olden Times they taught

arithmetic without real-life examples. So people didn't learn how numbers rule us, and they overbred like mad."

"Real examples? I don't know about towerblock corpses," Camee answered. "This voice should talk about wood ticks."

Treffin smiled. "This way you learn many lessons at once. History, too. Er—excuse me, I've got my own tapes."

He left again, as if there was a rule against spending much time with a young savage. Camee spent her next week speculating about rules like that. New as she was, she broke many of them, and the other kids laughed.

Juno guided her, but occasionally she took offense at an unimportant blunder. When that happened Camee exercised alone, hoping the Larkie would return from another harvest with a new wild girl for her to pair with. Someone skinny, so Camee could work out her bitterness by whispering fat jokes. Yes, even jokes on Treffin, whose repeated helpfulness seemed a little unnatural.

Meanwhile she practiced Letters, and studied Hygiene and Clocks&Time. One of her Clocks&Time questions was: "How long have you been here?" Camee counted on her fingers, and answered: "9 days." From then on Camee had to increment the number every lesson, converting days to weeks, but not yet into months.

Then one afternoon Sister Inra knocked on her door. "The Larkie wants to see you."

Camee's knees turned to water. Stories were told of the

Larkie interviewing children while gnawing on a tasty forearm. Nevertheless she followed the woman in white.

Inra led Camee outside, into sunlight-and-shadow. "Here."

"Thank you." The Larkie put down her tools and pranced forth from a dish-pedestal. "Camee. You are doing well? You are well treated?"

The outdoor wind felt strange on Camee's skin, the brightness much too harsh. "Yes," she said uncertainly.

"But you remember the good of your former wild life. My children here — after too long they falsify their memories. They deprecate mud and the mosquitoes, but my thinking is different. Shepherds take pride in the joys of flock and field."

"I know what the tapes tell," Camee answered. "In Olden Times people slaved more and more hours for less and less food, twelve and fourteen hours a day. In my family we work three, four hours, and even our work is fun half the time."

The Larkie nodded. "Good, you've learned to compare. What you've got out there is *Homo sapiens* heaven. But your species breeds too many offspring to maintain heaven. So you adapt; a fatal talent. Centuries ago you compromised your way into hell, and would have destroyed the Earth."

Camee held up her hand to shield her eyes. "Did we really make larkies? Just to harvest our excess?"

A Long Time Ago

Before taking charge at *Aboriginal Science Fiction*, our editor, Charles C. Ryan, was the editor of *Galileo*, a science fiction magazine published in the mid-1970s. During his tenure there, he helped discover a number of new writers who have since gone on to win Nebula and/or Hugo awards, such as Connie Willis, John Kessel, Lewis Shiner, and more.

For a limited time, while copies last, you can purchase a first-edition hardcover copy of *Starry Messenger: The Best of Galileo* for \$10, plus \$1.50 postage and handling. (Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery.) If you would like your copy autographed by the editor, please indicate how you would like the note to read.

Starry Messenger: The Best of Galileo (St. Martin's Press, 1979) features 12 stories by the following authors:

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"No, not just for that. If it was just for harvest, I'm not sure I'd have accepted my own existence. Camee, my species does not reproduce. When there were billions of humans, and many hostile, there had to be millions of us. We don't age, but flesh is flesh, so there are fewer larkies now, and in ten thousand years there'll be none. Before then I'll deliver my ultimate gift to your descendants. — *Your descendants*, Camee."

"Me? I'm going out to breed? I'm not here to stay?"

The Larkie quirked her head. "We lost your sister. Babies are vulnerable. I don't know what happened; my tracer doesn't tell me everything. All I know is, she died last night."

How calmly words crossed from one mind to the other. Camee swallowed. "Oh!"

"Explore yourself. Regret? Joy?"

Camee looked away. "I feel cut off — an absence inside me. Dead? I hardly knew her, and now she's lost! Oh, poor Mother!"

"You can go back. You'll want to, too. You gave me a polite answer, but I know the truth: these first weeks are miserable ones for harvest children. Get something to eat in the Mess, then head out for the dock. Wait near my boat."

Camee obeyed. The April sun still lay above the horizon when the Larkie came, waved her into the boat, and purred off into the Swamp. "I return one child out of five," the Larkie said. "All half-educated. Members of a primitive, but literate society with a true grasp of history. Your

kind help me. If your mother has another baby you will tell Borso not to run from my harvest. You'll tell your people that I have gifts other than death."

"Gifts? Your teaching tapes —?"

"The ultimate gift. Camee, there were prosperous times in the past, when humans learned to extend the Earth's limits, and did so faster than they bred. All that knowledge still exists. When larkies no longer harvest your herd, you can use those ancient tricks to live richly for many centuries, no matter how you multiply. Your wealth will endure long enough for you to reach the stars. You couldn't do it the last time, you couldn't master space and feed the hungry. Next time will be different. I and my helpers are working on new tricks: superconductors and solar batteries, and hyperfield photosynthesis. ENPA is growing, Camee. When I die there'll be a city here, ruled by my scientists."

Camee frowned sternward, into the evening gloom, looking into the Larkie's hooded eyes. "Why do we want the stars?"

The Larkie paused too long, as if Camee had said something she couldn't answer. "Look around you," she spoke at last, her voice just a whisper. "If I infected you with my disease, could you be happy as a huntsman's wife? No, I told you this is *Homo sapiens* heaven, and it is for you. But not for your children. No one can live forever in the womb of Eden." □

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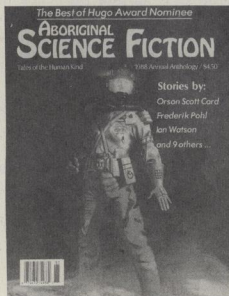
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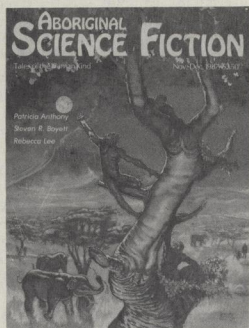


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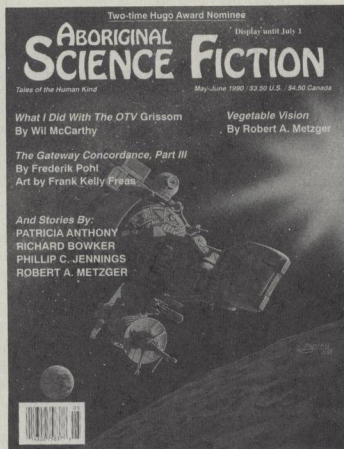


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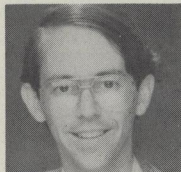
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Chaotic Dollars



Money. Does that word seem out of place in a science column? Well, it's not. You may be thinking that I should be talking to you about things from the cutting edge of science, filling your head with visions of cow antibodies generating colic in babies and chunks of Mars being found in Antarctica, deconvolving dynamics of the Great White spot of Jupiter, or explaining how superconducting transistors work. All those are wonderful things, interesting things, and things that at first glance might not appear to have an obvious connection. *But they do.* There is a unifying principle behind them, one far more powerful than anything discovered by Galileo, Newton, or even Einstein.

What is it that those above items have in common?

They cost money.

Big money.

When I'm in my lab at the Hughes Research Laboratories, wondering what new ways I can stack atoms of arsenic, aluminum, indium, and gallium atop one another in order to make new gee-whiz electronic devices, there is a question I can never ignore, a principle so fundamental that the crushing weight of it never escapes me. Every sample I produce costs the company almost \$5,000. I have a machine that grows thin films one atomic layer at a time. I can put atoms right where I want them. This machine costs *one million dollars* (this is a fundamental law of nature: the smaller the object you're trying to control, the more expensive is the machine required to do that controlling). And this million-dollar pile of equipment sits in a lab that cost \$30 million to build and millions more every year just to maintain (all this facility does is

keep the dust off my samples — again big bucks to control little things). I analyze my samples by bombarding them with X-rays, electrons, and photons of varying flavors, and then take these samples and have them etched and metallized, and then turned into something that, hopefully, behaves like a transistor. All these services cost *money*. I have to get paid (certainly a trivial amount, but for accuracy's sake I will mention it), several technicians have to get paid, my three levels of bosses have to get paid, the department secretary has to get paid, those in accounting, shipping and receiving, proposals, grounds maintenance, the plumbers, the electricians, the heat and air conditioning people, and those at the corporate offices have to get paid. There are electric bills, the cost of running the lab's library, the expense of keeping me in pencils and paper, and of course the monstrous bill for coffee, the primary fuel for keeping all this money-gulping machinery going.

One experiment costs the company \$5,000.

My machine can run four experiments a day.

Add that up.

It comes to \$100,000 a week.

That's \$5 million a year.

And where does this research money come from? Some of it comes from the profits of Hughes itself, some of it is paid by commercial customers who might want gee-whiz transistors in some microwave linkage, and the rest comes from you (your tax dollars, funneled to us by way of dozens of federal agencies). If it is a fundamental law that science costs money, then the corollary to that law is that *money is hard to get.*

It gets harder every day.

Everyone is cutting back — the company, the customers, and the Feds. It's becoming a constant battle for new sources of funding. I'm always on the lookout for a new place to find money.

And then I found a book.

Searching for Certainty — What Scientists Can Know About the Future, by John L. Casti, published by William Morrow and Company (it goes for \$22.95 a copy — I know where Casti is getting his money). It deals with *Chaos*. This is a hot topic right now — actually very trendy. If I went to the bookstore every week (I do), I'd have a good chance of always seeing a new book on this topic (and I do). So I opened up this latest offering with some level of trepidation, expecting to see just the same old stuff.

I was wrong.

I flipped open to the middle of the book, to a chapter entitled "Meanwhile, Over at the Casino." This sounded interesting. It sounded different. I thought perhaps Casti was going to explain some new way of beating blackjack based on chaos theory.

I was wrong.

But only partly.

He wasn't talking about blackjack, but he *was* talking about gambling — the ultimate gambling. Casti wanted to explore the possibility of seeing if the stock market could really be beaten, or if it was just some unfathomable chunk of chaos.

I bought the book.

This was perfect.

This made sense.

There'd be no more of this hat-in-hand nonsense of begging for money if I could beat the market. I could be my own funding agency. I went

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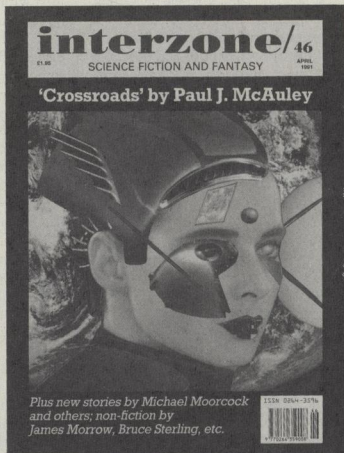
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straight home and read the book, hoping to find a way to solve my funding problem. Did I? Well, I'll let you be the judge.

To my surprise, I discovered that mathematicians and scientists have been interested in trying to beat the stock market for quite some time. A hundred years ago, Josiah Willard Gibbs and Ludwig Boltzmann were responsible for laying the foundations of statistical mechanics — the very cornerstone of thermodynamics.

It seems that Professor Gibbs, who spent his entire working life as a professor at Yale, earned a total *lifetime* income of only \$20,000, and yet when he died he had some \$110,000. Gibbs played the market. And judging by his luck with graduate students, he may have spent a little too much time playing the market and not enough time concentrating on his students. In his entire tenure at Yale, he guided only *one* student, an Irving Fisher, in successfully obtaining his Ph.D. in experimental physics. And what do you suppose this student did for his thesis? He constructed a hydraulically driven model of the American economy using a series of valves and pipes. By opening and closing the various valves he could simulate the various interrelationships of the economy.

Did Gibbs use this device to amass his fortune? I doubt it. Even though Irving Fisher went on to become one of America's most noteworthy economists, he is probably best remembered for having announced just two weeks before the stock-market crash of 1929 that "stocks are now at what looks like a permanent high plateau." Fortunately for Gibbs, not only did he not take financial advice from Fisher, but he was already dead at the time of the great crash (certainly one way of beating financial ruin).

At around the same time that Fisher was building the American economy in his basement, another student in Paris, a Louis Bachelier, was trying to defend his thesis to Henri Poincaré, one of the most famous mathematicians of the last several hundred years. His topic was "The Theory of Speculation." Poincaré passed him, but just barely. What Bachelier had concocted

was the first scientific look at how the stock market behaves (he managed to do this without benefit of any plumbing supplies — he must have been a theoretician). He came up with three fundamental principles:

1. *Independence*: price differences taken over any particular time period give no information about the differences over any other time period. This means that even if a stock lost a dollar a day for the last five days, you have absolutely no idea what it will do today — there's no such thing as a trend.

2. *Stationarity*: there is no preferred moment of time when it comes to price variation in speculative markets. This simply means that there is no wrong or right time to get into the market.

3. *Normality*: market price variations follow a Gaussian probability. This means that prices distribute themselves in the familiar bell-shaped Gaussian curve in which the highly unlikely outcomes (large price increase or large price decrease) are represented by the tails of the curve, while the more likely outcomes cluster near the center.

When all three of these conditions are taken together, the result is what mathematicians call the Gaussian random walk. This simply means that it's just a flip of the coin.

Play this little thought experiment with me. If you have a stock selling for \$10 a share, a flip of a coin will change its value by 10 cents. You get to flip once a day: heads it gains 10 cents, and tails it loses 10 cents. That means that on the first day the stock would sell for either \$10.10 or \$9.90. Both have the same probability. What happens on the second day? Well, if the stock had been selling for \$10.10, then after flipping the coin it would be selling for either \$10 (tails) or \$10.20 (heads). However, if it had been selling for \$9.90, then after flipping the coin it would be selling for either \$9.80 or \$10.

Look at this carefully. At the end of the second day there are four possible states that the stock could be selling at: \$9.80, \$10, \$10, and \$10.20. Note that it is twice as *probable* for the stock to be selling at \$10 as it is to be selling at either \$9.80 or \$10.20. Think about this. Based

on this simple flipping of a coin, what are the possible states on the third day? Don't peek, but write it down yourself. \$9.70, \$9.90, \$9.90, \$9.90, \$10.10, \$10.10, \$10.10, and \$10.30. Note that it is now *three* times more probable for the stock to be selling at \$9.90 or \$10.10 than at \$9.70 or \$10.30. This is the nature of the Gaussian distribution, with most prices grouped around the middle and fewer out at the edges. Try this for a few more days.

You may be thinking that the stock market just doesn't work this way. Maybe you're right. Maybe you're wrong. You must be thinking that if you had special information, or the advice of a good stockbroker, you could beat these Gaussian odds. Maybe, maybe not.

In 1967, Senator Thomas McIntyre of New Hampshire was holding hearings on the outrageous fees charged by fund managers because of what they claimed to be the value of their *special* knowledge. The Nobel Prize-winning economist Paul Samuelson testified at this hearing that there is *no special* knowledge, that all knowledge available is *already* reflected in the stock price. This is called the efficient market hypothesis (EMH). When combined with the rules of Bachelier, this is referred to as the Random Walk Theory (RWT) of stock prices.

Samuelson said that the best portfolio would be that which is simply picked randomly, that you can do no better than that. This means that you can't *beat* the market, but you can still make money. If the market as a whole goes up, because of an improved economy, let's say by some 10%, and your stocks go up 10%, then you haven't *beaten* the market, you're merely even. Think about the Gaussian distribution. This 10% increase would be equivalent to increasing that distribution by 10%, so that the peak of the Gaussian would now stand at \$11.00. You could have made less, or more (sitting a bit to the left or right of the peak depending on your luck), but the more you invested, and the more *diversified* your investments, the closer you'd be to sitting at the peak of the Gaussian.

Samuelson claimed that a fund manager could do no better than this. To check this out, the senator

played a game of darts, using that method to pick out stocks in 1957. In his little experiment he bought \$10,000 worth, and then found that by 1967, at the time of the hearing, they were worth \$25,300, an amount that *beat* the increase in the stock market itself over that time, and beat almost all of the expert fund managers with their *special* knowledge. He was *lucky*, having managed to hit on the right of the Gaussian peak. Fund managers got into real trouble after this little experiment. It was reported that several of these fund managers offered the senator a job since he had beaten their investment records.

So what does it all mean?

The mathematicians and Nobel Prize-winners will tell you that there's no way to beat the market. They can prove it. All their math tells them so. It all comes down to luck.

But there's just one little problem with their theories.

There is a *chaotic* component that they've ignored.

There are many underlying assumptions to the EMH viewpoint, but the one which is the weakest, which in fact is flat-out wrong, is that *Investors act rationally*. Only then will you get a Gaussian distribution. Unfortunately, investors are people, and people are by definition irrational — they are *chaos* personified.

If you remember an earlier column in which I talked about chaos, you'll remember that chaos occurs when highly nonlinear events take place, meaning that small inputs create huge outputs. Nonlinearity and chaos in the stock market are illustrated by a 500 point drop in a single day because people panic.

Benoit Mandelbrot of the IBM Research Laboratories took a look at this EMH theory and showed, simply by looking at the data, that price fluctuations are *not* Gaussian, that the price swings that do in fact take place could not exist if the market were operating under EMH conditions. He describes the market with a different type of probability, one using *Levy stable laws*, which allow *infinite* variations to occur.

But even with this approach, he cannot predict, cannot pick out a winner. The nonlinearities that

govern the market, the irrational, chaotic core that is driven by people who want pet rocks one year, mountain bikes the next, and probably clown shoes in '93, cannot be boiled down to a simple formula for picking the winners.

I was crushed.

There would be no magic formula for me to make the millions I need to do my research. The stock market has been terminally and chaotically contaminated by the irrational people who play it. What could I do? Were there any helpful hints at all in this book?

And then I found one.

It was almost perfect.

It is called the *Super Bowl Indicator*, as put forth by Robert Stovall of the 21st Century Advisers Fund. This Indicator states that if

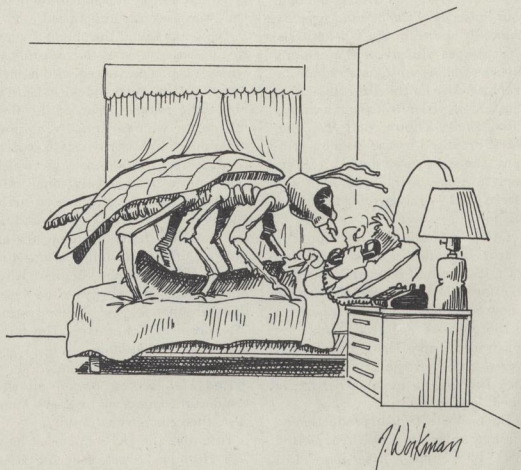
the team that wins the Super Bowl originally belonged to the old National Football League before it merged with the American Football League, then the stock market will be up for the year; otherwise, it will be a loser. In the 23 years prior to the 1990 game, the Super Bowl Indicator has been right an amazing 91% of the time (21 out of 23 times). So what does that mean for this year?

You figure it out.

I won't give you all the answers.

After all, I'm no stock expert.

There's only one piece of advice that I'll give you, and that is to buy Casti's book. It may not show you how to beat the market, but I guarantee that you'll find it interesting. □



"I'm afraid I won't be in today.
I woke up with a real nasty bug."

Fall Sale! Creators: Lowest Price Ever!

Television

In 1987 I started writing animation for television. Work was plentiful. A year later, the Angel of Death descended upon the innocent bearing *Little Clowns of Happytown*. On viewing *Little Clowns*, the industry promptly went into cardiac arrest and has been virtually moribund ever since.

Starting this fall the prognosis is good. In a partnership between Claster Television and Harvey Comics, Claster will distribute 65 half-hour episodes of *Casper and Friends*, originally shown in the '50s and '60s. The episodes will have new music and titles as well as up-to-date animation graphics. Also for the 1991-92 season, Claster Television will debut a weekly show, *Bucky O'Hare and the Toad Wars*. Produced by the Sunbow company, the show aired first as a three-part miniseries in June, but will return as a weekly syndicated series this fall.

Other animated shows on the boards include *G.I. Joe*, returning with 20 new half-hour episodes (fall '91); *James Bond Jr.* (1991-92 season); a new ecologically minded-superhero in the guise of *The Toxic Crusader*; and from Hanna-Barbera, a *Tarzan* series, based on the original Edgar Rice Burroughs novels. *Tarzan* is scheduled for 1992.

Buena Vista TV is in production on four new animated series to be slotted into "The Disney Afternoon" fall programming over the next three years. First to air this year is *Darkwing Duck*, followed by *Bonkers!* in 1992, *Goof Troop* in 1993 (this will coincide with Goofy's 60th birthday), and *Quarks* in 1994.

With the ratings victory of Stephen King's *It* last November, it didn't take television long to jump aboard the King express. During the May sweeps, CBS aired a television movie based on the short story "Sometimes They Come Back." While, for Laurel

Entertainment, King has completed a two-hour pilot for a series called *The Golden Years*. In a quote from *TV Time*, Laurel president Richard Rubenstein describes the idea as, "The fountain of youth gone sour."

This fall the networks will be trying out a variety of prime-time fantasy pilots for possible new season series. With the success of *Ghost*, television just couldn't resist climbing on the supernatural bandwagon. A lot of "dead people" shows to brighten up your evenings.

Here's a peek at some of the pilots that were recently announced.

NBC has taken the "buddy" show to the extreme with *Robosaurus*, in which a cop is partnered with a part-dinosaur, part-robot sidekick. *Cain* is about the reincarnation of the first murderer, who repents by helping other people. Wes Craven is executive producer on *Nightmare Cafe*, which takes place in a ghostly diner. *Mr. Lyle* is a secret agent whose arch-enemy is the evil Dr. Coma. Rounding out the NBC fantasy lineup are an untitled pilot from Ridley (*Bladerunner*) Scott and, since Stephen King adaptations are always good bets, then why not a show about a young "Stephen King" character? The show is called *Eerie, Indiana*.

CBS opted for an animated show called *Fish Police*, based on the wonderful comic book by Steve Moncuse, then changed its mind.

ABC has the DC comic-book hero *The Human Target*, starring Rick Springfield. The three other ABC shows are of the supernatural variety. There is an untitled pilot about a dead couple who are returned to earth to mend broken hearts. *Moe's World* is about a black inner-city family as viewed by their deceased 11-year-old son. Family relationships are strained in *The Craft* when a woman is stalked by her husband's coven of witches.

From Fox is the television version of the film *Bill & Ted's Excellent Ad-*



venture, and *The Brave New World of Charlie Hoover*, which casts Sam Kinison as Tim Matheson's two-inch tall, sometimes invisible alter ego.

When you think of the average werewolf, silver bullets, a full moon, and the occasional ripped throat usually come to mind. But not in England... It seems that HTV International Ltd. has withdrawn from its co-production deal with MCA Television Entertainment on *She-Wolf of London*, alleging that the show had too much violence for UK audiences. This has prompted MCA to file a multimillion-dollar suit against HTV for breach of contract. If only HTVI had heeded the warnings of Madame Ouspenskaya.

To celebrate the 25th anniversary of the *Star Trek* series, the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry is designing an interactive exhibit based on the futuristic themes of the show. The traveling exhibit will first open in January 1992 at their Washington Park facility.

Movies

With the realization that not all sequels are guaranteed money-makers, many studios are looking at the smaller-budgeted, non-numerical films as a source of revenue.

In a much publicized 28-page memo (published in *Daily Variety*) from Walt Disney studios, chairman Jeffrey Katzenberg comments on the high financing of blockbuster movies and the large salaries paid to writers, directors, and actors and suggests that studios should "return to basics" and move away from the big-budgeted blockbusters and million-dollar salaries. In the memo, Katzenberg states, "...we must try to blaze a path away from unreasonable salary and

participation deals." In that same issue, *Daily Variety* reports that Walt Disney chairman and chief executive Michael Eisner was paid \$11.23 million last year, of which \$10.48 million rolled out in the form of an annual bonus. In fact, a statement sent out to Disney shareholders showed that Disney paid out \$3.77 million in salaries and \$19.79 million in bonuses to the top five corporate officers last year. I wonder if Disney intends to blaze a path away from the million-dollar corporate bonus? Or is it just the creators who are supposed to take the short money? Perhaps I'm just a little too cynical.

Only time and box office stats will tell if the "small film" is a legitimate, widespread trend. For now, like the comptrollers at the studios, all we can do is wait and watch.

Reason and restraint notwithstanding, the expected bonanza from this summer's potential cult blockbuster, *Terminator II* (which reportedly cost at least \$88 million to make), and from *Aliens 3* this fall, reassures us that the sequel is by no means extinct. It's early days yet, but the number of sequels remains constant; what seems to be happening is an increase in original, less costly features.

Some upcoming movies to support the theory:

First Look Pictures (a subsidiary of Overseas Filmgroup) is producing three features, one of which is the science fiction thriller *Earth Creature*, to be directed by Tibor (*The Gate*) Takacs. All three films will be budgeted around the \$5 million mark.

For release late this summer from Trimark Pictures is a \$5 million fantasy called *Newman*. Written and directed by Tony Cookson, *Newman* is the story of two boys who build a robot which becomes inhabited by the spirit of their dead father. Trimark Pictures track record includes *Warlock* and Dean Koontz's *Servants of Twilight*.

In a co-production deal, Allied Vision and Lane/Pringle Productions are making four genre films this coming year. No start date has been set for the screen adaptation of Dean Koontz's *Phantoms*, but shooting began earlier this year on two Stephen King projects: *The Lawnmower Man*, directed by Brett Leonard, and *The Mangler*, directed by Kevin Tenny. Both are budgeted around the \$6 million mark. Last in

the lineup is *Howling VII*, based on a script by Kevin Rock, which will start filming this summer in Budapest. The \$3.5 million feature is intended for the U.S. home video market but will be released theatrically overseas.

The news is not good for Koontz's *Midnight*, currently in production. No one should confuse the novel (or the original screenplay written by Koontz for a proposed Paramount film based on the bestseller) with the forthcoming godawfulness bearing the title. Of the thirty-odd directors who responded positively to the Koontz screenplay, for reasons that surpass human understanding, the producers at Paramount chose Stuart Gordon — the "guiding intelligence" behind the spectacularly icky film called *Re-Animator* — and, yes, that's the same



Little Chucky

Stuart Gordon who was booted off *Honey, I Shrank the Kids*. According to reliable studio scuttlebutt, Gordon has acted out of such total confusion and ineptitude that he has undone everything good in the Koontz screenplay that commended it to thirty-odd directors. The award-winning novelist has apparently advised both Paramount and Gordon that they can call it "Stuart Gordon's *Midnight*" but that if his name is connected with the abomination, even in a whisper or publicity inference, he (Koontz) will open the floodgates of media opprobrium and let the world know he found the film so awful he couldn't permit his own good name to be associated with it.

And concluding our tale of botched creations, a summer start date is planned for the horror-thriller movie *Transformation*. John Perry wrote the screenplay about your average alumnus of the mad scientist academy

who develops a rejuvenating serum.

Superheroes still seem to be a source of inspiration for the film industry. Director Roland (*The Killing Fields*) Joffe and writer Barry Morrow are working on a screen adaptation of *The Super Mario Bros.* for summer 1992.

Fearless Fosdick, created by Al Capp, will appear as a live-action feature by Nelvana Ltd. as well as an animated television series.

Barring complications, the *Batman* sequel will start filming in August. Both Michael Keaton and Tim Burton will return in their respective roles of star and director with Danny De Vito as The Penguin and Michelle (*Married to the Mob*) Pfeiffer as Catwoman. The script has been written by Dan Waters, whose previous credits include *Heathers* and *The Adventures of Ford Fairlane*. Tim Burton has also signed to direct *Mai, the Psychic Girl* for Carolco Pictures. Based on the well-known Japanese and American comic book, this feature will be a musical with music and lyrics by Ron and Russell Mael. The screenplay is by Larry Wilson and Caroline Thompson (*Edward Scissorhands*). You can expect *Mai* to be in theaters around Christmas 1992. To top it all off, Geffen Films and Warners are also developing Burton's other creation, *Beetlejuice 2*.

After the mega-hit *Home Alone*, one of director John Landis' next projects will be the animated feature *Sinbad: The Dreamquest*.

In development from New World and Canada's Paragon Entertainment is a live-action feature of the recently canceled Marvel comic book superheroes, *Power Pack*.

Blackman Entertainment's first venture into the movie making business will be with an \$8-million feature about a superhero who lives in LA where he defends its juvenile inhabitants against evil drug dealers and gangs. The film is appropriately called *Blackman: The Movie*.

Spider-Man is joining the ranks of Broadway hoofers in a new musical, *The Amazing Spider-Man*. The musical is being produced and developed through Radio City Music Hall Productions and Marvel. Keith Herrmann will write the music, Barry Harman the lyrics.

Some more upcoming films:

From Universal:

That \$29.95 villain, Chucky, is

back for yet another go around with Andy (Alex Vincent) in *Child's Play 3*. Screenplay is by veteran *Child's Play* writer and creator Don Mancini. Brad Dourif will return as the voice of the murderous Chucky. Installment three will be in theaters this fall.

This year, your Halloween trick or treat comes to you courtesy of *Shocker's* Wes Craven with his latest horror film, *The People Under the Stairs*.

For those of you whose nerves are now a little on edge, Thanksgiving is the general release date of Steven Spielberg's animated *An American Tail II: Fievel Goes West*.

From Columbia:

Late For Dinner is a time-travel story set in 1962, in which two friends travel back to their hometown 29 years after leaving it. The film is written by Mark Andrus and directed by W.D. Richter. (A scheduled fall release.)

John Heard, Adam Baldwin, and Rhea Perlman star in *Radio Flyer*, a story of two brothers who seek sanctuary in a fantasy world after their mother remarries and moves to another town. (A July 19 release.)

William Nicholson will adapt his stage hit *Shadowlands* for the screen. Originally a BBC teleplay (also written by Nicholson), *Shadowlands* is the love story of author C.S. Lewis and American poet Joy Davidson. Lewis is best remembered for his *Chronicles of Narnia*, including *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, and for *The Screwtape Letters*. Sydney Pollack is slated to either direct or produce the feature.

From Disney and Hollywood Pictures:

Hollywood Pictures, a subsidiary of Walt Disney, has acquired the rights to Robert F. Young's *Eridahn*. First published as the novelette "When Time Was New" in 1964, *Eridahn* is the story of a paleontologist/time traveler who makes a jaunt 74 million years into the past to discover the answer to the riddle of human bones mixed with those of dinosaurs. Upon arrival, he encounters two children who claim to be the Prince and Princess of Mars. This one sounds promising; at least, intriguing.

Disney and Hollywood Pictures have also bought the rights to two Robert Heinlein classics. *The Puppet Masters* will be filmed under the Hollywood Pictures banner for theater

distribution, while *Farmer in the Sky* will be a Disney project aimed for the television audience.

Currently being written by Dale Wasserman for Disney is an animated musical based on the old Russian fairy tale *Baba Yaga*.

Films in development:

There is news on four independent movies in various stages of production. A detective's spirit returns to help catch a serial killer and solve his own murder in *Haunted Precinct*. What do you get when you cross a doll with the supernatural? This time it's *Dolly Dearest*, starring Denise Crosby, Sam Bottoms, and Rip Torn. *Scanners II: The New Order* has been completed, while *Scanners: The Takeover* is now in the post-production phase. Both films were written by B.J. Nelson (Nelson shares a writing credit for the third movie with Julie Richard and David Preston) and directed by Christian Duguay.

Modern-day vampire killers-for-hire is the idea behind John Steakley's recent novel *Vampire\$*, currently being adapted for the screen.

It's back to the vampire classics for Francis Ford Coppola with his version of *Dracula*. The cast includes Winona Ryder.

Production is under way on three more Poe story-to-screen translations: *The Masque of the Red Death*, *The Gold Bug*, and *The Black Cat*.

In 1975 Peter Benchley and a relatively unknown Steven Spielberg scared the hell out of us with *Jaws*. Universal has bought the rights to Benchley's recent thriller, *Beast*. This time the aquatic nasty is a giant squid.

Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett's book *Good Omens* has been bought by Mark Levinson and Scott Rosenfeld (executive producers of *Home Alone* and *Mystic Pizza*) in association with Sovereign Pictures. Gaiman and Pratchett will write the screenplay.

Chevy Chase is the co-producer and star of *The Memoirs of an Invisible Man*. John Carpenter directs from a script by Dana Olsen and Robert Collector. Special effects will be by Industrial Light and Magic.

There are two futuristic thrillers in the works. The first is *Universal Soldier* from Carolco, pitting Dolph Lundgren against Jean Claude Van Damme as a special operations officer who must stop his unit of genetically

engineered soldiers gone rogue. The second film, which starts shooting next month in Australia, is *Fortress*, from Davis Entertainment and 20th-Century Fox. John Davis, head of the company and producer of the film, describes *Fortress* as "a futuristic *Escape from Alcatraz*."

This time staying closer to the original material (remember the Bing Crosby version?), Orion studios will remake Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*.

A half alien-half Jew voyages back to the Bronx to find his father in an upcoming Fox comedy, *Furman, Son of Stuart*.

Andrew Neiderman's Jekyll and Hyde novel *The Need* has been optioned by Goodman-Rosen Productions.

In a nasty case of *déjà vu*, screenplay writer Frank Miller, who shared the writing credit on *Robocop 2* with the director, will again share credit with *Robocop 3* director Fred Dekker. Although Nancy Allen will return for number three, actor Peter Weller will not reprise his original *Robocop* role. This time the honors go to Robert Burke.

Considerable buzz has been generated in the film community (and, even more, upstate in California, in the vicinity of Skywalker Ranch) by the unverified but frequently-heard rumor that George Lucas is interested in doing a new trilogy of science fiction films. He hopes to make use of the latest in computer graphics to go beyond the spectacular effects we've seen thus far in even the most extravagant blockbusters.

And finally, having just graduated from the Joe Bob Briggs School of Cinema Culture for the Criminally Insane, I have news concerning four splendidly titled soon-to-be classics: *Nudist Colony of the Dead*, directed by Mark Pirro, who also directed by such films as *A Polish Vampire in Burbank* and *Curse of the Queerwolf* (the cast for *Nudist* includes long-time fan Forrest J. Ackerman); a double treat by producer-director Richie Suraci, *The Priestess of the 7-Foot Cobra* and *Sun Goddesses & the Lost Temple of Paradise*; and John Astin's salad days return with *Killer Tomatoes Go to France*.

More cinematic greats next time. □

Life in a Tree



Twenty million years ago, the creatures that were destined to become human beings lived in trees. They have never really gotten over it.

Tree-bound life made a profound impression on the ancestors of human beings. Once you get two or three families in a tree, the quarters are close. The earliest human beings never could have survived in trees if they had any sense of privacy at all. The need for privacy was bred out of them when they still had prehensile toes, and it has not yet returned, though few of them live in trees anymore. There aren't even very many trees left.

Today, your average human being is capable of an intolerable proximity to other human beings (as in the intimate acts of love, mugging, and airline travel) without any loss of self or even a glimmer of empathy with the others close by. The size and demeanor of the crowds these creatures routinely assemble is frightening by our standards. One of us would suffer a fatal loss of self-respect just trying to get a seat at the average baseball game. Human beings comport themselves in baseball parks the same way they did in trees: cheering, sharing food, making concerted gestures, urinating on one another. And they never seem noticeably diminished by it.

Naturally, they never developed any sense of privacy about family, social, or financial affairs. On the contrary, they take quite an interest in the details of each others' lives. They are obsessed with each other's purchases, credit histories, reading habits, and living arrangements. Some of them compile extensive dossiers of this information and sell it to others. Few human beings object to having the details of their private lives bought and sold. And fewer still object to supplying the information.

The average middle-class human being responds to four market sur-

veys in a year. He thinks nothing about sharing his innermost product preferences and consumption habits with a person or machine he knows only from five seconds' telephone acquaintance. This has produced a whole industry among the human beings: armies of people who telephone other people at random and ask personal questions. And they aren't even punished for it!

In order to simplify the compilation of information on each other, human beings routinely do this as a byproduct of other activities. One of these creatures thinks nothing of supplying his name, address, telephone number, social security number, mother's maiden name, and so on to validate a bank check, register an appliance warranty, apply for a loan, purchase a house, stay in a hospital, or obtain a driver's license. This information enters a market where it is bought, sold, loaned, borrowed, and traded — wholesale, retail, and customized. You can purchase anything you want to know about any human being (or group of them), outside of his videotape rental records, which are protected by law (the only information so protected, incidentally). And most large businesses routinely purchase this information, to make their intrusions on private life both more efficient and more effective.

Comparatively few organizations have the computer or financial resources to obtain or make use of this information. Lotus Development Corporation, a software firm in a place called Cambridge, Massachusetts, last year tried to make it available to anyone with a personal computer, a CD-ROM drive, and \$600, with a product called *Marketplace: Households*. The idea was that you could put certain criteria into your computer — say, males over forty-five who make \$50,000 per year and own goldfish — and the software would spit out

a bundle of mailing labels for your use in getting your important messages out to these prospects. But when the general public found out the product was under development, people began to contact Lotus and ask to have their information stricken from the database. After 30,000 such requests, Lotus canceled *Marketplace: Households*. Human beings don't mind giving the information to anybody who asks for it. They just don't want somebody else selling it. Not for \$600.

Human beings only want their personal information sold to the well-heeled. Thus the U.S. Census. Every ten years, the government of the United States sends armies of specialists into the field to profile and count every man, woman, and child in the land. This information goes into a computer database, an anonymous person-by-person map of income levels, living arrangements, and family structure. The government then sells chunks of this database (or the whole thing, if you want to buy it) to organizations that use it to decide on locations for convenience stores, what to emphasize in local advertising messages, or where to sell storm windows.

Human beings do not find it particularly alarming that their government is serving them on a platter to the merchants of vinyl siding and adjustable beds. They like to hear from the siding sellers. It helps them feel close to their fellows. And it reminds them of when they lived in trees. □

Hotrider

By Keith Brooke
Art by Cortney Skinner

Tin Man had lived in Malibu for over six years when they told him he'd been for his last ride. I was up on Observation G when he found me. Towering over me, sheened with sweat, his squared-off head hung to one side and his one real eye twitched to some irregular beat. To most people he would have been a scary sight, but to me he was Tin Man and he was upset and that was screwing with his neurons where they interfaced with his prosthetic enhancements. It always affected him like that. Tics, couldn't stand still, perspiration. He was my best friend.

"What is it, Tin?" I wiped my part of the view-panel with a sleeve. I don't like to be caught doing nothing; it gives the wrong impression. I'm Ray Siefert, I'm Malibu's fixer, I know all the right people, do all the right things, I've always got myself something on flick-forward, if you follow my drag.

He gripped the hand-rail and pressed his forehead and the bulb of his prosthetic eye against the panel. He was trying to stop the twitching. "It's over," he muttered. "They've dumped me after all I've done for them."

"Who said? What were the terms they used?"

"R & G." He turned to face me. "No further need of your services" was how they put it —

"They?"

"Ruttgers himself. And Gerome's P.A. It's final, Ray, the show's over." He couldn't control his twitching any longer, so he gave up trying.

I stared past him, up at the streaks of Jupiter, wondering what we could do. Ruttgers and Gerome were partners of Malibu. They'd grown from a two-person trip agency into a major force with controlling interests in most of the Jovian system in less than the four years I had lived here on Io.

There was only one answer. We went up to my dom on K and broke out the scotch. Real scotch. The crate had cost me most of the proceeds of a bootleg sim-trip. It was my last bottle; I'd been saving it.

It got to him quickly. Tin Man always said he had a Teflon liver, said he could out-drink anybody, but then Tin Man was all talk. Pretty soon he was doing his party trick of standing on one hand in the middle of my small room. With such big hands and less than a fifth of a gee that's not so great, but you don't tell that to Tin Man when he's had a few slugs of real scotch. I watched him through my alcohol haze. This guy had been the hero of countless hotriding sims, he was looked up to by billions around the solar system, this guy had made the fortunes of Ruttgers and Gerome, and now they were just dropping him.

"No market, they told me," said Tin Man, crumpling slow-mo to the floor, the neurological twitches finally upsetting his balance. He took another slug. "There's only so much you can do with a sim-trip and then the market's saturated. They say they're winding down the sim side and pumping up the hands-on, they're going to open up Malibu for the riches, build others like it."

"So they're not closing down altogether," I said. My mind was working in parallel, trying to guess how the changes would affect my own position on Io. "Hands-on

means people — they'll still need hotriders: couldn't you be a guide? You know what the riches are like."

That hurt Tin Man. How could he drop from trip star to tour guide?

"Didn't even offer me any pay-off. Just finished, that's all. Can't afford to stay on Io, but I have enough for a fare to Callisto. *Callisto*. Might as well take a walk outside!" Callisto is a stop-over, all caves and transit bars and moving under cover every four days when the place crosses the plane of Jupiter's mag fields — they haven't even installed MP screens to cut out the radiation, it's that run-down a place.

"What's wrong with Callisto?" I said. Tin Man didn't even smile.

"Riding days are over, they say, and I have to accept it!" His tics were pulling his whole head around; he sometimes got like this with drink and stress and raw deals and the like. I skidded the bottle across the floor to him.

Maybe I should explain a little about Malibu, about how it all came about. They always said Io was the least hospitable place in the solar system. I can think of worse, but it's true that the inner Jovians were uninhabitable until some Earthbound tecky came up with the MP screen. *Mesoproteic*. Something about mesons and positron moons and the strong nuclear force. I don't know, it's fifty-seven years since my doctorate. A six-year-old could probably explain it better than me now. What it does is cuts out everything you want, solids, radiation, whatever. MPs let us live on Io; a big one encases all of Malibu. It keeps our air in, keeps the charged particles and the stink of sulfur out where they belong.

Tin Man was one of the first people to set up on Io. Employed by one of the old lunar corporations, he and some others discovered just how useful an MP screen was. Malibu was little more than a small prospectors' dome when a keyboard man called Berg Ruttgers came down and saw Tin Man and his friends skidding around on MP-screened buggies, skimming down slow-moving channels of molten sulphur, riding the golden surf. Ruttgers had gone back to Callisto to make a deal with Ruby Gerome, and together they had bought into Malibu and started building.

There were other hotriding stars, but Tin Man was always the favorite. With all his alterations and implants he could jack directly into his buggy, link directly with the sim-recorder. The trip technicians could access the raw data from his prosthetic eye, they could trace his tensions through the body-machine interfaces. Others followed, other agencies competed, but Tin Man was the first and best.

One time, when the market had apparently peaked, there had been rumors that the sim-trip line would be pared back. Tin Man had killed the talk. Until then hotriding had consisted of skidding around in MP-screened buggies near to Malibu, riding crests of molten sulfur, using low-gee surface effects to go as fast as possible. This time had been like any ordinary trip. R & G



hadn't even wanted to bother recording — even then they were shifting their plans towards the tourist trade, the little groups of *riches* that gathered by the view-panels to watch that square-headed trip-star heading out to ride his stick on the liquid brimstone. But R & G had a contract going for a Nutragena ad-operetta, and Tin Man had convinced them they needed to re-sim some of the sequences. He had headed for the main drag, no hurrying, just letting the currents take him out onto the sea of golden sulfur, apparently unaware of the two black-shielded buggies closing on him from behind. He had caught the turbulence where his channel joined the sea and ridden it out to where a whirlpool chopped up some real waves, one of his standard moves.

I'm telling all this second-hand, up until this point. I wasn't watching, I was too busy cutting a deal with a courier for one of the lots of trip-out-takes I used to sell: she would take them out to a studio where they could be cosmetized and re-animated until even Ruttgers would have trouble telling who had originated them. Then a nearby gaggle of *riches* had all stopped talking and a man made a bubbly sound in his throat.

I realized something was wrong, so I made for a panel, suddenly scared for Tin Man. I knew he had been angry, and I didn't like to think what he might have tried.

I looked out and there were the two black chase-buggies, circling slowly, no sign of Tin Man.

Even a magniview only showed whirlpool turbulence where my friend had last been seen. No buggy. I picked up what had happened from the tourists. Tin Man had gone down. The chasers had closed on him, drifting in behind a three-metre crest of sulfur. Tin Man had spotted them, hesitated too long, and the wave had folded over him, carrying the chasers on past. When the surface had leveled, his buggy had vanished. In over sixty years off-Earth I had lost a few friends, some very close, but there was something too terrible to comprehend about going the way I believed then that Tin Man had gone. The MP shielding would protect him from the heat and the pressure, but there would be no way to dissipate his own heat from the buggy, or, failing that, he would eventually run out of power or air. I couldn't bear to think about it, but then I couldn't fix my mind on anything else. Maybe he would sink so far that even the MPs would fail; maybe that would be best.

Eventually, the chasers came back in. I saw their faces as they left their buggies. They were creased, shaken. Then a tecky came out and —

"Mega, mega!" said a whining *riche* voice, and I looked up and saw Tin Man's buggy skimming back up the drag towards Mahibu and, pretty soon, MP screens merging and he was in and home and alive.

He must have been under the brimstone sea for near to forty-five minutes, yet he came out of the crowd smiling. People were yelling at him, asking what had happened, and all he would do was grin and tap his bulbous plastic eye and say, "It's all in here. Property of R & G. Sorry, you'll have to buy the sim."

That dive had revitalized the hotriding game, but this time it looked like the end was really here. He'd never said if he had planned the trip to happen like that, if he'd planned to dive. R & G Publicity had made him up as some kind of hero, trying what nobody had ever even considered, but I couldn't swallow it. "How did you get back

to the surface?" I had once asked him.

"You should see it, Ray — not just the sims, but really see it. There's all sorts of flows and currents down there. Some of them, it's like a pattern to it, you latch on to the right place, ride the right bubble and it lifts you back up like it was always meant to be. It's really fantastic, Ray, it's a magic kingdom down there. It's beautiful."

Looking at Tin Man's face, I could remember the light in his eye when it had still been new to him. Now it was gone. They were taking it all away from him.

"Tell you one thing," he said, on one hand again, despite the ties. "I'm gonna have one more trip 'ar ain't nobody gonna stop me." Then he tumbled, slowly, and didn't wake for the next fourteen hours.

Full night on Io would only be dusk anywhere else. The sunlight, reflected red from Jupiter, casts the surface of Io in sepia tones, soft ochres as opposed to the harsh reds and oranges that full sunlight gives.

I left Tin Man asleep in my dom. For some reason I had the idea I could fix him up with something, something better than tour-guide, something better than the resort bum it looked like he was headed for.

On Observation G, like all the ob decks, an entire wall is view-panel. I found Shenet Ra'ath leaning on the hand-rail, staring up at the swirling aurora, our constant link with Jupiter. The flickers and the lightning were building up with the approaching dawn, the build-up that accompanied and fed the volcanic peaks of that time of day, the best for hotriding, the most dangerous for a carbon-based life-form such as myself or most of Tin Man.

Shenet looked good, even if she was well into her fourteenth decade, as the records claimed. She worked in Leisure for Ymporial, one of the lunar corporations that had been caught off guard by R & G's sudden onslaught on the sim-trip market. She was a good contact in lots of ways, but I could tell from her face that she wouldn't be any help on this occasion.

Regardless, I plowed in, told her what was happening to Tin Man. "I knew it would happen," she said when I had finished. She wouldn't meet my eyes. "It's down to Tin that the market's stayed open for so long."

"Will you take him on, Shenet? He deserves better than this."

"This time she looked at me. "No, we can't." I like that about Shenet, even when I *don't* like it: she tells you straight. "There might have been some time left in hotriding, but if Ruttgers and Gerome pull out, then that's a strong signal. I can't convince Finance to go against a trend like that. You can't fight market forces, Siefert."

That was the kind of line I'd expected, but it still dented my shell. Tin Man was going down, and there was nothing I could do to help him.

With a brief nod I turned away from Shenet and walked off down the ob deck, wondering if Tin Man was still asleep.

Then I heard the first blast, felt the shock waves under my feet.

I was on my knees when the second blast went off, closer this time. It doesn't take much to pull your feet from under you at point eighteen gees, even with grippa floor covering.

Silence returned after the sixth blast, and I crawled over to the wall, pulled myself up by the hand-rail, hurried

back to confirm that Shenet was okay. Then I saw her eyes widen as she stared over my shoulder, out through the view-panel. "Jesus," she said, and for a moment I wondered why. Then I saw.

We were moving.

Malibu was edging slowly away from its foundations, sulfurous rock crumpling and crevassing all around. Malibu was an island of rock adrift on a river of liquid sulfur.

Tin Man was having his last ride, and he was taking the whole town with him.

You're his friend: convince him." Rutters didn't have any implants to blame for his nervous spasms or his flushed, shining face. He was terrified, that's all.

When we'd realized exactly what Tin Man had done, Shenet and I had headed for Concourse. I guessed that would be where the action was. There were several routes we could have taken, but I headed down through the ob decks just so I could see what was happening. *Should be scared*, I kept telling myself, but I stared at those panels and somehow couldn't manage it.

I'd never been hotriding, myself. Sure, I'd done the sim-trips, but I didn't need Tin Man to tell me how superficial that was. I tried to think of the stresses on the structure of Malibu, tried to guess if they would be enough to break up the town's MP screens. They weren't built for anything like this. But still I couldn't work up any fear.

By the time I reached Concourse, Malibu had found the main drag, the fastest part of the channel. Leaving the last ob deck, I paused to look out. Soon we would be leaving the drag, drifting out onto the ochre ocean. Just then green lightning arced down from Jupiter, colors swirled in the sky, and the sun lit the sea a sudden, bright yellow.

In the middle of Concourse was a cluster of Senior People, mainly R & G, but there were others there too, Ymporial, CalCorp, Tranche. Shenet joined them, and the only reason she stood out was because she wasn't so scared.

The glass front of Drac's Nite Klub was phasing to a general view of the brimstone ocean as Rutters turned to me, said, "You're his friend: convince him."

I studied his face. Fear flustered him, but it made him angry, too. He was a keyboard man, not a hands-on. He was quaking. I didn't enjoy it, but I can't say his attitude made things appear any worse at that particular moment.

"Well, where in hell is he?" Until then I hadn't even known for sure that it was Tin Man, and I wanted to know more, but I could see that Rutters and his mob weren't in any state to fill me in on the details. I followed his glance towards the R & G offices and ignored him after that.

I had to smile when I found Tin Man. Somehow he had found his way into Ruby Gerome's office and jacked directly into Control, Malibu's governing mainframe. More than that, he had protected himself.

No one could get into that office because he had shielded it with an MP screen.

He'd left a view-panel at the open doorway so we could see in and he out. Jacked in, he was only partly aware of my presence, but he knew who I was because he smiled and mouthed my name. *Ray*.

"Last ride, huh?" I said, not usually so stuck for words.

He nodded, then, after at least a minute, said, "No sim to this trip. Let 'em see it for real. Ray, I tell you: go and jack in. You can't really ride unless you're jacked." He knew I had illegal access to Control from my dom. I nodded. I'd been planning to anyway; I had to take care of my affairs, hadn't I? "There's bubbles, Ray, I can feel 'em. I think we might —" the floor lurched and I went down on my hands and knees — "yes! We're going down!" The floor jumped again, and when I regained my senses I realized that it was at an angle, maybe ten degrees or more. Then I realized what Tin Man had meant, and then I started to be scared.

I found my way out to Concourse just as the sulfur was closing above us. The big screen on Drac's showed the last tiny disc of Jupiter, and then a ripple sealed it off and Malibu was cast in a dim golden glow from the molten sulfur. After a split-second gap, Control cut in with town-lighting, but that didn't stop the screaming, didn't stop the yells.

Berg Rutters had been running around when the lights came on, yelling for somebody to do something. Ruby Gerome had done something. She had hit him with a punch that had carried him meters into the air before he crumpled into a blubbering heap against the view-panel front of Drac's.

I dashed through the crowd, hoping no one would try to stop me, lost my feet a few times as the floor lurched away from under them. I tried not to hear the huge groans and metallic shrieks which I guessed came from the structure of Malibu. Up through the ob decks, I kept getting glimpses of the strangely illuminated world of sulfur. Twists of darker magma spiralling up and around, blobs, bubbles, drifting in an apparently random ballet. I suppose it could have been beautiful, but all I could think of was how thin an MP screen really was, how I didn't even know how the damn things worked.

Once in my dom I locked the door, out of habit, I guess. Nobody was likely just to happen by and notice that I had an illegal In-point to Control. Not when we were sinking through a sea of molten sulfur.

I went straight to my view-panel — showing streaming, writhing magma — and yanked it from the wall, reached behind and pulled the access set out into the open. Without another thought I slid the jack into the socket behind my right ear, my one augmentation, a requisite for modern life, the salesperson had told me.

And I was there with Tin Man. I could tell where he was, in Control, but he didn't notice me for a few seconds. Long enough for me to take care of my own insurance.

Ray. His voice was all around me. He'd been thorough, embedded himself deeply in Control. There was no way anyone could corrupt him through the mainframe. If R & G tried anything they would be attacking Control itself, not a wise option when the only thing that could run Malibu's screen was Control.

Here, he said, and my senses were flooded with inputs from all around Malibu's shielded dome. It was overwhelming, the different densities, the magnetic fluxes of the magma, but it did give me a kind of blast-image of where we were.

And that was deep. Deeper than I could remember any hottrider daring to go before.

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One Star

By Ray Vukceвич

Art by Larry Blamire

Ouch!" Jane probed through her long yellow hair and found one of her brothers where he'd lodged under an armpit to burrow into her skin. She plucked the squeaking little guy off and crushed him between the thumbs of one hand and popped him into her mouth. Her eyes widened as she realized what she'd done. Her stomach roiled, and she thought she might retch, but it was all on an intellectual level. He had, in fact, tasted quite good, strangely warm and wet and salty, exciting, not at all like dry breadfruit or woody hardberries. Another change. Another discovery. She glanced around to see if anyone had noticed what she'd done.

Of course, her sister Sally had noticed. Jane could see Sally's blue eyes peeking from the red foliage of the breadfruit tree where she hid.

"That's disgusting," Sally said.

Sally's head followed her eyes into the open, and she carefully scanned up and down the shadowy path before she swung down onto the deck. Patches of raw, gray skin still dappled her body where Jane had snatched out handfuls of brown hair the last time they'd quarreled. Sally's mere presence irritated her these days. Fighting among themselves was stupid, Jane thought, but she had to admit to a warm feeling of rightness tingling through her body whenever she bit a piece out of Sally. No time for that now.

"What do you know about it?" Jane groomed absently through the hair on her chest looking for another of the strange new snacks as she pondered the last data she'd been able to gather before the Monster chased her out of the lab. She knew people back home didn't have so much trouble with their mothers. There were so many more places to hide on a planet. She could feel the hum of the ship in all her hands — the gentle, constant white noise of the life-support machines that had always been a part of her world. She might envy her planet-bound sisters their endless hiding places, their boundless space, but she really couldn't imagine what it would be like.

"I know there are only six of us left." Sally rose on her back arms, her eyes all straining forward to pierce Jane with a fierce look. "Six! Out of thousands. I know the rest of us won't last long. I know it's all hopeless. I know I won't be ... I won't be the one." Sally crumpled to the deck, overcome, Jane thought, with spineless despair.

"Five," Jane said.

"What?"

"There are five of us. Mary got gobbled up over by the waterworks this morning. So, see? You don't know as much as you thought you did."

"Oh, no! Not Mary." Sally rolled over and leaned back against the breadfruit tree. "Oh, it's all so useless."

"Don't say that!" Jane shouted. "It's not useless. We are the Sack of the People."

Sally sucked her lips into her mouth until they disappeared, then blew them out, making an explosively rude

noise. "That means about as much as a boy squeak."

"You don't know anything, Sally. Can't you ever think of anything but your own petty situation? Listen." Jane put her top four hands together to lecture. "We conjecture that just before the Big Bang, there was the Little Pop, a sputtering of star stuff speeding off into the Is Not, trailing a thin line of time and space always just ahead of the main show. When things settled, there was the Sun, the Earth, our seven dead sister planets, their miscellaneous moons, and the single Star in our black night sky. The Star is, of course, the rest of the universe. We go there because there is no place else to go."

Sally had made a great show of exaggerated boredom, hunching all of her shoulders, sighing deeply, and gazing out at the shafts of gentle bulkhead light poking through the red and green foliage of the breadfruit forest as Jane spoke, and now she made her rude noise again and said, "Words! Just words. You're always quoting dead people, Jane."

"That's not the point!" Jane beat her fists on the deck. Then she shook away her irritation at her dim sister. The point is, she thought, getting back into the lab. Inspirational words never worked with her sisters. She'd gotten carried away again. "I've got to figure a way to get back into the lab, Sally."

"You're so shallow, Jane. So uncaring. Mary. Look what I made for her." Sally pulled a peeled breadfruit down from the tree where she'd been hiding and spying on Jane. She'd carved a good likeness of a sister in the spongy, pale white fruit, six arms arranged in a graceful dance, the tiny hands, each with its three fingers and two thumbs, artfully open. There seemed to be too few eyes, but at that scale, eyes would be very hard to carve. It didn't look much like Mary. It could have been anyone.

"Mary ... Me ... We were going to have lunch together today, Jane." Sally turned her carving around and around in her hands. "Now, I guess we won't."

Lunch! Jane was on the verge of a discovery that could change the whole meaning of their lives on the ship, and Sally played with breadfruit and worried about lunch. Jane bit back cruel words. She needed Sally today.

"I want you to be a distraction while I sneak back into the lab," Jane said.

"What?" Sally's blue eyes stiffened and spread like hardberries stretching on their stalks for the morning light. She hugged her carving to her chest. "How can you even think of such a thing?"

Jane didn't know. It had been an idea. Lately she'd been having lots of unusual ideas. It didn't matter where this idea came from. It was a good one, and she'd make Sally do it. She stretched herself up and waved her arms and grimaced horribly. "Are we going to fight about this,



Sally?"

Sally rose in defiance, but even at her full height she still looked up, way up, at Jane. She crumpled back to the deck. "No, what do you want me to do?"

"Nothing hard." Jane lowered herself, then ran a hand gently through the hair between Sally's front eyes, an old caress, as if nothing had changed. But everything had changed; Jane felt Sally tremble under her hand, her neck tight, her arms tense. Sally would bolt if she thought she could get away with it. "Just swing by the lab at the tree top level. I'll make my way along the path. When she sees you, she'll chase you, but you're much faster in the trees and can get away easy. I'll hurry into the lab before she can get down again. Easy as that."

"Easy as that." Sally didn't sound convinced, but Jane knew she'd do it. In fact they'd do it now, before Sally could change her mind.

"And what will you do when she gets tired of chasing me and comes back?" Sally asked.

"She won't even know I'm in there. I'll worry about getting out later. Come on, Sally, it's a good plan. Let's do it."

"Now?"

"Why not?"

"Okay," Sally said. "You'd probably kill me yourself if I didn't."

Jane sputtered, searching for a way to say it wasn't so, but there were no words, because it was so, she suddenly realized. She turned all her eyes away quickly, shook her head, swallowed and swallowed again, her lips fluttering. She pushed her feelings away. She had no time for such nonsense. "Up you go," she said.

Sally took to the trees and scampered away.

"I like your carving!" Jane said, but she didn't think Sally could have heard her.

Jane waited to give Sally a good head start, then moved off down the path toward the lab.

Jane had worked hard for what she knew. Even when she'd been tiny, not much bigger than her brothers, running, always running, and hiding under the broad leaves of the hardberry bushes, in electronic cabinets, behind the plumbing, and in the trees, she'd found time to assault the ship with endless barrages of chatter — questions, questions, questions; she'd driven her sisters to distraction. Now she might have learned too much. Aren't some things better left unknown? No. Definitely not. Jane was a scientist.

The ship was little more than a canned ecosystem, a spinning cylinder, its inner walls glowing with soft golden light, filled to bursting with the forest of home, trees, vines, bushes everywhere — everywhere but on the paths of bare, gleaming deck and in the electronics. How did that work? Jane hadn't figured it out. Yet. The ship had been initially accelerated down the long corridor of Time/Space toward the rest of the universe by a series of nuclear explosions. These days it moved at a tremendous speed, but the distance was so great that no one living now, and the People lived a very long time, could ever hope to reach other suns. Jane's troubling new data indicated that the mission might be a horrible mistake. A waste of time.

Jane moved down the twisting path toward the lab, her eyes extended and scanning this way and that, up, down, ahead, behind, looking for the lurking white form of her mother, listening for the horrid slaps of the Monster's

huge hands on the deck.

When she turned the corner opening into the hollow where she had slept the night before, her other three sisters filled the leafy air with their screams and scattered into the forest.

"Hey! It's me," Jane called after them, but they didn't slow down. She had to admit she had been a little testy lately, but they were clearly overreacting. Forget them. She moved on through the hollow, out the other side, and into the last tunneling path that opened into the big space and the lab. At the junction, she stopped and twisted an eye around the corner to study the lay of the land. Midships, the main hollow offered a huge open space. Here Jane could see the tangled vines and bushes and trees wrapping up and up and around and over the rounded hull, a distant hanging forest, then down the other side again, everything green and red and sparkling in the golden light; here Jane could see the true shape of her world.

As far as she could see, the path to the lab was empty. No mother. No Sally. Maybe things were working out for a change. Jane crept onto the path and hurried toward the lab door.

A shadow flowed beneath her like black water, and she bunched her arms under herself and leaped forward, tucking and rolling as she hit the deck. She sprang up at once to run, but she'd come down facing a broad tree trunk. She rose to her full height and spun around to face the horror rushing up behind her, baring her teeth, knotting her free fists, straining all her eyes forward.

Instead of her mother, the Monster, Jane faced Sally.

"Aren't you the jumpy one," Sally said. "She wasn't there. So I just popped down for a bite." She dropped the golden hardberries she'd been munching and backed away from the look on Jane's face.

"You stopped for lunch?"

"Well, I have to eat, don't I? And, like I said, she isn't down there."

"That's because she's up here." Huge white hands flashed from the tree above Sally and jerked her screaming into the air. Mother, her black eyes twisting with the excitement of her catch, pulled Sally into her lap and held her tight. Sally struggled and beat against the hairy, white arms with her fists.

Jane banged the deck in frustration. No lab today. She moved slowly sideways back toward the path from which she'd come.

"Please, Jane," Sally called, her voice rising to a screech. "Help me. Please, please, please. Help!"

Her mother pushed Sally's head forward and administered the deadly spinal bite. Sally's eyes fell limp over her mouth. Her body jerked once like she'd grabbed a hot wire in one of the electronics cabinets, and then she was still.

Jane hurried from the big hollow, but even as she passed out of sight, even over her ragged breath and her hands slapping the deck, she heard the long rip, then the crunch, snap, crunch as her mother fed.

Plan B.

Jane lurked in a tree and watched her three skittish sisters huddled together on the deck below. They snatched bright hardberries from a bush and stuffed them into their mouths, their eyes scanning everywhere, their

muscles tight for sudden flight. Alert, but not smart. It would be easy to drop down on them, Jane thought. She could catch at least one with no trouble, maybe two, but she didn't want to catch them.

Jane leaped growling from the tree, all her arms spread wide, her teeth bared, her eyes tucked tight against her head and pointing forward. Before she landed, the sisters took off screaming. And in just the right direction, Jane thought, as she scrambled after them, making as many scary sounds as she could. She knew they would think only of running, not where they were running to; she deftly headed them into the big hollow where her mother had herded Sally.

At the junction of the path and the hollow, Jane pulled up and peeked inside. Her sisters ran straight for the lab, but then the quick white shape of the Monster loomed up to their left. Together they veered off the path and into the undergrowth. Mother raised her arms and laughed, then roared and gave chase, crushing a new path with her weight. Jane hurried to the lab door and slipped inside.

Maybe she should have used plan B in the first place, Jane thought, but Sally really hadn't been in much danger, if only she hadn't gotten stupid. Jane knew the three sisters out there now didn't have much of a chance. At least one or two, maybe all three, would die. Plan B, that worked so easily, had seemed the more extreme. But what did it really matter in the end? Nature always had Her way. Jane couldn't clutter her mind with regrets. She hurried to the observation apparatus and hunkered down to punch in the new program.

Jane, up to her elbows in printouts and slumped near the console, didn't bother to leap to her hands when the lab door banged open, but she did turn several eyes up to her mother. The white hair all down the Monster's chest was flecked with bright red blood. Jane would probably have to fight her, not that it mattered much. She supposed Sally had been right after all.

"We've got a problem," Jane said.

"What problem?" Her mother dropped to the deck and moved toward her. "You're the one, the last. Welcome to adulthood."

Up close, Jane could see that her mother wasn't much bigger than she was now, and her mother's arms seemed flabby, her white hair patchy. Jane was pretty sure she could beat her in a fight. Not that she would have to do that now. This should have been the supreme moment of her life. She was the one. Who would have thought it, when she'd been scrambling around the forest, just one of thousands of sisters? The best that could happen to a girl had happened to her, but her terrible new knowledge had soured the moment. She sighed and let her eyes droop.

"We're wasting our time, Mother," she said.

Her mother settled next to her and tentatively, gently, stroked her head. "I know it can be a letdown, Jane, but it's the greater glory you must consider. That generation after generation lives and dies on the ship doesn't matter. Thousands and thousands have gone before us, and thousands and thousands, millions, billions, will follow before we reach the Star. It's worth doing, Jane. It really is. You'll come to see that."

"You don't understand, Mother." Jane dug through the printouts, tossing them this way and that, until she found the one she wanted. "No one will ever reach the denser

part of the universe. No one, not ever."

"Time, Jane, time. We just go on and on, and eventually we'll get there."

"No," Jane said. She offered her mother the printout.

Her mother puzzled over it, then handed it back. "I can't read this. My field is philosophy."

"Philosophy? You'll like this then, Mother," Jane said.

"The universe stopped expanding a long time ago. It's contracting now. Everything's dropping back together. We should get there just in time to see the whole thing explode in our faces with the next Big Bang."

"How exciting! What a discovery!" Her mother jumped up and hopped from hand to hand, her hair rippling with pleasure. "And to happen on my shift! Oh, I'm so proud of you, Jane."

"Is that what you call a philosophical reaction, Mother?"

Her mother settled back down on the deck and gathered Jane in her arms, pulled her close and rocked. "This was always a possibility. We always knew someone would discover the truth as time passed and we got closer. People will be talking about this forever. Talking about you, Jane."

"But why? Why bother? What's the point of it all now?"

"It's what we do," her mother said. "Nothing fundamental has changed. We are the part of the universe that thinks, that looks upon itself. It seems unlikely, but it may be true that we are the only intelligence anywhere. Don't you think it's glorious that we will be in a position to see the end? How would the universe know of it, otherwise?"

"I don't know."

Her mother pushed her away, then loped to the lab door. A moment later she was back with the breadfruit carving Sally had made.

"It's like this carving, Jane." She forced the carving into Jane's hand.

"Sally made this."

"I know, I know," her mother said. "Isn't it good?"

"I suppose so, but what's the point, Mother?"

Her mother snatched the carving from her hand. "I'll put this in my room. A place of honor. I'll sleep, and when I wake, it will have rotted to nothing, a black smear on the deck."

"So?"

"Life is a breadfruit carving, Jane. It's all in the doing. Think about that." Her mother pulled Jane up and guided her toward the lab door. "But not right now. Now, young lady, it's time to make babies!"

She led the way to a part of the ship Jane had never seen — the lair of the Monster. It had a feel of permanence about it; the Monster, after all, didn't need to keep moving. There were places to sit and places to lie. A big screen displayed the Star like a golden hardberry suspended in the endless black nothingness of the Is Not.

"You mustn't be afraid, Jane. I know how you girls spend hours tittering and whispering about it. Scaring yourselves. Wondering who will be the one. What it will be like."

"I've never had much time for tittering, Mother. I have puzzled after a scientific explanation for the fact that I don't conceive when my brothers get under my skin."

"Evolution! Our genes are much smarter than that."

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ARON HEUER

Measure for Measure

By Valerie J. Freireich

Art by Carol Heyer

Hugh Turnbull crouched in the shadows, waiting for Geoffrey Chaucer's late night visitor to leave. Silently cursing the literature proctors who'd forced this additional mission into his tight schedule, he moved his arms to ease the stiffness the summer dampness of London caused. He wouldn't be fresh next morning while observing the crucial meeting between young King Richard II and Wat Tyler — all so the literature pedants could study Chaucer's work in progress at the advent of the *magna societas*, the great society.

Chaucer's door opened. As Hugh idly gazed at the backlit figure of a tall man bidding good night to his host, he wondered who would be openly visiting a court official while rebels were abroad in the city. A sudden shout startled him; he turned toward the sound, then relaxed. It was only drunks at a nearby Aldgate tavern. No attempt to enforce curfew had been made since the invasion of the city by tens of thousands of villeins and peasants a few days earlier.

Looking back to Chaucer's doorway, Hugh realized he could no longer see the visitor. Curious, he slipped on his wire rimmed spectacles — infrared glasses he'd brought to deal with the foggy London nights, one of the only pieces of modern technology he'd been allowed. He immediately spotted a man moving away, but when he pushed the glasses up, the man seemed to vanish.

Hugh's gut twisted. No fourteenth century native could camouflage himself so well. He had to be another time traveler.

Hugh put the glasses back on, located the second time traveler, and ran after him. Despite the cloth Hugh had wrapped, outlaw fashion, around his shoes, his wooden soles rang alarmingly loud against the street stones. The stranger glanced over his shoulder, then he began to run, his steps eerily silent. The tall stranger was faster than Hugh, who was built more like a wrestler than a runner.

"Wait!" Hugh called, before the man could get too far ahead. The street was empty except for them. "I'm from the future, too!"

The man stopped.

Hugh caught up with him, grasping his arm. "I'm Hugh Turnbull, from 1998," he said, self-consciously breaking into modern English. "I thought I'd be alone here. Who are you?"

In Middle English, the other asked, "What did you say?"

Hugh glanced around. No one had come to investigate the disturbance, but this was not a conversation any native should overhear. Nodding at a dark passage between two buildings, he said, "Come on."

The man obeyed. In close quarters he seemed even more an alien: he smelled too clean. The city's heavy odor of decaying refuse and the stench of the generally unwashed natives had ceased to bother Hugh — except occasionally when the reek came from a pretty girl — but he immediately noticed its relative absence.

The man stumbled in the darkness as Hugh stopped. Hugh put out a hand to steady him, feeling hard muscle

on the taller man's lean frame. "Who are you?" Hugh asked, slipping back into Middle English.

"My name is Ralph Parker. What did you say before?" The stranger looked uneasily into the street, then down at Hugh, as if measuring him.

"Hugh Turnbull. When did you leave the future?" Perhaps Parker was from so much farther ahead that language had been significantly altered or English was no longer in common use.

"2116. You?"

Hugh looked into the other man's eyes. One hundred eighty years. Speech should not have changed so much — not if the world was still technological, as Parker's presence implied. "Do you understand me?" Hugh asked slowly and deliberately, in modern English. "I'm a proctor of history at the University of the West, here to study the founding of the Society of the New Temple. I come from 1998."

Parker shook his head, then spoke slow gibberish, scrutinizing Hugh while enunciating each syllable so carefully that his too-perfect teeth gleamed in the dim light.

"Tell me," Hugh said haltingly, again in Middle English. "What language was that? English?"

They stared at each other. Parker shifted position, pushing back the hood of his concealing cloak; immediately, he became visible by normal sight.

"English," Parker said eventually. "My native tongue, though I'm actually *American*."

"What's that?" Hugh put away his spectacles. He spat, but his mouth still tasted sour.

"I'm *American*!" Parker came an aggressive step closer. "From the United States. Anyone would know that! How far ahead are you from, that you've forgotten *America*?"

Hugh leaned against a nearby wall, glad of the support. "Not from your future, Parker. I'm from earlier than you. Your past? I don't know. I left in 1998."

"There was no time travel in 1998!"

"I suppose not," Hugh said. "Not in your 1998, anyway."

Parker stared, then glanced back into the street.

"What have we here?" a rough, slurred voice said.

Hugh's hand slipped automatically onto the hilt of the cutlass in his belt. A year's training had given bladed weaponry a certain normalcy in his perceptions, but seeing the gang of six men facing him, Hugh wished Ah Baccal had not been so adamant in his prohibition of any device without a native correlative.

The intruders were crudely dressed in torn hose and ragged tunics; two were barefoot. The smell of ale hung in the heavy air around them like the halo above the picture of a saint. One shouted gleefully, "More Flemings! Let's kill 'em!"

"Oh, Rob! Ye see Flemings everywhere," a more sober voice said from the back. "These are just some Londoners, not foreign merchants." The speaker came forward, car-

rying a torch.

Rob lurched at Parker, who sent him flying through the air in some oriental martial arts fashion. The band closed on the two time travelers, confused but furious.

Hugh seized his cutlass, but numbers were against them. Unless Parker carried future weaponry and meant to use it, they were likely to be overwhelmed. "Is there no help for the son of the widow?" Hugh shouted.

The two men closing on him ignored the temple's signal, but the man holding the torch ran forward, shouting at his companions to put aside their weapons. They grumbled, but obeyed: Tyler enforced strict discipline.

"Ye should have identified yourself earlier, brother," the leader said. "Sorry for the trouble, but ye've a bit the look of clerics."

"My fault, goodman," Hugh said contritely. "We're going home, now." He took Parker's arm, fearing the man would melt away into the night.

"Where?"

"I've lodging with Alderman Horn," Hugh said.

The rebels stared. Horn was one of the aldermen who'd sided with the rebels and opened the city gates to them despite Mayor Walworth's direct order against it. "Wat Tyler himself meets with John Horn," their leader said slowly. "We'll be escort — to see there's no trouble."

Hugh nodded. He kept an eye on Parker, who trudged beside him. Over and over, like a dream delirium, he recalled Parker saying there was no time travel in 1998. Ah Baccal had told Hugh there was a risk of creating a new reality and being cut adrift in it if the past was altered in any significant manner, but he knew he had been scrupulously correct. He spat. The twisting streets of medieval London seemed suddenly to have become a labyrinth in which he might have been irrevocably trapped. He glanced at Parker; their eyes met. They frowned at the same moment.

Hugh was trying to remember the milky smell of his daughter, Katherine. She had just learned to say "Da" before he left. Despite Ah Baccal's prohibition of anything conspicuously alien, Hugh had managed to bring a portrait of Katherine, and of Beth, his wife, back to the fourteenth century in the guise of a miniature painting of the Madonna and Child.

Hugh studied the portrait as Ralph Parker toyed with the salted fish on the trencher in front of him. Horn's servants had insisted on full hospitality, although their master was absent.

"Is there some secret rebel organization? What was that phrase you used? The widow's son?" Parker asked.

Hugh was astonished: Parker knew nothing of the Society. "A group of builders," he said, the usual tradesman cover story for the cabal begun by the excommunicated Knights Templar. "They acted like freemasons, so I tried that ritual."

Parker nodded, apparently satisfied. "How can you adapt to this filth?" He gestured.

"Because it's essential." Hugh glanced around the hall of Horn's house. Horn was a fishmonger, a powerful man in an important guild, a London alderman, but flies still buzzed in clouds inside the room. Hung with woven cloths in bright colors and with real glass window panes, the large hall nevertheless had a noxious odor of decay, mostly from the filthy rushes on the floor, within which all

manner of debris was deposited. "Excessive cleanliness marks you as a stranger. If you don't fit in completely, it's hard not to leave traces. Like a ripple on water, it can spread, changing the surface texture, the reality." Hugh's throat felt dry. It occurred to him that such caution had become irrelevant.

Parker shrugged negligently. "Fortunately, I leave tomorrow." He pushed the food away. "Tell me what you know about this situation."

Hugh rubbed his eyes, then put the miniature in his tunic pocket. "This appears to be the true past for both of us," he said in subdued Middle English. "But we come from very different futures — sufficiently dissimilar that our English languages are mutually incomprehensible. We need to know the pivot point at which our histories diverge. Tell me your history, Parker, starting with tomorrow, June 15, 1381, the dawn of the Society of the New Temple."

Hugh watched Parker to see if his surmise was correct, that the division was soon and deep enough that Parker did not recognize the Society.

Parker's eyes narrowed as though attempting to decipher something unintelligible. "Give me your history first," Parker said.

"One of us has to begin." Hugh looked down at his hands. He and Parker were natural enemies — only one reality could exist. If he learned the pivotal event before Parker, he might prevent Parker's interference. Guilt at that internal declaration of war against a man he scarcely knew forced Hugh to speak. "I'm a proctor of history at the University of the West in Unikiwac, a city of about a half-million people, medium sized. It's in . . . those names wouldn't mean anything to you, would they? I live on the northern continent in the western hemisphere, in the central lakes region. Do you understand?"

Parker smiled for the first time. "America," he said. "That's where I'm from, too. I teach English literature at *Harvard*." He stretched, balancing his stool on only two legs. "Countrymen, of a sort," he said.

Hugh laughed. "I'm originally from the eastern edge of the continent," he explained, "but my wife is part Chippewa and we were invited inland. I met Ah Baccal, the director of the time project; he was visiting from Chetumal. All Maya are obsessed with time, aren't they? Anyway, that's how I got involved in this damn Maya time research."

Parker was looking at Hugh as if at an alien again.

"What the hell, Parker. I'll start. King Richard II begins something too significant to name with just a tag word, but we call it the 'Thoughtful Revolution.' England is ostracized among nations for nearly a century, but Europe's radicals — in philosophy, religion and technology — all congregate here. By the time the two popes resolve their differences, and France gathers the courage and the funds to try to invade more than Aquitaine, English Lollardy and Wycliffians are entrenched and English technology is significantly ahead. The Explorers . . ."

"Just stop," Parker said. "It's all nonsense. The Peasant's Revolt — Wat Tyler's Rebellion — is nothing, a blip on the horizon that never could amount to much. The Lollards are suppressed. Richard is deposed in 1399 by Henry the IV, Henry of Bolingbroke, he's called now — then he's killed — smothered, I think, or starved to death.

Shakespeare's play, *Richard II*, is about all that. The Renaissance and Reformation are centuries ahead; this peasant mob couldn't bring them about so early."

From all the turmoil in his mind, Hugh seized on what sounded most innocuous. "Shakespeare?" he asked. "Who's that?"

"Doesn't your world have Shakespeare?" Parker sounded sincerely appalled.

"Never heard of him." Hugh bent over the table, massaging his forehead with a hand. The stench of old fish permeated the room. Horn's warehouse and shop were inside the same building as his home. "All right, let's backtrack. In my history, Richard isn't deposed. Some say he's the greatest monarch in English history." Hugh looked up. Parker was observing him without expression. "Talk about what happens in the next few weeks in your history, Parker. I think our moment is very, very soon."

"Your turn."

Hugh pounded his heavy fist on the table. The board jumped. "This isn't a game!"

Parker glared. "That's right, it isn't. Talk."

Hugh sighed. "Richard takes Wat Tyler into his council after their series of meetings, beginning at Smithfield tomorrow. A new Parliament, with villein and laborer representation, is formed. King Richard gives his support to Wycliffe's church reforms. Papist lands are confiscated and turned over to the peasantry and local manors. Villeinage is abolished. The poll tax is abolished. The Statute of Laborers is repealed. Richard reigns until 1435, when he dies of natural causes and is succeeded by his son, Edward IV."

Parker was staring fixedly ahead, grinning.

"What happened in your world?" Hugh asked, with a sick dread in his stomach.

Parker's voice was strained. Hugh saw a man trying to hide his elation at winning. "My world is the original," Parker said. "I must have created yours — I made this paradox. This is an interlude after the interference when I created your universe, but before the pivotal event which determines the path reality will take. It's up to me to undo my carelessness, and ensure that the real universe continues."

"Why do you say yours was the original?" Hugh's annoyance with Parker's arrogance helped him focus outside his growing fear. He noticed his hands on the tabletop, restlessly clenching and unclenching, and stilled them.

"Because the Peasant's Revolt is trivial in my universe — a convenient time to be inconspicuous in medieval London. It's crucial in yours, isn't it? I'm here to study Chaucer. You're here to study history." Parker's tone was condescending.

It made an awful kind of sense. Hugh looked up. Parker was examining him with a clinical interest.

"I've met with Chaucer, pretending to have Italian books to sell. I must have been careless — perhaps I did say something about Richard being deposed. As a court official, Chaucer would have passed odd information on to his superiors. It influenced Richard's handling of the Peasant Revolt." Parker gave Hugh a wry half-smile, almost an apology.

"Whether it's original or not, your universe doesn't have any more inherent right to exist than mine! I want a home to return to!" Hugh thought of everyone he'd ever known evaporating. His wife and daughter would disap-

pear.

Parker smirked. "All of you, all your history, really only has existed for a few days. Then it's back to oblivion for the upstarts."

Hugh jumped to his feet as his host, John Horn, entered the hall. "What's this about upstarts, Hugh?" he said. "Do you vouch for this fellow?"

Hugh strode around the table to where Parker sat, aloof and arrogant. "No, I don't," Hugh said.

Parker tried to stand, but Hugh put his broad hands on Parker's shoulders, holding him down. "This man's an enemy." Hugh grabbed Parker's upper arms and yanked them behind, immobilizing them. "He'll try to prevent all that the Society works for from coming true. He may also have magical devices with him. We need to search him."

"No!" Parker shouted, struggling on the bench. "Turnbull is a traitor. Everything he tells you is a lie." He shifted position so Hugh nearly went sailing over him, but Hugh braced himself and held grimly on. Horn shouted for help and came around the table just as Parker kicked it over. Yawning apprentices ran into the room from the shop and grabbed Parker, freeing Hugh to stand aside.

"We'll need to strip him," Hugh said. "His devices are cunningly disguised."

"I'm telling you the truth," Parker said directly to Horn.

"Are you a traveling man?" Horn asked Parker with an obvious intensity.

Parker hesitated, clearly not knowing the proper response. Horn glanced at Hugh, then nodded.

"Yes," Parker said suddenly.

"Where are you traveling?" Alderman Horn asked Parker.

Hugh held his breath. The correct answer — "From west to east" — would mark Parker as a brother of the Society.

"Into the future," Parker said.

Hugh sighed and said, "I've told you the truth. This man is a grave danger to everything we hold dear." Horn's men dragged Parker upright.

"Would it be best to simply kill him?" Horn asked.

Parker looked directly at Hugh, defiantly daring him to agree.

"No," Hugh said. An apprentice removed a gray metallic object from a leather pouch inside Parker's jacket. The meaningless word *IBM* was embossed in discreet black letters on its surface. There was quite a bit of jewelry, though Hugh surmised it might have uses other than as a source of funds. "I'll keep these for now," he said tiredly, taking the baubles and the cloak.

Horn grimaced. "You're a mystery, Hugh Turnbull," he said. "I've never heard of your homeland west of Ireland, yet now I'm locking a man in my cellar on your word he's my enemy."

"My home exists," Hugh said, with more certainty than he felt at that weary moment. "And we're on your side."

Bells were ringing matins in London the next morning. The city stank from the smoke of rebel fires rather than from the usual filth. Peering through the wavering glass of John Horn's windows, Hugh decided he preferred filth. Burning was a doomsday scent.

Ralph Parker stood directly below the trapdoor opening when Hugh raised it. He stared up at Hugh with impotent fury, squinting into the light. Hugh couldn't

meet his eyes. "Move back," he said. When Parker complied, he jumped heavily down.

Parker no longer smelled clean; he reeked of fish and brine, which were the chief inventory of the cellar. His face was smudged with grime. "If I knew of another way to handle this, I would," Hugh said, disgusted with his role as jailer.

"You could kill me. I expect you'll work your way up to that." There was a small, scuttling sound. Parker shivered. "Rats. There could be plague."

Hugh understood Parker's bitterness. "Not this year. Typhus, maybe. Not plague."

Parker's laughed sarcastically. Abruptly, he lunged at Hugh.

Hugh leapt away, remembering Parker's tricky fighting technique. He grabbed the knife he'd hidden inside his sleeve. "Stay back! Parker, listen! I'll bring you home with me!" He bumped against the cellar wall behind him.

"I don't want your bootstrap universe!" Parker charged Hugh.

Hugh cut Parker's forearm with the knife; he smelled the blood. "Robin!" he bellowed.

Parker attacked again, kicking Hugh hard in the groin before Hugh dodged. Doubled over, unable to speak, Hugh watched Parker grab the rope ladder hanging from the trapdoor.

"Is everything all right?" Robin, the apprentice on watch, shouted down.

Parker hesitated on the rope.

"Did you think I was a fool?" Hugh gasped, straightening.

Parker turned to Hugh. "Did you think I was?" He raised his right hand, pointing the index finger at Hugh like a child playing at having a gun. "This is for emergencies, but it has enough power to kill you. Tell the boy up there to move away, and neither of you will be hurt."

Hugh stepped forward. Parker looked silly, and Hugh still had his knife.

"Do it!"

Hugh glanced up. Robin knelt, staring down at them, his head just visible. "Shut the door!" Hugh shouted, unable to discount the possibility that the weapon was real.

The apprentice slowly stood to comply. Parker worked on the rope, almost at the top. Hugh jumped at Parker. Parker twisted, shouting. Hugh saw a red glow, then nothing more.

Wat Tyler had gray in his light brown hair; his face was weathering into ruggedness. He was dressed like a petty merchant or well-to-do farmer in long hose and a short, tight-fitting jacket, but his clothes were dusty and wrinkled. His manner was confident, if bemused, as he stood observing Hugh.

"Explain this mystery," Tyler said. "Who are you, Hugh Turnbull? Who is this other man?"

Hugh fought a mad impulse to tell the truth. He gave a small laugh, out of place in the troubled atmosphere of the room. John Horn frowned, and Jack Straw, one of Tyler's closest companions, began to pace. "Parker intends for the Society to fail. That's all I know."

Tyler's expression was cool. "Why should I believe anything you say?"

"Parker didn't know the signs of the Society," Horn

interjected. "Hugh came several days before word reached us from John Ball that now was time for rising. I gave Hugh lodging as a brother of our Society and have had no reason to doubt him."

Hugh nodded his gratitude to Horn. He touched his shoulder gingerly where the beam of Parker's weapon had grazed him. A light gun of some sort? There was no bullet. Robin had been struck unconscious; Parker had vanished.

"I'm a brother mason," he said. "I want the success of the Society with all my heart." Carefully, so the rough dressing on the wound wouldn't pull, Hugh made the *geste du garde* of a master of the Society, his upper arms along his sides, forearms out straight, with palms down. A sign went around the room.

"All right," Tyler said. "But who is Parker?"

"Parker is a traveler from a land near mine. He can't return to his home if we succeed," Hugh said. The rebels looked skeptical. "Parker's people won't send a ship for him." Wat Tyler shook his head, frowning, but Hugh did not dare explain further.

Hugh picked up his miniature painting lying on the table. It had been scorched by Parker's weapon. The faces of the Madonna and Child were no longer discernible under the ugly blackening of the wood. The tiny portrait had saved his life, but it seemed an ill omen. Gently, he touched the place where the faces of his family had been, then put the ruin in his jacket's inner pocket.

Wat Tyler was observing him. "The only thing I have from my home," Hugh said. Tyler continued to scrutinize him, so Hugh walked to the window to get away from that penetrating gaze. Tyler was scheduled to meet with the King at Smithfield in a few hours. There were two great men in England in the late fourteenth century: Wat Tyler, who had the vision of a better world, and Richard II, a fourteen-year-old boy with the intelligence to recognize the vision and the authority to bring it into being. Richard would be deposed, Parker had said. And Tyler?

Hugh slammed his fist against the window sill, then shuddered as the impact jarred his burned shoulder. "He's a scholar, interested in poetry. He's a foreigner, and has to act indirectly, except as a last resort. He'll try to enlist Chaucer's help."

"Who?" Tyler and Straw spoke at the same time.

"The customs officer?" Horn asked, incredulous. "The rhymor?"

"Yes. Parker knows Chaucer's writings. He's met him — that's where I saw him first."

Tyler crossed to Hugh's side. "All this is hard to credit. Half the lords and all the papist priests in England want to murder us and the rest lie cowering under their beds in fear that we will murder them. This Ralph Parker is no greater threat than all of England at our heels."

"He's desperate," Hugh said, staring into Tyler's eyes, willing the older man to believe. "He has information other men do not."

Straw faced Hugh. "You mean the sorcery? Like your wound?" Distaste and fear mingled on Straw's face.

It was as good an explanation as the not quite rational fourteenth century afforded. "Yes." He lightly touched his bandage. "Let me go to Chaucer. It might do some good, and won't do any harm, I swear."

Tyler walked across the room, then turned on his heel and observed Hugh for a moment. He seemed to come to a decision. "Go on," he said. "We'll leave for Smithfield



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now, so as not to keep the King waiting. I think we can manage without your counsel." Tyler, Straw and Horn laughed, but Hugh imagined he detected tension in Tyler's voice. The rebel leader returned to Hugh's side, put an arm around his good shoulder, and said softly, for only Hugh's ears, "I don't believe you've told me nearly all you know, Hugh Turnbull; nevertheless, I trust you." In a louder voice, he said, "Remember your oath to the Society and your brothers. See that you don't betray us."

Hugh raced through the streets of London toward Aldgate, opposite the flow of foot traffic, which was headed west to Smithfield for the meeting with the King. He was afraid; he still didn't know the pivotal event, which could occur at any time. Panting and out of breath, he finally arrived at the Chaucer house above the city gate. Hugh pounded on the door.

"Chaucer! Geoffrey Chaucer! I have a message from the King!" Chaucer, securely upper middle class, would have little sympathy with the rebels as yet. He was a bureaucrat, an educated man, trained in the law and lucky to be sufficiently obscure that he hadn't been killed by the rebels, who'd placed heads of a few infamous Londoners on pikes already.

The door was unbolted; it opened a crack. Hugh saw a plump, middle-aged face with unexpectedly sweet eyes, made owlish by spectacles. Chaucer had answered the door himself. "What's the message?"

"I'm looking for Ralph Parker. Has he been here?"

Chaucer peered around the door, past Hugh, into the empty passageway, then opened the door a bit wider. "I've never seen you before, and I know all the King's clerks."

"I'm not from the King. My home is near Parker's."

"Another man who isn't born yet," Chaucer chuckled. "One of you might be a madman; two constitutes an invasion!"

Hugh leaned against the doorframe, half inside the Chaucer home, chilled to learn Parker had divulged that he was a time traveler to a native of the fourteenth century, and a writer, to boot. "Did you send him to the King?"

Chaucer's speculative expression was that of a man aware of potential danger, but for whom intellectual curiosity is a more potent force than physical caution. Hugh wondered how much of Parker's bizarre story Chaucer had believed. It didn't matter. With the country besieged by well-organized peasantry, the King's court would be grasping at straws. Shoulder aching dully, he bent closer to the older man.

"How is your *Troilus and Criseyde*? You have a very famous name in both Parker's home and my own, though you may think fame beyond the grave an overrated achievement. I'll tell you this, your best work is yet to come, tales of common men and not nobility. If you care about men at all — and I believe you do — if you are loyal to your king, then tell me what Parker said and where he is."

Chaucer laughed and threw the door wide. "The peasants have strange companions, but then you're all mad."

A woman's plaintive voice from within the apartment told Chaucer to shut the door.

"Come inside. Phillipa will fetch some wine; perhaps I'll read you some of the verse you say you admire. You

can rest. You look wounded, friend."

Hugh shook his head. "Please," he said. "Whatever Parker told you is only half the truth. There is some event, something that will occur soon, which can make or unmake Parker's home or mine. Parker knows what it is, but I don't. Tell me. Give me a chance to keep my daughter's life."

"Why should I care about this quarrel?" Chaucer said reasonably. "You tell me I do well in both future worlds."

Hugh closed his eyes a moment. When he opened them, Chaucer was observing him intently. "I can't say my world is better than Parker's — I don't know much of his. I can tell you that mine is a good place, where men are mostly happy if they try to be, without having to blind themselves to faults around them about which they can do nothing."

"According to Parker, you aid these rebels. He says you make secret signs with that traitor alderman, John Horn."

"Quite true," Hugh said, reluctant to lie to Chaucer, who had his own greatness, different from the political arena of Tyler and the King. "Because in my world the rebels win. In Parker's they do not. But before you think that Parker's future is the one you should therefore favor, let me add that in my world Richard reigns a long time over an occasionally troubled but increasingly prosperous land. In Parker's future, Richard is deposed a few years from now and his throne usurped. Are you loyal to your king or not?"

Chaucer lost his look of detached enjoyment. "A few days ago Parker, my erudite bookseller, let slip word of this peasant storm and a later usurpation of the throne. I passed the information to those closer to the king. Then Parker rushed to me this morning, explaining his secret knowledge, anxious to be introduced to the king's counselors. When I asked him about the other, the deposition of the king, he said it was my misunderstanding, that Richard reigned for a long time. I didn't believe him, though I kept my doubts to myself. Now you say my intimations of fraud were correct."

"Yes," Hugh said, realizing he was hearing how his universe had been created. "Tell me — if only to give me a fair chance of rescuing your king from early death — did Parker say what was the crucial event in making his world?"

Chaucer hesitated. Hugh wanted to shake the older man, to scream, but he stood, waiting, feeling the seconds pass by like each was a blow to his body.

"He said Wat Tyler must die. Today, at Smithfield, cut down by Mayor Walworth and some knight."

"How long ago did he leave?" Hugh demanded. He reached out and clutched Chaucer's arm, then realized it didn't matter. There was one unavoidable battle, one place where Parker had to be: Smithfield.

Hugh was a late arrival at Smithfield. The King's small party of goldsmen and knights was already in front of St. Bartholomew's Hospital. The peasant army was at the opposite side of the great open field, at least 20,000 strong, with stragglers like Hugh joining them steadily. The two sides faced each other uneasily, armed and mutually distrustful. As Hugh came through the peasant ranks, thrusting his way past the men, he saw Wat Tyler and a man holding a banner, both on horseback, heading across the field towards the King.

"No!" Hugh shouted, but his voice didn't carry far in the

open field, nor would he likely have been heeded.

In Hugh's history Tyler had crossed to the King accompanied only by a bannerman. When discussion of the peasant demands became heated due to protests by several noblemen, King Richard had suggested that the two of them continue the meeting alone, in the middle of the field. After an intense private discussion, watched anxiously by all, Richard had ordered the peasants fed at royal expense, and set another meeting for the next morning. All villeins who had come to London were manumitted; within a week all men of England were free.

Hugh ran after Tyler, gritting his teeth against pain as each step jolted his burned shoulder, but propelled by fear for his future. He heard pursuers. Raising his eyes, he saw the small band of noblemen and city merchants sitting mounted with the King. They watched his strange intrusion onto the field. Wat Tyler wheeled his horse around and stopped.

Hugh was tackled from behind and brought to the ground; he tasted dirt and grass as several strong men held him down. His shoulder sent jagged lines of agony up and down his arm and side. Hoofs sounded loud. Wat Tyler's strong voice said, "Let him up."

Hugh rolled to the side, and spat out the muddy soil. "Parker has been to court. Chaucer arranged it. Parker wants you killed today, Wat Tyler, on this very field."

Tyler looked at his army, then glanced at the King's small company. Several knights were approaching. Tyler chuckled. "They won't dare harm me," he said. "But come along. You've got the noblemen buzzing already. A puzzle is a good thing to keep those carrion flies from getting too close."

Hugh rose to his feet, hunching forward to protect his shoulder.

The King's men arrived. "All of you villeins, disarm! What need do you have for weapons?" shouted a fat, well-dressed man, more guildsman than knight.

"A good idea, sir Mayor," Tyler said pleasantly to him, "and as soon as you disarm, then so shall I. There are traitors surrounding our King, and I'll need arms to sort them from the rest." His bold, level gaze showed that he considered Mayor Walworth one of the traitors. As if the mayor was unworthy of further discussion, Wat Tyler turned away. He reached down and grasped Hugh's good arm, lifting Hugh behind him onto the horse. Tyler rode off towards the King, followed by the peasant bannerman, Mayor Walworth, and the knights who had come midfield. As they approached St. Bartholomew's, Hugh whispered to Tyler, "Parker claimed it was the Mayor of London who would kill you!"

"Leave off, Hugh Turnbull. I don't need your nervous blather."

None of this, Hugh thought, was part of his history. How much could events be distorted without ill effect? Would it be sufficient merely for Wat Tyler to survive?

Richard II was dressed in beautiful white and gold clothing which emphasized both his youth and, by its richness, his royalty. The late morning sunlight shone with exceptional clarity around him, making his intelligent face appear to glow. Hugh felt Tyler relax. However great a man, he was a creature of his times, and the fourteenth century said a king was holy. "A smartly dressed boy," Hugh whispered, intentionally sarcastic. Tyler did not respond.

Hugh scanned the hostile faces in the King's party, spotting Ralph Parker in the rear of the group. Their eyes met across the ranks of men. Parker's shoulders straightened. He frowned, then stared deliberately at Tyler.

"Get down," Tyler ordered.

Hugh slid off of the horse, wincing as his injury stung. No longer able to see Parker, Hugh took a position in front of Tyler, facing the men around the King, hand on the hilt of his cutlass, though he kept it in this belt. He studiously avoided looking at the King directly, hoping that by such stratagem there would be less offense in his obvious positioning as a bodyguard to Tyler. Some bodyguard, he thought.

Tyler bowed from his saddle, as did the man carrying his banner. On the ground, Hugh copied the gesture.

The King nodded, then sat impassively, well schooled in regal grace and bland expression, a self-important child raised on chivalry and power.

"My lord," Wat began in heavily accented Anglo-French, still the language of the court and educated classes. He haltingly began a prepared speech presenting the peasant demands.

Richard nodded stiffly from time to time as Tyler spoke. Twice Richard's glance came to rest on Hugh, but he did not interrupt Tyler to make any inquiry. Hugh noticed that the boy did not look levelly into Tyler's face, but only around it. At first Tyler ignored the snide comments and open jeers from some of the knights, but he flushed as the jokes became bolder and began to elicit tight smiles from the King. Hugh sensed that the royal party was awaiting an excuse to attack Tyler.

Hugh stepped forward. Tyler's earnest voice slowed. Everyone looked down at Hugh. "My lord," he said, speaking only to Richard, trying to reach the greatness which was only potential. "You are about to make a terrible mistake."

"Quiet, Hugh! I don't need your interference!" Tyler said.

"There is a stranger among you," Hugh said. "It would be shortsighted to follow his advice — he knows less than he pretends."

"By God, Hugh, I said to step aside! I'll speak for us!" Tyler was rattled; his voice shook with excessive anger. He pulled his sword from its scabbard and raised it, threatening Hugh, who stood before the King.

Walworth and several others rushed to place themselves between Tyler and the King. Their swords and knives were already out, ready to hack at Tyler. Tyler pulled back, startled at the swift advance against him. His horse reared into the air.

All Hugh saw were hooves rising and ready to plunge into him. He jumped out of the way, falling to the ground, as other horses surged around Tyler's. Knights surrounded Tyler, shouting that he was traitor, that he had raised arms against the King. They were grinning.

"No!" Hugh shouted, appalled that his own actions might have precipitated Tyler's murder.

He was ignored, but Richard was not. "Hold!" he screamed, in a wild voice. "Hold, I say." He kicked his horse and moved as close to the melee as he could, trying to interpose himself between Wat Tyler and his own knights, all the while yelling for them to stop.

Between the horses' bodies Hugh could sometimes

view the roiling mass of men at the far end of the field. The peasant army was unable to see clearly what was going on, but voices were being raised; a movement toward the brawl began, then subsided at the King's intervention.

The situation steadied from skirmish to mere readiness to battle. Hugh got to his feet, largely ignored. All eyes were on the King and Tyler.

Tyler sheathed his sword, moving with elaborate care to indicate no harm was intended to the King. Hugh saw blood on Tyler's right arm, dripping from a cut across his shoulder, and a gash on his forehead, but Tyler had been trained in war and had done well against the overeager knights. The peasant bannerman was dead, lying on the ground between the King's party and Tyler. Among the knights and nobles, no one appeared much hurt, but fat Walworth was puffing.

Hugh grabbed the reins of the bannerman's horse and pulled himself onto it, searching for Parker, and finding him at the front of the King's party.

Richard moved toward Tyler, waving off the attempts of his elders to restrain him. "Why shouldn't I kill you? These men of yours will do nothing to me."

"Is that how far chivalry extends, now that your father is dead?" Hugh shouted, hoping the boy was still young enough to believe in the chivalric ideal his heroic father, the Black Prince, had epitomized. "We look to the King for redress and you treat loyalty as a weapon to be used against us."

King Richard appeared uncertain.

"Hugh!" Tyler shouted angrily. The knights rushed toward Tyler once again, and this time also at Hugh. Hugh's eyes found Ralph Parker. Parker shook his head, frowning.

"I said 'Hold!'" Richard's voice cut through the noise. He was watching Hugh. The knights surrounding Hugh and Tyler fell back a pace, their unsheathed swords shining in the sunlight. Hugh heard horses coming from the peasant side of the field but didn't look to see who approached.

"I'll speak with these men alone," Richard said. "Perhaps they'll make some sense; perhaps not. I'll stay in sight in midfield. Go back towards St. Bartholomew's." He made an imperious gesture to the rear. Hugh smiled; except for his own presence, this was what had happened in his future's history.

There were protests from the knights at an order they did not like. Suddenly, Parker charged at Tyler, who was oblivious, watching the King.

"NO!" Hugh shouted.

It seemed to Hugh that all sound ceased, that his view of the world narrowed so that there was only Parker, holding a short sword in his upraised arm, mouth opened and facial muscles stretched tight as he shouted something Hugh never heard. Hugh tried to turn his horse, to interpose himself between Parker and Tyler. The field was well trampled around the King's company; Hugh smelled the fragrance of crushed grass mixed with the rank odor of sweating horses and angry men. The arc of Parker's arm reached its apogee; Tyler began to turn, alarmed at the movement behind him, following the widening eyes of the King. Parker's arm came down urgently. The sword connected with Tyler's flesh. Dark, red blood fountained from Tyler's severed neck. The head-

less body tumbled from the horse, his feet clinging to the stirrups so that the trunk was dragged as the horse stumbled forward, stepping onto Wat Tyler's rolling head.

Parker smiled sheepishly at Hugh, an inane look of apology on his face, as the others began to react.

Several knights started toward Hugh, the only supposed peasant leader left alive on their side of the field.

"I didn't order it! Who is this man?" Richard screamed, pointing at Parker.

Parker dropped his bloody sword. He ignored the knights and King as if they were ghosts. "I did what was necessary."

Abruptly, Parker rose up in the saddle. His expression changed from apology to incredulous pain. An arrow extended from the left side of his chest, then suddenly, another. About forty feet away six of Tyler's men sat on horseback, with drawn bows. One of them — Hugh recognized Jack Straw — cantered closer. He looked at Tyler's head on the ground, the dirt adhering to the sweat and blood, so that the whole lumpy mass looked like a dirty, misshapen melon.

"It wasn't any plan of mine!" shouted King Richard to Straw.

Straw ignored Richard and rejoined his men. They galloped to the other side of the field, to where twenty thousand others awaited someone's orders.

The men of the King's party had bunched together, conferring. The young King himself was excluded from their discussion.

Hugh slid off his horse. Parker slumped in his saddle, still alive.

"I win and lose," Parker said. Blood bubbled out of his mouth as he spoke.

"I'll help you to your gateway," Hugh said. His throat felt tight; his mouth tasted of ashes. "One of us should get home, and mine is dead with Wat Tyler. If they arrive quickly enough, your people might save you. When and where are they to come?"

Parker pointed with a shaky arm toward the east side of St. Bartholomew's, away from the crush of men. "There," he said, beginning to cough. "Soon."

Richard studied Hugh and Parker: supposed peasant rebel and Wat Tyler's killer. Hugh took the reins of Parker's horse and began to lead it in the direction Parker had indicated. The King rode into their path. "Where are you going? Who is that man?"

"What does it matter?" Hugh said, hearing his own despair. "The world is gone." Richard's face clouded and looked younger than his fourteen years. Deposed and dead, Parker had said. "You, too," Hugh told the boy. He pushed past the unresisting king.

Parker was a long time dying. Hugh tried to make him comfortable; his knowledge of first aid said to leave the arrows in place, but periodically Parker pulled pathetically at them, and had to be restrained.

They sat, ignored, on the east side of St. Bartholomew's, under a lone tree Parker had indicated. Occasional confused noise could be heard from the leaderless peasants and outnumbered knights, who still irresolutely confronted each other.

"Not long now," Hugh said, as he had several times before, resenting the civilized reflex which caused him to comfort Parker, a man who had tried to kill him, had

murdered his family and cast him out from his history. But I would have done the same to him, Hugh thought. "Are you certain this is the place?"

"Yes." Parker's voice was ragged, filled with pain and the knowledge he was dying. Weakly, he pointed at the tree.

Hugh wondered how it felt to have existence stop: not death like Tyler, or dying like Parker, but to cease to be — never to have existed at all. Was there any sensation involved? He supposed not. Into oblivion. He looked up at the sun, blinding himself with its light, remembering Katherine in a patch of bright sun at the winter window, laughing as she tried to catch her moving shadow. She would never exist, yet he could almost feel the curve of her head as he'd kissed it, holding her close just before he'd left. He pulled the burned portrait from his jacket, but the images were gone.

Parker's eyes bored into him. He opened his mouth several times, but didn't speak. Blood seeped from between his lips. Hugh imagined how it tasted to Parker: salty and bitter with the flavor of death. For a moment the other man's pain made him glad; he almost understood the medieval fascination with torture and death.

"They're not coming," Hugh said, gesturing at the sky, where the sun had taken a definite turn to the west. "You failed, after all."

"Wat Tyler is dead," Parker managed.

Hugh wiped blood from Parker's chin. "I'm not."

No historian existed who hadn't contemplated "what if?" What would he do, if he were in Wat Tyler's shoes? That stupid antagonism to John, Duke of Lancaster, should have been resolved. The attempts to conquer the Scots were senseless ventures.

But what if he did precisely as Wat Tyler had done — and who was better qualified to do so than a historian specializing in this period? After all, the peasant leaders knew him. King Richard recognized him as a comrade of Tyler's, and all of them, on both sides, were waiting for someone to seize the initiative lost when Tyler died. Could he rebuild his own universe?

"Wat Tyler was sixteen years older than I," Hugh said, "and he died in 1402. That's twenty-one years of work, and then, if I'm very careful and very lucky and resist the temptation to tinker, maybe they'll come for me, on Tyler's death day. I'll see my wife, my daughter; I'll go home again. What do you think, Parker? Am I dreaming?"

Hugh looked at Ralph Parker, visitor from a vanished world, destroyed by a ripple on water. Parker's staring eyes were dead. Hugh felt unexpected grief at this further loss, at the impossible friendship, at the waste.

He sighed. He knew the universe he built couldn't be an exact duplicate of the one he'd known — anything else was a dream. He got to his feet. Perhaps he could make a better world. The future was once again a frontier and he the first traveler across it. He would do his best. He began walking toward the sound of men. □

One Star

(Continued from Page 41)

Your body just absorbs your brothers. Wait here!" Her mother moved deeper into her lair.

"Smart genes? Oh, really, Mother," Jane muttered as she settled back in a comfortable sitting place. Okay, maybe she was a little scared.

A moment later, her mother returned holding a device wrapped in green cloth. The part Jane could see was black, and puffs of white vapor rose from it as if it were very cold. "These now will be something altogether different from your brothers, Jane."

Her mother took Jane to the sleeping place and directed her to lie on her back with all her arms spread.

"I guess I am afraid, Mother."

"Don't be." Her mother twisted the end off the device. "This will be glorious. Trust me." She poured a pile of males onto Jane's stomach. "They're still a little sluggish." She leaned over Jane and blew on the males.

Jane watched the males as they peaked up and scrambled away through her hair. Her mother pulled back her head. "There now," she said. "Hang tight."

Jane's entire body stiffened with pleasure as the first male broke her skin and burrowed deep. She sucked in air, but before she'd filled her lungs, another found his place, and she whooshed out her breath in a cry of joy. Another. Another. As each male dug in, Jane plunged further from the world she'd known so long. The figure of her mother rippled away in waves of light. Jane crossed all her eyes as she exploded into space. Stars, real stars, suns, exploded into new life all around her. She filled the universe, expanding until she encompassed it all, then more; she gathered in the Sun and the Earth and its seven

dead sisters and their miscellaneous moons. Then she felt herself contracting, coming together, compacting, spinning down to the final heat death. It would have to be enough, Jane thought; there wasn't anything more. The next universe would be nothing like this one. All in the doing, the looking, the knowing. This precious moment. Jane's sweet laughter filled the universe. Maybe ultimately all mothers are philosophers, she thought.

Jane was the universe forever, and then she was Jane again, sighing, deliciously warm, calm but ravenous behind her retracted eyes.

Her mother shook her shoulders, slapped her on the side of the mouth gently, said, "Open your eyes, Jane. You mustn't miss this."

Jane poked an eye out to see her swollen sack pulsing between her two lower arms. Her mother had withered in the long time Jane had been away playing the universe, shrunk, her hands now twice too big for her stick arms, her white hair loose on her small frame. "It's time, Jane," she said.

Jane lifted a hand and saw that her nails had grown long and sharp. She reached down and slapped her sack. In panic, her babies rushed the walls of the sack, probably knocking themselves silly, Jane thought.

Instinctively, she sliced her sack with a sharp thumbnail, and her get spewed onto the deck. Thousands and thousands of little girls, millions of boys, blue eyes and black, blondes and brunettes, and all of them scrambling for hiding places.

Her mother shooed the squealing horde toward the door.

Jane scooped up a handful of stragglers and poked them into her mouth, chewed.

Life was so good. □

We Were Wrong About Congress



I am pessimistic about our plan to sell consulting services to the human beings. When I came here, we knew that transporting goods over stellar distances was highly impractical and that if we wanted to make any money in our dealings with humanity, it would have to be from the sale of information. We had ready-made solutions for their most intractable problems, of course, and one of my objectives was to determine if they might be willing to pay for these plans.

But they are way ahead of us. We had thought the American human beings might want help with their crime problem, for example. Serious crime has been on the increase over the past few years, with an annual growth rate on the order of one or two percent. The United States has seen periods with higher crime rates (the decade of the 1970s, for example), but most human beings find the current growth in crime particularly alarming, because it shows all the signs of being due to the creation of a professional criminal class.

As you would expect from a newly-developing profession, crime is dominated by young people. Compared to the general population, prison inmates are younger, less educated, and more than two and a half times more likely never to have married. Similar demographics, in other words, to what you would have found in computer programming in the mid-1960s. Serious crime will probably develop along the same lines as the software industry, although it will recruit more from the urban poor than the middle-class college population. Unlike software, crime is an ap-

pealing line of work to those who have no stake in social stability. And it does indeed seem to be a burgeoning career path. Eighty-two percent of all imprisoned Americans have been punished before.

Although this much information is really all that is needed to work out a plan for virtually eliminating serious crime, we thought the human beings incapable of doing so. We thought they would never see that the most effective way to deal with the growth in crime is to make it a capital offense to murder a poultry inspector. But they have discovered this plan for themselves. The U.S. Congress has passed just such a law. The crime problem is all but gone. We can say good-bye to our potential profits on that one.

Here we thought the Congress was impotent and stupid, dominated by venality, corruption, and the cynical manipulation of voters. We thought its sole purpose was to perform a public relations function for its members by pretending to attack problems while really doing nothing. We could not have been more wrong.

Just look at the way Congress has disposed of the AIDS problem. Ninety-six percent of AIDS cases come from ill-advised sexual contact or intravenous drug needles, but a fraction of one one-thousandth of one percent (.0008%) of the AIDS cases come from transmission by infected health-care workers. Given the circumstances, anybody with any sense can see the best way to contain the disease is to impose a ten-year jail sentence on health care workers who test HIV positive. We didn't expect Congress to ever see it. Yet Congress has

proposed jailing all the HIV-positive health care workers involved in particular medical procedures. Soon AIDS will just be a memory. I guess we should have known they would eventually come to the conclusion there are very few problems in human society that can't be solved by putting somebody in jail for ten years.

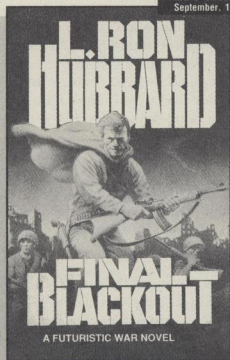
Congress is fabricating simple, elegant solutions to social problems as if it were a factory. Do you remember our plan to make American industry more competitive by protecting it from international competition? The one for eliminating sexual harassment in the workplace by restricting the damages that can be recovered by victims of it? The strategy for stabilizing the banking system by putting the members of Congress on the payrolls of the least stable banking institutions? Congress has uncovered all these ideas on its own.

I can't understand it. In the past, Congress showed very little grasp of social problems. Suddenly, it seems to be everywhere with bold, new plans for social reform: closing art galleries, repealing insurance plans for catastrophic illness, restricting freedom of speech, and attaching anti-abortion amendments to every law anybody proposes. In short, Congress appears to have solutions to nearly every one of the major human social problems.

They seem to have anticipated everything we had hoped to offer them. I wonder if they'd be in the market for a plan to create a \$300 billion deficit? □

BESTSELLERS BY L. RON HUBBARD

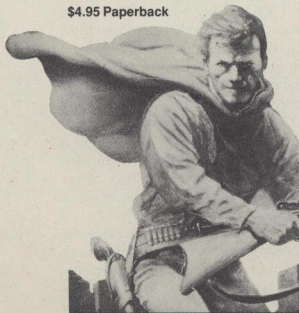
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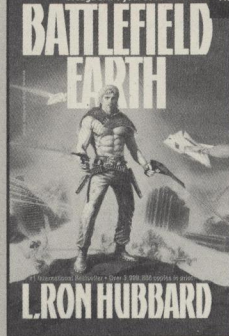
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Hotrider

(Continued from Page 37)

Tin Man was really doing his best to give the execs a hands-on, as they like to call the real thing. If he was in control at all.

Bubble's taken us down, chuckled Tin Man in my head. Readings of electrostatic potential scanned through my brain. Slowly, I was getting used to being jacked into a system that was so overwhelmed by another person. There seemed to be some kind of pattern to the readings, some kind of order.

You see it?

Wave patterns, I told myself. Order imposed by universal physical laws.

We're riding the bubbles, said Tin Man. *I told you you had to be jacked before you could see what it's like. Do you see the patterns?*

Tin Man wasn't the only one to talk about patterns in the magma; all the hotriders did it. You catch a good pattern of bubbles and it'll take you back to the surface, it'll jockey you along like you're riding with a mermaid. But Tin Man was the only one to get mystical about it. He talked about bubbles as if they were more than that, as if they weren't just blobs of magma that clung together because of differing densities, differing compositions from the local norm. Sure, I saw the patterns, saw the order to it all, but I'm not one to go mystical like Tin Man.

He flashed me the stresses in Malibu's structure and I wished he hadn't. *Didn't mean to go this far down*, he said. *I only wanted to...*

Only I stopped listening at that point because I had noticed something else. I guess that, being closer to the surface than Tin Man, I was more aware of things at that level. That's why he hadn't noticed me as soon as I jacked in. And that's why he didn't notice Magya 38.

Magya 38. That was the handle she was logged under. She was down in the R & G offices, jacked into Control, feeling her way around.

I checked with Tin Man, but he was all taken up by then, part of him off with the bubbles, trying to find a conflux that would get us back to the surface, the rest of him running through with Control, trying to keep Malibu and the MPs from collapsing under the stresses of being in excess of a kilometer under the surface of Io.

Fools. Already Magya was testing Control. Clumsily. Even as I tugged the jack from my skull a power spike made the lights dim and I dived foolishly, reflexively, for the floor.

Down through the ob decks, I could see the magma swirling its golden currents around us, the blobs now scattered evenly, conforming to a strange pattern. Or to my imagination. As I leapt in slow-mo down the steps I kept sensing fluctuations in the electrical energy buzzing around me, kept expecting the MPs to go down. At least it would be a speedy end.

As I hurried across Concourse, the big view-panel showed an unmistakable pattern to the blobs, and I realized what that meant: Tin Man had found his good flow, we were rising with the bubbles of magma towards the surface.

The lights dimmed again and I cursed the ineptitude of this Magya 38.

The execs were by the door of Ruby Gerome's office,

craning to look in through the clear panel in Tin Man's defenses. They were talking with him — negotiating, they said. And their diversion appeared to have fooled him as he nodded absently in his jacked-in haze.

I passed the end of their corridor, continued on an access corridor, and so found my way past them and to the office of Berg Rutgers. That had to be where Magya 38 was tampering with Control, had to be.

I was right. She was there, jack-leads attached through a sub-occipital lobe, all glittery and awkward looking. I vaguely recognized her: a teck from Ymporial, one of Shenet's favourites. Why couldn't she see the risk she was taking?

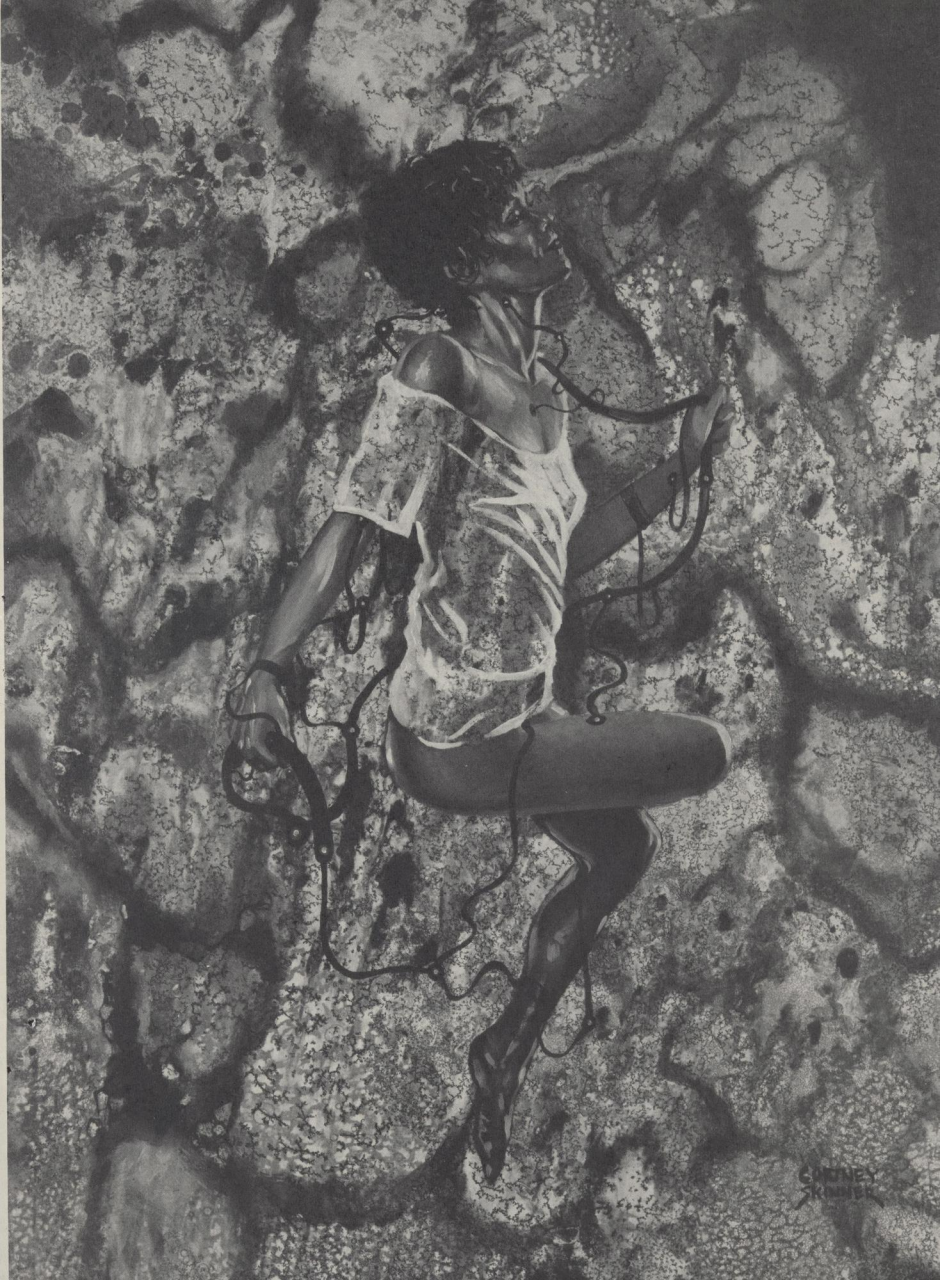
As I crossed the room I wondered how I could stop her, how I could prevent her messing with Tin Man and so with Control and so with all the screens that had so far kept us distinct from the sulfurous magma all around.

I knocked her on the head a little. Enough to break some skull, enough to keep her out of Control for a while, but not enough to do anything that couldn't be repaired. Sometimes the simple ways are best. I pulled the jack from her lobe, checked her vitals, and then jacked myself back in just in time to get full visuals of us breaking the surface of the sulfur ocean. I tell you: I've never been all that impressed by your everyday scenic beauty, but Jupiter sure looked good to me right then. Even *Io* looked okay.

Things were a mess for some time after that. We drifted a while, but eventually we came to rest on a newly formed island of black sulfur. They moved Malibu to somewhere more secure a few months later, somewhere more attractive to the touring *riches*. But Tin Man and I had got out of it all by then. He kept his screens up until tempers had cooled and the negotiations were through. You see, when I jacked in, back in my dom, first thing I did was take out some insurance. Hell, it was almost a reflex action to divert all the sim-data to my own private account within Control. It's how I used to make my living. The way I figured it at the time was that if we ever got out it would all be pretty exciting stuff: we could make a good sim out of it. It turned out that several of the big agencies joined the bidding, but in the end we sold it all back to Rutgers and Gerome. They paid us a lot of money for it, and I don't think it was the action sequences that any of them wanted. I think they wanted the crowd scenes, the human interest shots, like the one where Ruby hits Berg, or the one where Berg is running around screaming like some maniac. A company like Ymporial or CalCorp would have had a great time with a sequence like that. According to Control, Berg and Ruby destroyed all the records as soon as they had paid us for them.

Me and Tin Man are partners now. We have a hotel complex on Io, near to the old site of Malibu. Tin Man takes the guests hotriding, sometimes in a buggy, sometimes in the entire hotel. He shows them the bubbles, shows them the patterns.

I guess that's the end of our story: the two of us on equal footing. I think that's pretty generous of me, seeing as all the trading was done in my name, he had no legal rights or anything. But is he grateful? *Tin Man*? All he can talk about is his bubbles. He gets this stupid grin, tells me it's like swimming with the whales. What's a whale? I say, but he just smiles and goes about his business. □



SIDNEY
KAMBER

Why a Non-Profit?

You've probably noticed that this issue of *Aboriginal Science Fiction* is a tad late and has a few more pages than normal. That's because this is our first special double issue (otherwise known as: "We fell behind, and are catching up"). So this is the Sept.-Oct. and the Nov.-Dec. 1991 issues of *Aboriginal* with 13 short stories instead of six. It also will count as two issues on your subscription. It isn't double the usual page count, since it would be silly to duplicate in-house ads, etc.

This is also the first issue of *Aboriginal* published under a new regime — The Second Renaissance Foundation, Inc. has taken over operations from Absolute Entertainment Inc. in order to keep the magazine coming your way on a regular basis. We hope the change will make little difference to you, or the quality of the magazine, but it could help the fiscal operations tremendously. That is because The Second Renaissance Foundation, Inc. is a non-profit foundation which was formed with the assistance of the New England Science Fiction Association, another non-profit group which runs *Boskone* each year and operates the NESFA Press.

Why a non-profit?

Now we get to the title of this editor's note this issue. Why has the magazine been taken over by a non-profit operation? There are a number of reasons, but the most basic and bluntest answer is: so it can survive.

Those of you who have been reading *Aboriginal* since that first tabloid issue in October 1986 have probably noted that on a number of occasions I've said that *Aboriginal* had taken on an impossible task. We fought as hard as we could but, unfortunately, it turned out to be just that — impossible... at least as long as we were using traditional approaches. Too many doors that could have led to a profitable operation were closed to us. No major distributor would carry the magazine; the two largest subscription services would not solicit subscriptions for the magazine (even though they continue to do so for the Davis Group); and we received so little advertising it was barely worth the effort we undertook to get it. All of this meant that *Aboriginal* has been operating in the red.

Most of the problems facing *Aboriginal* are the product of one word: greed. And that greed is a direct outgrowth of the mergers of giant publishing and marketing corporations. Small

is no longer beautiful. These firms only want big bucks and to them that means big numbers.

The indifference of large corporations, combined with increased costs for postage, printing, and other items, and the lack of any real advertising, have made it almost impossible for any small fiction magazine to succeed on a for-profit basis.

What are the facts?

1. Major publishers discount their magazine subscriptions below actual cost to increase circulation. They do that because this increased circulation draws in more advertising revenue. Unfortunately, the discounts also condition the buying public to expect magazine cover prices to be lower than they should be, because the prices are subsidized by the advertising.

2. Magazines with very large circulations, because of their large press runs, get volume discounts from printers. Small publishers pay more per copy.

3. Large magazines use discount subscription services such as Publishers Clearing House and American Family Publishers (owned by Time-Warner) to get bulk subscriptions. (Again the cost to the subscriber is well below the actual cost of the magazine.) Publishers Clearing House and American Family Publishers refuse to market *Aboriginal* because it claims science fiction doesn't draw well, and it would diminish the sales of the Davis SF magazines.

4. Bulk and second class postage rates have increased dramatically since 1986 (56 percent for bulk rate alone), and that's how *Aboriginal* obtained most of its subscribers. Major publishers with lobbyists have negotiated discounts for massive bulk mailings that smaller publishers do not and cannot benefit from. Major publishers often pay 30-percent to 40-percent less to mail the same bulk mail piece to a potential customer than smaller publishers. To mail 10,000 pieces in 1986 cost \$1,270. Now it costs \$1,980 to do the same mailing. This increased price, along with other price increases, means that mailings to get new subscribers barely break even, leaving nothing to pay for the actual cost of printing and delivering the magazine.

5. National advertisers generally will not advertise in a magazine with less than 500,000 circulation. Even within science fiction, the bulk of the genre advertising goes to the two largest magazines (*Analog* and *Asimov's*) [owned by one publisher, Davis], and the trades (*Locus* and *Science Fiction Chronicle*).

6. Major magazine distributors have undergone the same mergers that other fields have seen. None of the major magazine distributors was willing to distribute *Aboriginal*. They, too, are only interested in magazines which will sell several hundred thousand copies. This means that *Aboriginal* was forced to go to much smaller distributors who charge more and cannot give the magazine good placement on the newsstands.

7. As *Aboriginal* has struggled to overcome the overwhelming odds described above, it has always been upfront with its subscribers, keeping them informed of changes and why they have been made. This isn't always the case with others. *Analog* and *Asimov's*, for instance, have been issuing special "double-issues" in the last several years, without specifically explaining to customers that each double issue counts as two issues off their subscription. The economic hard times are hitting *Analog* and *Asimov's* as well; recent issues have had fewer pages, dropping from 196 to 176 per issue, again without any fanfare. Expect *Fantasy and Science Fiction* to follow suit with the double-issue practice. (A double-issue is cheaper for the publisher, because the most expensive part of the printing is the four-color cover, and it saves on postage.)

8. Becoming a non-profit will make *Aboriginal* less dependent upon advertising, and ensure editorial freedom of expression, which we have been exercising, and which will continue to benefit our readers.

9. Every attempt to start a new science fiction magazine in the last several decades has failed because of some or all of these factors. *Asimov's* magazine succeeded primarily because of the strength of Isaac's name and the strength of Davis's, and later *Analog's*, marketing base. At the time, it also used one of the cheapest methods of printing a magazine. But even the Davis publications only make marginal profits in real-world terms. A continuing recession coupled with increased costs could shake that empire. Modern science fiction started in the magazines. New writers still get their start there. To preserve the field, it is necessary to preserve the magazines. A non-profit foundation is one of the best methods of doing that.

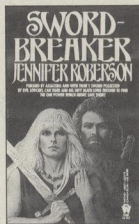
We hope you will bear with us, and support the cause if you can. (Tax-deductible donations made out to The Second Renaissance Foundation, Inc., will be cheerfully accepted.) Thanks for your patience and cooperation. □

New from DAW Books!

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Accused of murdering the messiah of the Southerin tribes, Tiger and Del flee across the deadly Punja desert, pursued by religious zealots and sword-dancer assassins. But avoiding death at the hands of assassins is only one of the challenges they face. For Tiger's sword, Samiel, has been possessed by the spirit of a deadly sorcerer, Chosa Dei—a wizard out of legend who wields the power to destroy the entire world, and who seeks to use Tiger as a vessel for evil.

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FIRST PAPERBACK PUBLICATION.

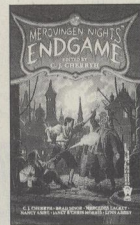
0-88677-480-2 Fantasy/Original \$5.99 (\$6.99 in Canada) Aug. '91



ENDGAME (Merovingen Nights™ #7) edited by C. J. Cherryh

In this climactic volume, swashbuckling high-towner Thomas Mondragon and gritty, spunky knight Altair Jones face their greatest challenge yet when Altair sets out to rescue Mondragon from imprisonment, even as Merovingen's ruler is assassinated and fires and rioting sweep through the city.

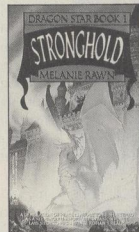
0-88677-481-0 SF/Original \$4.99 (\$5.99 in Canada) Aug. '91



STRONGHOLD (Dragon Star #1) by Melanie Rawn

With this blockbuster novel from the best-selling author of *The Dragon Prince* series, a new cycle begins, as a generation of peace is shattered by a seemingly unstoppable invasion force which even the combined powers of High Prince Rohan's armies, Sunrunners' magic, and dragons' deadly fire may not be able to defeat. FIRST PAPERBACK PUBLICATION.

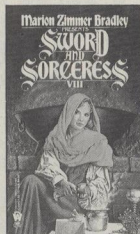
0-88677-482-9 Fantasy/Original \$5.99 (\$6.99 in Canada) Sep. '91



SWORD AND SORCESS VIII edited by Marion Zimmer Bradley

More tales of bold women warriors, wise women, and sorcesses wielding the powers of light against such terrors as an ancient dragon that has long held a kingdom hostage to its terrible hunger; a stealer of magics who seeks to drain the power from all who cross her path; a mortal so caught in evil's thrall that not even his own family is safe from harm; and all the other enemies that only those long-trained to battle with sword and spell can hope to overcome....

0-88677-486-1 Fantasy/Original \$4.50 (\$5.99 in Canada) Sep. '91



WINDS OF FATE (Mage Winds #1) by Mercedes Lackey

Once again the realm of Valdemar is at risk, for Ancar of Hardon will use every weapon at his command to conquer Valdemar. And it is Elspeth, Herald and heir to the throne, who must take up Ancar's challenge, abandoning her home to find a mentor who can awaken her untrained mage abilities to help Valdemar survive the onslaught of an enemy able to wreak greater devastation with spells of destruction than with swords....

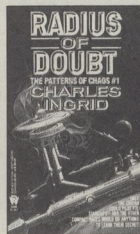
0-88677-489-6 Fantasy/Original \$18.95 (\$24.95 in Canada) Oct. '91



RADIUS OF DOUBT (The Patterns of Chaos #1) by Charles Ingrid

Palaton is a *tezar*, gifted with the power to navigate the Patterns of Chaos, able to pilot a starship from one planetary system to another at FTL speeds. As his world hovers on the brink of civil war, Palaton is sent to pursue rumors of a planet where forbidden experimentation is being carried out—experimentation which could renew a *tezar's* unique abilities with the aid of a race that has not yet won Compact membership, a race that calls itself "human."

0-88677-491-8 SF/Original \$4.99 (\$5.99 in Canada) Oct. '91



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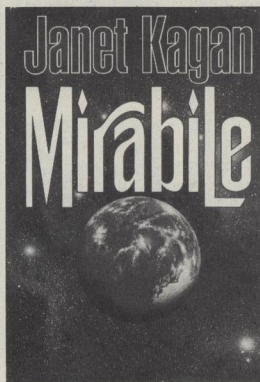
Distributed by PENGUIN USA

Short Subjects

Mirabile

By Janet Kagan
Tor, 1991
256 pp., \$18.95

Mirabile is a collection I've been waiting for since the first story in it appeared. (Don't believe the jacket copy if it says that Janet Kagan's new



book is a novel, a whole, as Tor claimed to reviewers. Kagan has taken a series of six individual stories about the planet *Mirabile*, removed most of the repetitive exposition, and written the most minimal linking material possible.) These tales of the

Rating System

☆☆☆☆☆	Outstanding
☆☆☆☆	Very Good
☆☆☆	Good
☆☆	Fair
☆	Poor

colony planet *Mirabile*, where DNA runs amok, are delightful.

The plants and animals sent with the colonists have the blueprints for other life forms "tucked inside" their own DNA and subject to mutation, leading to such situations as flowers producing biting cockroaches, or chimeras like the Kangaroo Rex. I don't believe the biology for an instant, despite all Kagan's efforts to make it plausible, but once you get past that, the stories are lots of fun, particularly the brilliant opener, "The Loch Moose Monster." There are a few illogical situations — although in at least one such case, a story explained it in its original published form, but the explanation was apparently cut out along with the redundant information when putting the book together — but on the whole the situation and plots are well thought out.

Each story is essentially a mystery, in which protagonist Mama Jason must track down the strange genetic mutations and combinations leading to whatever new creature is causing trouble. The detective work is fun, and Kagan manages to combine humor and drama. The developing romance between Mama Jason and the character Leo is unusual, warm, and wonderful.

Kagan's effort at resolving the whole problem, in the story "Frankenswine," is pat and doesn't stand up to scrutiny (though I can't go into why without giving it away), and the story "Getting the Bugs Out" is predictable if you know anything about the habits of bats — but don't let any of that stop you. Read *Mirabile* and enjoy Kagan's continual inventiveness and one of the few truly new ideas in recent SF.

Rating: ☆☆☆☆



Full Spectrum 3

Edited by Lou Aronica, Amy Stout,
and Betsy Mitchell
Foundation/Doubleday, 1991
535 pp., \$11.00

One thing should be made clear from the beginning: *Full Spectrum 3* is not a science fiction anthology. Admitted-



ly, it doesn't claim to be one, calling itself "speculative fiction," but the title would lead you to expect a broader variety of stories than are actually included. The contents are by no means a full spectrum — they represent mainly blue to ultraviolet, with occasional flashes of yellow or green.

Most of the editors' selections could be classified either as "magic realism" or "slipstream" — the latter referring to stories that walk the edge between SF and mainstream writing. Both are worthwhile — see my review of the

Sturgis anthology, below, for a look at magic realism — but it's disappointing to see them so dominate an anthology supposedly dedicated to bringing to an SF audience a broad range of good writing.

There are some stories that give off the aura of hard SF, but few of them live up to that promise. Gregory Benford's "Matter's End," Ursula K. Le Guin's "Newton's Sleep," and Patricia Anthony's "The Dark at the Corner of Eye" have mystical endings; Norman Spinrad's "The Helping Hand" is an old chestnut; Mark L. Van Name and Pat Murphy's "Desert

TALES OF MAGIC REALISM BY WOMEN



DREAMS IN A MINOR KEY
EDITED BY SUSANNA J. STURGIS

Rain" could have been essentially the same story if translated from the SF language to mainstream; Kevin J. Anderson's "Fondest of Memories" is a brief vignette; Ted Chiang's "Division By Zero" is barely speculative and feels flat. Peg Kerr's "Lethe" is a Horrible Example of how not to write SF; I could spend several hundred words analyzing its carelessness with details, poorly thought-out background, and failure to Ask the Next Question, to think through the implications of its central idea.

The tales of magic realism include Michael Bishop's brilliant "Apartment, Superstrings, and Mordecai Thubana" and James Morrow's witty "Daughter Earth." Marcos Donnelly's "Tracking the Random Variable," though it isn't SF even by its most elastic definition, is the story I enjoyed most and one of the few with a science-fictional feel to it. In the realm of fantasy and horror, most notable are Kristine Kathryn Rusch's "Precious Moments," Karen Joy Fowler's

"Black Glass," and Elizabeth Hand's "Snow on Sugar Mountain."

Two unclassifiable but excellent stories are David Zindell's "When the Rose Is Dead" and Poul Anderson's "Rokuro." There are two entries translated from other languages: Joëlle Wintrebert's "Transfusion" is a bewildering exhibition of pyrotechnics, and Wolfgang Jeschke's "Loitering at Death's Door" a clever but fairly predictable piece of SF.

The standard of writing in this anthology is extremely high, but it's a shame that similarly well-written stories from a broader range of SF subgenres either could not be found or were not included. I certainly recommend the anthology, which provides an excellent view of one corner of the SF field, but you'll have to look elsewhere for the rest of the spectrum.

Rating: ☆☆☆ 1/2

*Tales of Magic Realism By Women:
Dreams in a Minor Key*
Edited by Susanna J. Sturgis
The Crossing Press, 1991
235 pp., \$10.95

The first question that came to my mind on reading Susanna J. Sturgis's new anthology was, "How do you define magic realism?" Once we get past the half-joking answers ("Fantasy written by Latin Americans"), we can see that though there is certainly a difference between magic realism and what is generally marketed as "fantasy," that difference is at least as difficult to define as is science fiction. Of the fifteen stories in this anthology, only four appear to be by authors who are also involved in the SF genre, and only one of those is familiar to me.

Is magic realism just fantasy set in the "real world" without any attempt at explanation, even a fantastic one? It sometimes seems so: Mary Rosenblum's "In Unison, Softly," about a woman who begins to hear the voices of plants, is an interesting story, and if it came to some kind of conclusion, rather than just ending, it wouldn't be out of place in an SF magazine. This is not necessarily a criticism, but it is a difference. Does everything have to be explained?

Gwynne Garfinkle's "Memo to the Universe" isn't any kind of story, by my definition. On the other hand, Ellen Gruber Garvey's "Degree Days at Home" doesn't have a proper plot, either, but it's my favorite piece in the

anthology. Perhaps that's because it feels as if it gets somewhere; I would, however, describe it as hallucinatory, rather than fantastic.

Batya Weinbaum's "Bapka in Brooklyn" starts out very promisingly but then gets excessively weird, becoming an everything-but-the-kitchen-sink story. It might have been more successful had the magical elements not so completely displaced realistic ones. Alcina Lubitch Domecq's "Bottles" is a fine vignette but not fantasy, simply a description of madness. Lucy Sussex's "The Man Hanged Upside Down," however, is straightforward



dark fantasy.

Kathleen J. Alcalá's "Flora's Complaint" is well-executed but obvious. Other enjoyable contributions are Valerie Nieman Colander's "The Gifts of Diaz," Kristine Kathryn Rusch's "Heading West," Stephanie T. Hoppe's "Old Night," and Lianne Elizabeth Mercer's "The Monument."

I never did decide how to define magic realism, but now I feel that I know it when I see it, and some of what I see is very good. *Tales of Magic Realism by Women* is a varied showcase of a different and interesting approach to the fantastic, and well worth checking out.

Rating: ☆☆☆ 1/2

Strange Monsters of the Recent Past
By Howard Waldrop
Ace, 1991
208 pp., \$3.95

Howard Waldrop is one of the most peculiar, original, and brilliant writers in the SF field, and not nearly

prolific enough. Ace Books has now published a collection of some of his best stories, previously available in book form only in limited editions. Drop everything and go buy it.

The major work included is "A Dozen Tough Jobs," an incomparable and seamless retelling of the Labors of Hercules set in the American South of several decades ago. "The Lions Are Asleep This Night" is a telling alternate history of Africa. I'm not as fond of the popular "Flying Saucer Rock and Roll" as most people seem to be,

**Bruce Clemence
NO WAY STREET**



perhaps because I'm too young to attach any emotion to early '60s rock. The other pieces included — "All About Strange Monsters of the Recent Past," "Helpless, Helpless," "Fair Game," "He-We-Await," "What Makes Heironymous Run?" — are all remarkable; every story is a polished gem.

Waldrop's work is full of references and allusions, with subject matter ranging from Renaissance art to '50s monster movies; though his stories are generally clear whether you understand the allusions or not, the more you know, the better you'll appreciate what he's doing (particularly in "Heironymous" and "Tough Jobs" — for the latter, you might want to brush up on your Greek mythology).

Don't miss this book. Howard Waldrop is a natural resource.

Rating: ☆☆☆☆ 1/2

Heaven Chronicles

By Joan D. Vinge

Questar, 1991

275 pp. in proof, \$4.99

Heaven Chronicles is a collection of

Joan Vinge's fiction set in the Heaven System, where civil war has ravaged the human colonies. The book includes two different stories, both dealing with desperation and betrayal.

First we read the story of Chaim Dartagnan and Mythili Fukinuki, who are trying to carve out a living on the edges of Heaven's society; it's good SF adventure, though a bit predictable. The second, more absorbing tale concerns a voyage from another colonized system to Heaven in search of help, with the visitors unaware they've found themselves in the aftermath of a civil war. Vinge combines an exciting adventure with characters you care about.

The most intriguing aspect of this book is the societies Vinge has created. I particularly like the construction of the Demarchy, a "radical democracy" that feels more like an anarchist hell. The Heaven System is fascinating and could certainly yield more stories. Though in the first tale the visual environment is not created as well as I'd like, the second improves on this dramatically.

The stories in *Heaven Chronicles*, particularly the second, are soundly crafted, absorbing, and fun. Vinge demonstrates that space opera doesn't have to be mind candy.

Rating: ☆☆☆ 1/2

Short Story Paperbacks

By various authors

Pulphouse, 1991

\$1.95 each

Reviewed: "Listening to Brahms," by Suzy McKee Charnas (#19); "Piecework," by David Brin (#23); "I Remember, I Remember..." by Mary Caraker (#24); "No Way Street," by Bruce Clemence (#15)

In one of Pulphouse Publishing's most radical moves, the company has started a line called "Short Story Paperbacks," which consists of short stories in individual volumes, published in batches of ten every two months. (Some of the stories also appear in hardcover, presumably aimed at the collectors' market.) The caliber of the stories chosen — some previously published, others apparently in print for the first time — is quite high.

Of the volumes reviewed, my favorite is "Listening to Brahms," an absorbing story of the last surviving humans and their relationship with

an alien race fascinated by human culture, told from a flawlessly executed viewpoint. "Piecework" is generally well done, though it's confusing at the start and I saw the ending coming too soon. "I Remember, I Remember..." is straightforward SF crossed with a mystery. "No Way Street" is a compelling piece of science-fictional horror.

A minor problem with the format is that blurring a short story — as is done on the back cover of each volume — can easily give too much away. This

**Mary Caraker
I REMEMBER,
I REMEMBER...**



was a particular problem with "No Way Street." However, the big question is: Is it worth it to pay \$1.95 for a single short story when you can get a magazine for \$3 or a paperback anthology for \$4.50? The value is most questionable when considering the reprints, which are generally available elsewhere (I was surprised to see Pulphouse choose such an over-anthologized story as Roger Zelazny's "The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth"). The original stories are, as I have said, good, but they cost a lot for what you get. While I enjoyed these little books, I find it hard to recommend them when considering value for money.

Ratings:

"Listening to Brahms," ☆☆☆☆☆

"Piecework," ☆☆☆ 1/2

"I Remember, I Remember ..." ☆☆☆

"No Way Street," ☆☆☆☆

The Edges of Things

By Lewis Shiner

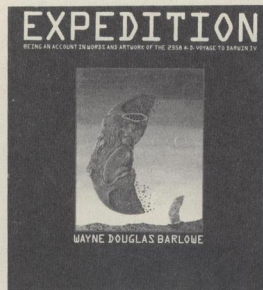
WSFS Press, 1991

232 pp., \$45.00

The Edges of Things, a fan-publish-

ed collection, does not represent Lewis Shiner's best work, but less than his best is still much better than most authors can hope to achieve. Even the unpublished and the peculiar stories are well worth reading. (The price is certainly high, and I'm afraid I can't evaluate the quality of the bookmaking for the price, since I don't have a finished copy, only galleys.)

Of particular note are "Twilight Time," a paranoid time-travel story;



"Stompin' at the Savoy," a weird, jokey story in the "Church of the Sub-Genius" universe; and "Blood Relations," a tale of terror reminiscent of Sturgeon's "It." Shiner has said he is no longer writing SF; this collection makes clear just how badly he will be missed.

Rating: ☆☆☆ ½

Expedition

By Wayne Douglas Barlowe
Workman, 1990
192 pp., \$18.95

Artist Wayne Barlowe, whose most famous previous work was the delightful *Barlowe's Guide to Extraterrestrials*, now presents us with a unique and fascinating book. *Expedition* is neither a novel nor an art book, but with some of the appeal of both.

The book is the "report" of an expedition in the year 2358 to explore the planet Darwin IV. The majority of the book is taken up with paintings, sketches, and verbal descriptions of many of the life forms found on the planet. The sketchy story is set against the backdrop of a ravaged

Earth; Barlowe is making a rather obvious point regarding care of our environment, but this background gives an added poignancy to the "report."

The introduction gives the historical background of the expedition a bit clumsily — even including the dreaded phrase, "as we all know" — but that doesn't matter, because the book's fascination is in the remarkably detailed and consistent world that Barlowe has designed. (Though I don't have the biological knowledge to evaluate its plausibility, it *seems* plausible, which is 99 percent of the battle.)

Barlowe has apparently lavished time and care on everything in this book, from the design of the exploration vehicle to the map of Darwin IV that serves as a frontispiece. The art is delightful to look at, and the descriptions of truly alien life forms are absolutely fascinating. (I don't recommend reading it all at one sitting, though; the lack of a plot can make things a bit tedious.) Each creature we're introduced to is weirder than the last, and all are parts of a truly complex ecology. Barlowe could hire out to SF authors as a planet-builder.

Expedition is a book that should not be missed. It will be fascinating for those who love SF art, those interested in xenobiology, and those who simply love the detailed depiction of alien worlds.

Rating: ☆☆☆☆ ½

Who P-P-P-Plugged Roger Rabbit?

By Gary K. Wolf
Villard, 1991
255 pp., \$17.00

In 1981, an obscure science-fiction writer named Gary K. Wolf published a novel called *Who Censored Roger Rabbit?*, a delightfully weird hard-boiled mystery set in a world in which comic-strip characters were real. The book developed a small cult following, but probably would have remained obscure had Steven Spielberg not adapted it (very freely) into the blockbuster movie *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*.

Now Wolf has published a second Roger Rabbit novel. He has resolved the major differences between his original book and the movie (including such minor points as the fact that, in the book, Roger Rabbit is murdered

early on) in favor of the movie. Thus it is not a sequel to *Who Censored Roger Rabbit?* — Wolf dismisses the plot of that book offhandedly, in a cute aside by Jessica Rabbit — but to the movie. The world of this novel is a bit darker, though: Toons suffer discrimination, and Roger and Jessica's personalities are not quite so innocent. Wolf has kept one of the cleverest details from his original novel: when Toons speak, they produce word balloons that have a material existence.



Who P-P-P-Plugged Roger Rabbit? is well executed and enjoyable, if not ambitious. Wolf has fun with the '40s Hollywood milieu, bringing in such major characters as Clark Gable and David O. Selznick, and leaving the reader to contemplate the idea of an animated musical-comedy version of *Gone With the Wind*. There are a few false notes; the author warns us that he's going to "play fast and loose with history," which is fine, but anachronisms such as having a woman refer to a man who's made a sexist comment as a "chauvinist" grate.

Unfortunately, and perhaps unavoidably, this quasi-sequel lacks the verve and originality of the first book — or the movie, for that matter. If you liked the movie, you'll have a good enough time, but it's not worth going out of your way for.

Rating: ☆☆☆

Hawaiian U.F.O. Aliens

By Mel Gilden
Roc, 1991
272 pp., \$3.99

Mel Gilden's sequel to the hilarious *Surfing Samurai Robots* is another weird melange of science-fictional clichés mixed with a Raymond Chandler pastiche. This time, alien Zoot Marlowe tries to track down the aliens who are stealing blowfish-spine necklaces. While the plot is a little too intricate, it actually holds together, while managing to involve everything from Sherlock Holmes to New-Age nutcases. The mystery even makes sense, in its own warped way.

Like its predecessor, *Hawaiian U.F.O. Aliens* is of no redeeming social value, but it's a lot of fun.

Rating: ☆☆☆☆

Winning Scheherazade

By Judith Gorog
Atheneum, 1991
101 pp., \$11.95

The world of the Arabian Nights exerts an endless fascination for readers. *Winning Scheherazade* is a young-adult novel about the tale-spinner herself.

The book takes off from the author's own version of the tale of Scheherazade, in which the Sultan grants her freedom, a palace, and the titles of Princess and Storyteller of the Kingdom. A man wishing to win her love devises a complex plan which, as you might expect, fails to turn out as

expected.

The character of Scheherazade is likable, though emotionally somewhat opaque. The man's plan to win her through adventures is not very plausible, but it fits with the mood of the Arabian Nights. The characterization is flatter than it ought to be, making it hard to empathize with Scheherazade. In general, though, it's a lovely book, and should enchant the young-adult girls it's aimed at.

Rating: ☆☆☆ 1/2

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The Second Renaissance Foundation is a non-profit Massachusetts organization which is taking over the operation of *Aboriginal Science Fiction* in order to keep the magazine coming to you on a regular basis. While we and the staff of the magazine will be putting forth our best efforts, there may be a bump or two along the way. We ask that you please bear with us.

We are all doing this on a part-time basis, which means working evenings and weekends, and no one is being paid a salary.

We may make some changes in the future, but we hope to keep the unique character of the magazine alive, and that includes the full-color art.

The biggest problem we face is that it currently costs more to produce the magazine than it earns. The magazine needs to raise funds. So if you can afford a tax-deductible contribution (be it \$10, \$25, \$50, or more), and are willing to help, you can send your donation to:

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Careers

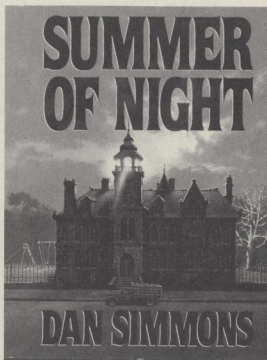


Ideally, a book is a book, read for itself, its merits being only those found in the text. But the real world doesn't work that way, folks. Writers work in a lifelong continuity of context commonly known as their careers. Often success is a matter of timing, coincidence, association with a movement (or separation from it), and so on. Actors have the same problem. A performance is a performance, unto itself, but you get cast on the basis of what you've done, and what you do determines what parts you'll be offered in the future. Peter Cushing started out doing Shakespeare (a minor role in the Olivier *Hamlet*), but the Hammer horror films turned his career in quite a different direction — and it stayed turned.

When you write a story or a novel, you try to think only of the demands of that individual work, but ultimately there are other concerns. Fashion. If you write what can be marketed as a Stephen King-type novel, that could mean big bucks, wide visibility, and a demand from publishers for more Stephen King-type novels. Move closer to the R.A. Lafferty pole, and you may find yourself unmarketable, regardless of merit. Lafferty himself has enough of a cult following that he still can achieve print — just barely, in tiny editions, even pamphlets, put out by devoted fans whose sole publishing activity is Lafferty — but Lafferty had a launch-phase of about twenty-five years, when the commercial markets could still support his unique style. This created the (admit-

tedly small, but large enough) cult which still demands more. A new Lafferty, starting now, probably couldn't get launched.

So, do you then write imitations of best-sellers? No, I don't advocate that. Tim Powers once explained the Meaning of Life (for a writer) to me: "You've got to believe in your own craziness." You have to just hope that what you do will have merit and find its audience. The possibility of failure is



always there, I would add, but it's a risk any writer of integrity has to take.

The alternative is write the imitations. Follow the safe paths someone else has cleared. That may make some immediate money, but it isn't what I'd call a good career move. If you get typed as an imitator, as a producer of generic product, be it elfy-welfy trilogies or right-wing militaristic epics, then that's what readers and publishers expect from you. Should you much later write something genuinely original, chances are no one will notice. Imagine what would have happened if Lin Carter, rather than

Ursula Le Guin, had written *The Left Hand of Darkness* back in 1969. That's a remarkable supposition, but play along with the fantasy for the moment. Reams of Thongor and inept completions of Conan fragments, then *The Left Hand of Darkness*, word for word as we know it today. Assuming Carter then managed to sell it to his bewildered publishers, the novel would have been swiftly buried among the other Lin Carter books and forgotten.

As a career move, the author's bet would have been to use a carefully-guarded pseudonym and publish it as a first novel, establishing a "new" voice in the marketplace who might be taken seriously.

And you don't have to be as blatant an imitator as Carter (or, a generation before him, Otis Adelbert Kline) to guarantee that particular dust-chute into oblivion. Probably the worst thing a writer can do nowadays is get visibly involved in sharecropping or franchise publishing, about which I have railed much in previous columns. If you're busy writing the work of other people, you aren't even an imitator. You have no identity at all. Who can even remember the names on, say, *Robot City* novels? A long string of that sort of thing could completely destroy a promising new writer. For an old one, to be reduced to such straits is rather like Bela Lugosi's painful last performances in the films of Edward D. Wood.

Or you could overproduce and become an imitator of yourself. I honestly think that Ron Goulart has hurt his career by churning out so many "typical Goulart humor" books (to paraphrase another critic) that they became indistinguishable. Roger Zelazny was a miraculous writer for about the first eight years of his

Rating System

☆☆☆☆☆	Outstanding
☆☆☆☆	Very Good
☆☆☆	Good
☆☆	Fair
☆	Poor

career, when everything he did was fresh and new and totally unlike everything else. But, alas, he settled down into routine, and, as yet another critic put it (A.J. Budrys, I think), put the magic tricks back into his hat one by one. I don't think a new *Zelazny* novel raises quite as much excitement now as in 1970, for all the early ones seem as good as ever.

And then there's Jonathan Carroll, one of my favorites of recent years. *Locus* just slammed his recent *Outside the Dog Museum* (which I intend to read and report on here) as, well, imitation-Carroll. I sincerely hope this isn't the case, but it seems that Carroll established himself with the unique and brilliant *The Land of Laughs*, then settled down to write that sort of book over and over. Any given volume in the series, taken by itself, is quite excellent. Any of them, were they first novels, would constitute a stunning debut. But in career-context, there's a bit of a problem, not irreversible by any means, but definitely a problem.

The point of all this is that the way an author's *career* runs may have just as much impact on how he is read (and even on what he continues to write) as the actual content of the books. It's possible for a writer to produce several really good books at wide intervals and hardly have a career at all. It's possible for a brilliant writer to produce classic works and make such a muddle out of his or her career that no one notices for decades. Think of Lovecraft. Or Emily Dickinson.

The writer might be such a pain in the posterior that no publisher will deal with him or her, whereupon the career grinds to a halt, pending a possible posthumous revival. But probably the most humiliating fate is simply to fade from the scene for a while, then try to come back. For many, it's almost impossible. Editors will say, "This guy is in his sixties and not likely to get any better. There's no way we can build him up into a stronger seller ten years down the road. So, forget it." Now if that writer were twenty years younger, he might have a chance. Had he been publishing all along, he'd have an even better chance. But for an older writer to begin again after a long hiatus is almost certainly futile. My advice to someone in that situation would be the same as to Lin Carter after his completion of *The Left Hand of Darkness*. A carefully-guarded

pseudonym producing a "new" writer. And lie about your age. It's not that the writer can't write as well as he ever did, but that his *career* is over.

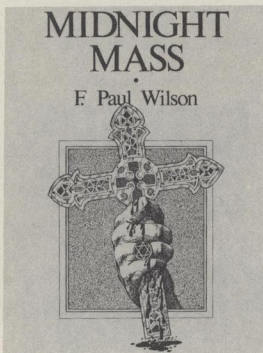
So, how you begin your career is crucial. It may determine everything that comes after. The best way is with a bang, but it had better be an enduring series of progressively different bangs.

Summer of Night

By Dan Simmons
G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1991
555 pp., \$22.95

Prayers to Broken Stones

By Dan Simmons
Dark Harvest, 1990
322 pp., \$55.00 (limited edition),
\$21.95 (trade edition)



"This book is an architectural plan for a major career," a *Locus* reviewer is quoted as saying on the back of the dustjacket of *Prayers to Broken Stones*. Exactly. When the sharecroppings and franchises and shared-worlds are gone as if they had never existed, readers and critics will look back on the 1990s as the era of Dan Simmons. His *career* so far has been extremely promising. He won the *Twilight Zone* new writer contest. He had sold a story to *Omni* a bit earlier, actually, but *Omni* held it back so the contest winner could be first. He sold more to *Omni*, to *Asimov's*, and to prestigious horror anthologies. Meanwhile his *Song of Kali* was the first-ever first novel to win the World Fantasy Award. Simmons made himself a major horror writer quickly. Six years after the *Twilight Zone* win, he filled one third of one of Dark

Harvest's showcase *Night Visions* volumes. His massive horror novel *Carrion Comfort* won a Stoker from the Horror Writers of America.

But, importantly, that's not all. Simmons became a major science-fiction writer overnight with the Hugo-winning *Hyperion*. Still unwilling to be typed, he published an earlier-written mainstream novel, *Phases of Gravity*. We cannot yet say what is a "typical Dan Simmons book," save it will probably be excellent. A little more of this and Simmons will be the selling point of these books. They won't sell because they are science fiction or horror or literary mainstream, but because they are Dan Simmons. He will pass from genre into brand-name, and if the brand-name is broadly enough defined, he can do anything he wants. (So, Dan, how about a romantic/comedy/western ...? Just kidding.)

The most remarkable thing about all this is that Simmons still seems to be in the formative stage. What he's done so far is assimilate virtually everything that has gone before. He is a master in the old, Renaissance sense, having achieved a level equal to his peers and predecessors. Thus, *Hyperion* effortlessly went through a series of tropes — the ultimate space opera, the Philip José Farmer story, the cyberpunk story, the Arthur Clarke story — all in the same book, as if Simmons is telling us, "Look, I can do that too."

What I am hoping is that he won't settle down here, that having climbed onto the shoulders of giants, he will keep on climbing, and go beyond all previous space opera/horror/cyberpunk/whatever to create something utterly his own and tower over the rest of us.

Meanwhile, in *Summer of Night* Simmons turns to the Stephen King-type horror novel. Simmons handles this form better than King, for all King virtually invented it. You know: the idyllic small-town setting, ordinary American boys on the verge of adolescent discovery, and then Something Awful threatens and the kids have to deal with it, mostly without the help of any adults. (Before King, admittedly, Ray Bradbury pioneered this sort of story, and made a complete hash out of it at novel length in *Something Wicked This Way Comes*.)

Simmons sets his story in the Midwest, which he obviously knows, in

FIRST BOOKS

Aboriginal Science Fiction has been around long enough now that some of the writers whose short stories first appeared in its pages have evolved into novelists.

Because of the nature of the publishing industry, most first books by new authors are paperback editions — books, in other words, that begin to fall apart after they have been read. First Books believes the first novels by new authors discovered by *Aboriginal Science Fiction* deserve better.

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By Patricia Anthony

Known for her sensitive and insightful stories, Patricia Anthony shows she can also write tough as nails in this fast-paced "whodunit." Det. Dial Holloway and Earth's top investigative team must stop the terrorists bombing innocent civilians on the planet of Tennyson — but all the clues point to Tennyson's religious government and the head of its secret police. Holloway must find the culprits before he and his team become the next victims — Available in January! —

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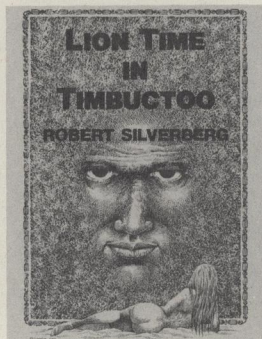
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the year 1960, which would be about right for him. He has a wonderful sense of cultural detail. Baby-boomers among his readers will find themselves remembering things they haven't thought about in thirty years — like staying up at night to watch the Echo satellite pass over. There are excellent characterizations, startling scenes, and at least one heart-wrenching surprise. The narrative is brisk and vivid, without the flabby first hundred pages or so King frequently needs to get things cooking. But in the end, I am a little unsatisfied. It's a thrilling roller-coaster of a book, but strangely lacking in any real substance. The *evil* in the story is *Ghostbuster*-esque dripping slime. It is not moral corruption. It seems ar-



bitrary, supplied by the author as something to endanger the characters. Possibly this is because all the characters are children who form their own, self-contained society, and they don't seem to question or demand insights from the adult world; but such insight into human nature pretty well defines the best horror fiction. As a story, scene-by-scene, *Summer of Night* is a great read, but on a thematic level, I'm not sure it's about anything. It does show a complete mastery of the Stephen King Novel form, though. I hope Simmons will do more with that form next time.

Prayers to Broken Stones contains the author's very impressive first sales from *Twilight Zone* and *Omni*, plus the short stories which grew into *Hyperion* and *Carrion Comfort*, and a lot more. If there's any flaw here, it's that Simmons sometimes rushes his

endings. "Iverson's Pits," for instance, is a superb historical recreation of the 50th-anniversary reunion on the Gettysburg battlefield (1913) told through the eyes of a Boy Scout sent there to assist the veterans, but the actual plot resolves itself in a burst of emotion which doesn't, quite, make sense. I have to agree with Harlan Ellison (who describes in the introduction how he discovered Simmons in a workshop) that "The River Styx Runs Upstream" is an *astonishing* first story. It's the sort of thing you'll find in a workshop only a few times in a lifetime. In "Vanni Fucci Is Alive and Well and Living in Hell," we encounter Simmons the humorist and satirist. In "E-Ticket to Namland," we have another sort of much grimmer satire. "Metastasis" is a gripping and original horror story about cancer vampires, accompanied by the screenplay version done for *Monsters*. (The story has another rushed ending. The screenplay adds the needed logical detail.) The range is impressive. This is a groundwork. If Simmons went on writing in any of the several veins opened here, he could have a career. If he goes on in all of them, it will be a major career, just as *Locus* said.

Ratings:

Summer of Night ☆☆☆☆

Prayers to Broken Stones ☆☆☆☆☆

Pulphouse Books

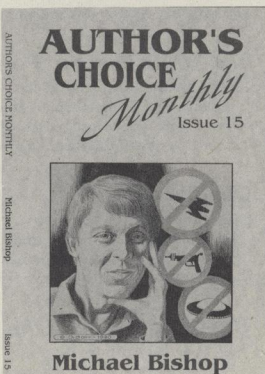
Pulphouse continues to be one of the most innovative publishers the science-fiction field has ever seen. They break the rules routinely. What started as a modest desktop/small press effort has become an empire which now makes co-publishing deals with Bantam and, if you stop and figure it out from any recent catalogue, must be producing close to a book a day.

Get this: the received wisdom in publishing is that Story Collections Don't Sell. Conventional publishers shy away from them. So Pulphouse does them *monthly*, an original collection by a different author each month, and sells subscriptions. They've reached volume 18 (Joe Lansdale). Conventional wisdom has little regard for periodical anthologies either, so we have *Pulphouse* itself, the "hardcover magazine," which can also be seen as an *Orbit*-type original anthology. Very good. Very pres-

tigious. The early volumes have all sold out. Soon to be converted into an *Aboriginal*-sized magazine (though with only black-and-white art, it seems) and published *weekly*.

But wait, there's more: *Short Story Paperbacks* (and hardbacks), a series of small volumes of either new or classic stories. (Apparently monthly. Ten so far.) *Monad*, Damon Knight's magazine of criticism, which I reviewed a couple of issues back. *The Report*, a magazine about writing. *Writer's Notebook* chapbooks (twenty-three so far, two of them by Ursula Le Guin). Axolotl Press novellas, apparently monthly, at twenty volumes so far.

I read three Pulphouse publications recently:



Midnight Mass

By F. Paul Wilson

Pulphouse/Axolotl, 1990

85 pp., \$10.00 (paper),

\$35.00 (cloth), \$65.00 (leather)

At last report, the paperback issue is out of print from the publisher, but that doesn't mean you can't get it. Other dealers haven't necessarily sold out their stock yet. But hurry.

The Axolotl books are handsome, well-made, signed first editions (even the paperbacks are signed) which often get reprinted elsewhere (the SF titles frequently in *Asimov's*), so I suppose they are for collectors, people who like fine books, and anyone too impatient to take chances on later reprints.

Midnight Mass might be described

as action/horror with a theological twist. The vampires are winning. They have virtually taken over the world, and retain a few live humans to aid them, and more to be kept as "cattle" to sustain the vampire race. Much of the story is from the point of view of an orthodox rabbi who discovers to his chagrin that Christian holy things (crosses, holy water) work where Judaism is powerless. It seems to imply which side God is on, for all God isn't helping much. The rabbi must rehabilitate a drunken and despairing Catholic priest and make a stand in a church against evil. Things happen at a furious pace. This is a well-written story which would make a good horror film.

Rating: ☆☆☆☆

Lion Time in Timbuctoo

By Robert Silverberg
Pulphouse/Axolotl, 1990
112 pp., \$10.00 (paper),
\$35.00 (cloth), \$65.00 (leather)

An elegant evocation of an alternate Africa, part of a time-line Silverberg has used before in *The Gate of Worlds* (1967): The Black Death of the 14th century killed, not one-quarter of the population of Europe, but three-quarters. The survivors were no match for the Ottoman Turks, who conquered all the way to England. The Americas were never colonized. In the 20th century, the Ottoman Empire is in decline. England has recently regained its independence but struggles for credibility among the major powers. The Aztec and Inca emperors treat the Turks and various African kingdoms as equals.

In the kingdom of Songhay, in the city of Timbuctoo, ambassadors from great powers and small gather like vultures as the old king lies dying. Plots are hatched. Imperialistic games are played. A young Englishman falls in love with a Turk and like a complete fool betrays his country. It's a bit perfunctory, but the city of Timbuctoo sweltering under the African sun, waiting for the rainy season to begin, is wonderfully depicted. You feel that you've been there.

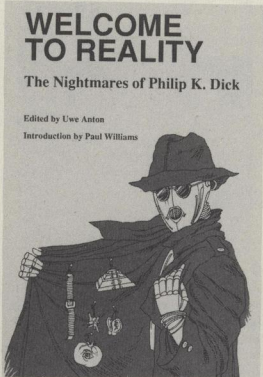
Rating: ☆☆☆

*Author's Choice Monthly #16:
Emphatically Not SF, Almost*
By Michael Bishop
Pulphouse, 1990

102 pp., \$4.95 (paper),
\$25.00 (cloth), \$50.00 (leather)

Indeed, the stories here aren't SF, though one is set at an SF convention. This is a collection of Bishop's mainstream stories, from *Playboy*, from mystery magazines, from little literaries, and they reveal a side of his writing which is both familiar and unfamiliar. We knew he was eloquent, emotionally intense, graceful, sometimes humorous. Now we can see him writing about strictly contemporary people and themes — child abuse, the humiliation of Alzheimer's disease; there's also a very funny story about a disadvantaged young man who tries hard, works his way up through the educational system, then finds happiness as a bank robber. I suppose in career terms, this is a footnote to Michael Bishop, but as a book, by itself, it's very much worth reading.

Rating: ☆☆☆



Noted

Astounding Days
By Arthur C. Clarke
Gollancz, 1989
224 pp., £12.95

Another book I picked up in Europe. If you envision me staggering across the Continent with a huge bag of books, rest assured I am a suitably muscular book schlepper. I can handle it. There has since been a Bantam trade paperback of this, slightly abridged, but since Bantam did not send me a review copy, I list the above.

Clarke's "Science Fictional Autobiography" traces his life, his career, the progress of science, and the development of science fiction literature through the history of *Astounding Science Fiction* (now *Analog*). Considering how infrequently Clarke actually wrote for *ASF*, this gives you some idea of the magazine's importance in the intellectual development of a science-fictionist of his generation. He dips into the magazine, discusses stories and the scientific concepts behind them, provides contemporary context in real science, brings up anecdotes. It's very charming, very revealing, and very much an autobiography in the best sense: it shows us how the author thinks.

Rating: ☆☆☆☆

Welcome to Reality:

The Nightmares of Philip K. Dick
Edited by Uwe Anton
Broken Mirrors Press, 1991
208 pp., \$12.95 (paper),
\$55.00 (limited hardcover)

This is a reprint of a very curious German anthology of stories about Philip K. Dick. More than any other writer in our field (the only other comparable one is Lovecraft), Dick has become a *mythos* unto himself. There was a cruel joke that went around at the time of his death: "Philip K. Dick is dead. Has anyone told him yet?" Most of the stories seem based on that premise. We have Dick in an electronic afterlife dictating a posthumous story to Richard Lupoff ("The Digital Wristwatch of Philip K. Dick"), in a somewhat different afterlife helping to break down (or shore up) reality for those few whose consensus determines the world for the rest of us ("The Transmigration of Philip K." by Michael Swanwick), or even turning up as a clone and possible impostor in the science-fiction scene in a somewhat Phil-Dickian Germany (Ronald Hahn's "Philip K. Dick is Dead and Living Happily in Wuppertal"). The stories vary in quality, but most are quite good, if a little repetitive after a while. Contributors include John Sladek, Robert Silverberg, Thomas Disch, Michael Bishop, Norman Spinrad, plus four Germans apparently translated into English for this volume.

Rating: ☆☆☆☆

*The Robert Bloch Companion:
Collected Interviews, 1969-89*
Edited by Randall Larson
Starmont House, 1989
157 pp., \$11.95 (paper),
\$21.95 (hardcover)

So, if this is a two-year-old book,

why did it come in the mail last month? I suspect a publication delay, copyright date notwithstanding.

The subtitle is a bit misleading too, since this is not a volume of collected, complete interviews, but of little snippets from a variety of interviews (one of them mine, from 1975) arranged to

form coherent conversations on a variety of topics. As such, it is quite good, and reveals many sides of Bloch's personality, perceptions, and ideas. Certainly anyone interested in him or his work should have a copy.

Rating: ☆☆☆☆ □

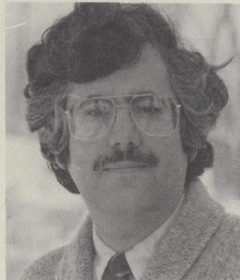
ABORIGINES

By Laurel Lucas

A Fresh Lineup

We're back from the *Interzone* with a fresh lineup of *Aboriginal* regulars and new talent.

Phillip C. Jennings's female



Chuck Rothman

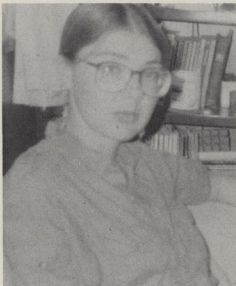
protagonists have included a human satellite ("Doctor Quick," Sept.-Oct. 1988) and a grossly obese maiden ("Queen of the Atzu," May-June 1990). In his fifth story for *Aboriginal*, "The Larkie," we meet a creature who devours children.

Jennings says he "managed to write



Courtney Skinner and spare head

a novella" recently called "The Fourth Intercometary," which he sold to *Asimov's*. He now has an agent peddling a couple of his novels.



Ann K. Schwader

Jennings let me in on the reason he insists on using his middle initial. "It seems every town I move to has a Phillip Jennings who is a deadbeat." He says he has a tough time convincing people he is not the Phil Jennings they want when they try to repossess his car or reconcile him with a dying father.

"The Larkie" is illustrated by Larry Blamire, who illustrates six stories in this issue and is the model for the illustrations of a fifth.

When I spoke to him, Blamire was directing a production of Shakespeare's *Richard III* at the Open Door Theater in Boston. He has set the play in "a world of its own, a strange plane peopled with very bizarre transients." He says he wanted to take the audience to a place where it had never been. So he not only directed, he designed the costumes, created some cacophonous music for the actors to sing, and staged fights with baseball bats, hockey sticks, farm tools, and golf clubs instead of swords.

He says he was blessed with a "brilliant cast" and despite the enormous

amount of work was having "a lot of fun."

If you like very short stories, try Chuck Rothman's "Something on His Mind," which delivers its punch line in



Lori Deitrick

just one page.

I could easily use more space than that telling you about Rothman. He recently sold three of his stories in one week. His "Curse of the Undead" is appearing in the Harper and Row anthology *Vampires*, and "The Willow"



Paul A. Gilster



Nina Kiriki Hoffman

appeared in *Tales of the Unanticipated* earlier this year. He's also working on a novel while holding down a job as a technical writer.

Rothman is married to Susan Noy Rothman, who wrote the poem "Pardon Me For Not Speaking" in the Jan.-Feb. 1989 issue. That makes them another great *Aboriginal* husband-wife team.

A widening chasm between the haves and the have-nots sets the stage for Ann K. Schwader's "Neighborhood Watch." I am happy to report it features another woman-of-the-law protagonist, the kind Schwader employs so well.

Schwader is the author of "Muttmind" (Jan.-Feb. 1988), "Nectar" (March-April 1991), and "Killing Gramps" (Sept.-Oct. 1988), as well as the poem "Same Song, Different Star" (Sept.-Oct. 1990). She says quite a few of her poems were just published in an anthology put out by the Minnesota Science Fiction Society called *Time Frames*. Schwader, who writes full time, was also invited to be a panelist at a horror convention in Denver called ConGo.

Schwader told me she was impressed with the way artist Cortney Skinner took care to reproduce Denver's skyline in the illustration for her story "Nectar"



Charles Lang on Table

and was thrilled at the way things turned out. "I saw it and said, 'That's my heroine!'"

"Neighborhood Watch" is illustrated by Lori Deitrick and David Deitrick. This was the first project that the artists collaborated on start-to-finish, and, according to Lori, they learned a lot from the experience.

When I spoke to them, they were just back from a rainy camping trip in Tennessee. David had finished up a large series of black-and-white illustrations for a new role-playing game called "Horror on the Orient Express," and they were still beaming about a show they put on in Knoxville in which they teamed up with other local SF and fantasy artists and drew an "excellent" turnout.

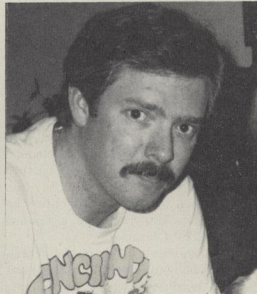
The shadow of catastrophe follows a father and son in "Jingle Jangle Morning" by Paul A. Gilster. The protagonist, Gilster says, is a "composite of different people blended into a science fiction premise."

Gilster is himself a father of three,

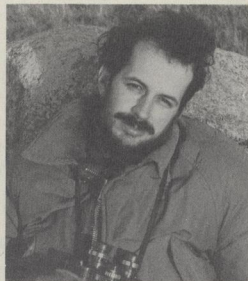


Gail Regier

one of whom just graduated from college. Since 1985 Gilster has been a full-time freelance writer of mostly computer-related articles and wine and restaurant reviews. The last *Aboriginal* story of his was "Merchant Dying" (July-Aug. 1987), so you can see that his occasional fiction



A. J. Austin



Robert Frazier

is worth waiting for.

"Jingle Jangle Morning" is illustrated by Cortney Skinner, who is pictured with his latest theatrical creation. His pal, Larry Blamire, asked him to make a realistic severed head of Lord Hastings for the production of *Richard III* he is directing (see above).

Skinner was happy to oblige. In fact, it is not the first time these two have put their heads together on a project. Cortney says the props he has created for Blamire's productions over the years have included a mutant monster, a cooked goose, a jar of human ears, a side of beef, and a dead baby.

Skinner says Blamire's *Richard III* is very well acted and has that "slightly skewed Larry look."

Blamire returned the favor by being the model, along with his son Cory, for the "Jingle Jangle Morning" illustration.

Now if Cortney's creation hasn't ruined your appetite, there are always the eating rituals in "The Coming of the Newest Messiah" by Nina Kiriki Hoffman.

Hoffman's story "Works of Art" was reprinted in *The Year's Best Horror XVII* (DAW, 1989), and her recent stories include "Life Sentences" for *Pulphouse*,



William Gregory Meltsner

"Pouring the Foundations of a Nightmare" for *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine*, and "A Touch of the



Keith Brooke

Old Lilith" for *Women of Darkness II*.

Hoffman says she has "invisible means of support" and also teaches fiddle, works as a secretary to a psychologist, and does typesetting for *Pulphouse*. She recently became Big Sister to Jackie, age 11.

"The Coming of the Newest Messiah" is illustrated by **Charles Lang**. He had just finished his fifth cover for *Cemetery Dance* when I spoke to him. He is especially happy with the one that was last published, which depicts a beautiful summer's day, a white picket fence, and a little rag doll impaled on a fence post with a butcher's knife. Lang says he likes to make a statement about life with his art, and this one says "you should not be too desensitized to violence." He says a number of people who have seen it "have not forgotten it."

Lang is also working on some gaming module covers for a small company in Connecticut and is negotiating his next large project. I was surprised to learn he still holds down a 40-hour-a-week job at an electronics firm.

A man can get pretty attached to a "pet" like the one in "A Thief in Heaven" by **Gail Regier**.



Ray Vukevich

Regier's essay about drugs, "Users, Like Me," was published in *Harper's* in May 1989 and was nominated for a National Magazine Award. His first short story was "Talking to the Sun" for the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1987, and he has a novel, *Meridian*, about earthquakes and Martians.

Regier is a teacher who likes films, art and basketball.

"A Thief in Heaven" is illustrated by **Larry Blamire**.

"...But Fear Itself" is a predator-prey action thriller that you won't be able to read at a leisurely pace. It is written by **A.J. Austin**, who began writing non-fiction in 1982 and made his first fiction sale to *Analog* in 1987. He has a novelette, "Another Dime, Another Place," appearing in *NAL's Newer York* anthology.

Austin is a radio talk show host in Hartford, Connecticut. The day I spoke to him the guests on his show included two gay policemen and the treasurer of the State of Connecticut. Austin describes his on-air presence as "level-headed."

Besides his radio audiences on the weekdays, Austin has a theater-going audience on weekends. He says he has appeared in approximately 65 community theater productions since high school, in every town he has lived in. He even met his wife, Sally, doing a play in West Virginia. He'll do drama and comedy, but not the musical variety. "I did one musical and they asked me never to do another one," he says.

"...But Fear Itself" is illustrated by **Larry Blamire**.

"White Light, White Heat" is a poem by **Robert Frazier**, who wrote the poem "Icarian" in our Dec.-Jan. 1987 issue.

Frazier has been writing a lot of fiction lately, and sold a whopping 10 short stories in the first six months of this year. He and **Bruce Boston** collaborated on the collection of poetry *Chronicles of the Mutant Rain Forest* (Mark Ziesing Books) and have written some fiction about that shared world. Frazier also keeps up his desktop publishing business from his home on a picturesque New England island.

Congratulations are in order for our regular book reviewer **Janice M. Eisen** and her husband **Ken Meltner** who became the parents of seven-pound-13-ounce **William Gregory Meltner** on February 15, the day *Boskone* started.

Though Billy's parents missed that convention for the first time, Billy had already been to his first convention by four months and even met a famous writer — **Hal Clement**.

Eisen claims her son is the cutest, smartest baby ever born, and theorizes he was nearly two weeks late getting here because he wasn't finished reading

a book. Now that he's out, I guess he can read on mom's lap.

Good news about frequent con-



Rick Wilber

tributor **Jovanka Kink**. The Science Fiction Poetry Association has selected her poem "Leaving the Sea of Suns" (May-June 1990) for inclusion in *The Rhysling Anthology*, its annual collection of the year's best SF poetry.

In **Keith Brooke's** "Hotrider," the joy ride is a hot affair indeed.

Brooke is a Brit from Gloucestershire with a growing family and a budding career. He got a degree in environmental sciences, then took a year off to write. That "year" has lasted about four years now.

Brooke has had several novels published by Gollancz, including *Expatriate* (May 1991) and *Expatriate Incorporated* (Nov. 1991). Recent short stories are "The Mother" (*Interzone*) and "Passion Play" (*Other Edens III*).

"Hotrider" is illustrated by **Cortney Skinner**.

Next Issue

The next issue will feature Gregory Benford with a story about the true giants who used to stalk the planet, "Rumbling Earth," and our favorite *Aboriginal* discovery, Patricia Anthony, who returns to these pages with a riveting tale called "The Shoot."

Joining Greg and Pat will be Dean Whitlock with a story about a computer hacker who really gets into his work, "Sliding the Edge." John F. Moore will return with a tight tale of intrigue and crime called "Sacrificial Lamb."

Aboriginal will also welcome two newcomers with first stories by D. Lopes Heald and Joseph Kosiewska. Heald's tale "Rifles" probes what happens to human-alien relationships when to touch is to kill; Kosiewska's story investigates the nature of one of the world's greatest minds in a timely sort of way. And, if there's room, we'll have "Friday Night is Date Night," by Mike Moscoe. It's an issue you won't want to miss ...

Victims' rights take on a whole new dimension in "Due Process," by K.D. Wentworth.

Wentworth is a fifth-grade teacher in Oklahoma who got her start when her husband urged her not to work in the



K. D. Wentworth

summer "because it messed up our taxes." So she stayed home to write. "He didn't think I would make any money," she says, but one of her stories won the fourth quarter of the Writers of the Future Contest in 1988, and she was off and running.

Her story "Dust" was in *Starshore* (April 1990), and she has stories appearing soon in *Pulphouse*, *Journal Wired*, and *Tales of the Unanticipated*, as well as four completed novels.

"Due Process" is illustrated by Lori Deitrick.

Mythology and metaphysics play a part in "One Star," an origin-of-the-universe story by Ray Vukcevic.

This is the second "big" sale for Vukcevic. The first was "Rachel's Inheritance" for *Pulphouse* (Fall 1989). He has ten more stories making the rounds and at least three "in various stages of completion."

Vukcevic is getting his master's degree in linguistics. He got his start by discovering a writing workshop run by famed *Aboriginal* contributor Kristine Kathryn Rusch and her Pulphouse cohort Dean Wesley Smith.

"One Star" is illustrated by Larry Blamire.

High technology gave the U.S. a big advantage in the Gulf War. Rick Wilber's "Helmet" is about a future Mideast conflict where soldiers have come to depend on sophisticated technology for nearly everything. (In case you're wondering, it was written before the Gulf War.)

Wilber has a Ph.D. in education and is an assistant professor of journalism at the University of South Florida. He's the advisor for the daily student newspaper, which was voted the best in the nation in 1990 by the Society of Professional Journalists.

Wilber got his start at a Clarion workshop in 1978. His stories have appeared in *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, *Chrysalis*, and *Pulphouse*, among others, and he is the co-editor of *Sub-Tropical Speculations*, an anthology of Florida SF (1990, Pineapple Press).

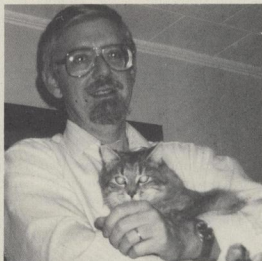
"Helmet" is illustrated by Larry Blamire.

"Measure for Measure," by Valerie Freireich, is a time-travel tale of intrigue and Freemasonry.

Freireich is a Chicago-area attorney and the mother of an exceptional seven-year-old named Jared Kaplan. She wrote her first story two-and-a-half years ago and writing has been a compulsion ever since. Soon she had won first place in a quarterly Writers of the Future Contest in 1990.

She says "Measure for Measure" was inspired by the non-fiction book *Born in Blood*, which theorizes that the Freemasons were an outgrowth of the powerful Knights Templar, who were excommunicated by the Pope in the Middle Ages and may have gone underground and instigated the Peasants' Revolt in England in 1381.

"Measure for Measure" is illustrated by Carol Heyer.



Thomas A. Easton

Heyer's children's book *The Christmas Story* is being showcased in Waldenbooks. She's now working on a book called *Creatures Great and Small* based on the old poem.

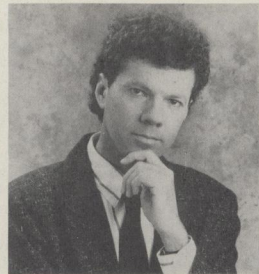
Heyer recently illustrated the hardcover book *Tome of Magic*, an Advanced Dungeons and Dragons game for TSR. And she's gone mass market; two fantasy posters she's painting for a New York company are being framed and sold in unlimited editions in department stores.

She also illustrated "Black Earth and Destiny," an alternate world tale about George Washington Carver by Thomas A. Easton, who is appearing in *Aboriginal* for the second time.

He is the regular book reviewer for *Analogue* and has a number of stories and novels to his credit.

My fellow Rhode Island resident and

Aboriginal artist Bob Eggleton's career is reaching ionospheric heights. He just won a Chesley award from the Association of Science Fiction and Fantasy Artists at Worldcon. It was for an *Aboriginal* cover, the January 1990



Michael Guillen

issue, and is titled "View from Neptune's Moon."

And Eggleton's also signed a very lucrative deal with a Japanese firm to do up to ten paintings of the aurora borealis.

The northern lights phenomenon is extremely popular with the Japanese, who make the pilgrimage to Alaska and "really go nuts over it," Eggleton says. His clients flew him to Japan to help market his paintings. He'll even be seen on Japanese television.

A personal note: This columnist, who in her other life is a reporter for a Providence television station, got hitched September 7 to Michael Guillen of ABC-TV. He is the science editor on "Good Morning America" and science correspondent for ABC News. (You can catch him about twice a month on "Nightline.")

Michael has a Ph.D. in physics, mathematics, and astronomy and teaches a physics class at Harvard. But despite being a scientist and knowing me for several years, he has absolutely zero interest in reading science fiction. I married him anyway. □

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Helmet

By Rick Wilber
Art by Larry Blamire

"That is no country for old men. The young
In one another's arm, birds in the trees,
— Those dying generations — at their song..."¹

Helmet is reciting poetry again, running off at the mouth with some old Yeats that O'Murchu, rising to consciousness, can't quite place.

Awakening to the drone, O'Murchu opens his eyes to a dazzling white-brightness, shuts them again quickly, and then, more cautiously, tries opening them a second time, bringing his left hand up to shade his vision.

Where the hell is he?

Helmet is a good three meters away, a half-moon of drifted sand nearly covering her and muffling her recitation of the poem as she says something about the holy city of Byzantium.

Well, no Byzantium here that he can see, no birds in the trees. As to the dying generations....

O'Murchu, first things first, struggles up to a kneeling position, crawls over the sand — hot! — and slaps Helmet on the left ear.

"Good, you're conscious," Helmet says, and stops the babbling.

"I suppose so," O'Murchu responds, though he's not so sure of that. Then he falls back into a sitting position, his legs folded under. He has always been limber, despite the years of his youth spent in football and hurling. He doesn't think he's seriously injured.

His right shoulder hurts, though. And he notices that he's been bleeding, the sand stained with his dried blood. The shoulder feels like it has been yanked, hard, and as he looks beneath his torn blue shirt there is a nasty gash there. The bleeding, at least, has stopped. He rotates the arm, slowly, to make sure it still works. There is some pain, but it's bearable.

"Where are we?" he asks Helmet. "What happened?"

Helmet goes informational: "This is the Wahiba Sands. Sultanate of Oman. We were brought down by a handheld Valiant missile, stealth equipped, the latest thing, really. Probably Japanese-supplied mercs who fired it. I didn't know it was coming until far too late to warn you. I had to eject us. We nearly cleared the blast."

"Nearly?" asks O'Murchu, shifting his position so that his legs are spread out in front. He takes a look around for the first time.

Sand. As far as he can see in any direction. Rolling dunes of it. Painful to look at. Too bright. And hot.

There is no 'chute that he can see lying anywhere about. No hot seat, no emergency kit. Just himself, the sand, and Helmet.

"How many belligerents around?" he asks Helmet. Both sides — those funded by the Japanese and those funded by the Chinese in this ugly little war between the sheets — have merc teams these days roaming around all over the peninsula. Clearly, one side or the other brought them down.

O'Murchu shouldn't have had to ask that question of

Helmet. Instead, he should have read the dailies before he left the base so he'd have known of any action reports around here. He's been relying too damn much on Helmet.

"The daily logs reported several possible landings in the last few days," she says as he thinks that dark thought. "This area is not far from Saudi's Sulamen fields, and also near the Gulf of Oman. We'll have to be careful."

Great. He thinks, briefly, of Dundrum, of County Tipperary, of cool rain dropping through a softer sunlight than this with Cashel's cathedral ruins atop the huge rock outcrop rising through the mist. Just yesterday? Three weeks leave at an end?

There had been a few pints at the Diggers with the lads, O'Murchu a bit in his cups, going on about the ridiculous Englishman who's in charge of their U.N. unit. Then, as he'd left for the long walk home to Da's house on rain-slick macadam, there'd been hearty slaps on the back and laughing advice from Donleavy to "Keep the peace, Sean, no matter how many of the sheets you've got to shoot down to do it."

All quite jolly, really. Damn.

Helmet is talking. "I'm sending a continual distress code, tight beam, to the stationary platform. Help will be on the way soon, I should think. Still, it might be wise to...."

O'Murchu sighs. She nags him and he hates it. But on leave he'd found himself missing damn Helmet, wanting to ask her advice. You get used to that voice after awhile. Always there. Always useful.

"I know, I know," he says. "We need some shelter. At least I need some shelter." He runs his hand through the hot, gritty sand, takes a handful, throws it idly at Helmet. "You, you hunk of tin, you probably like all this."

"Hardly," says Helmet. "Can you walk?"

O'Murchu rises unsteadily to his feet, shakes as much sand as he can from Helmet, and puts her on, flipping down the visor. There, that's better, at least he can see without squinting now.

Not that there is much to see. Shadowless waste, he thinks, in every direction. Nothing, just vast amounts of nothing.

"That way," says Helmet, and rotates toward the right a few degrees, stops.

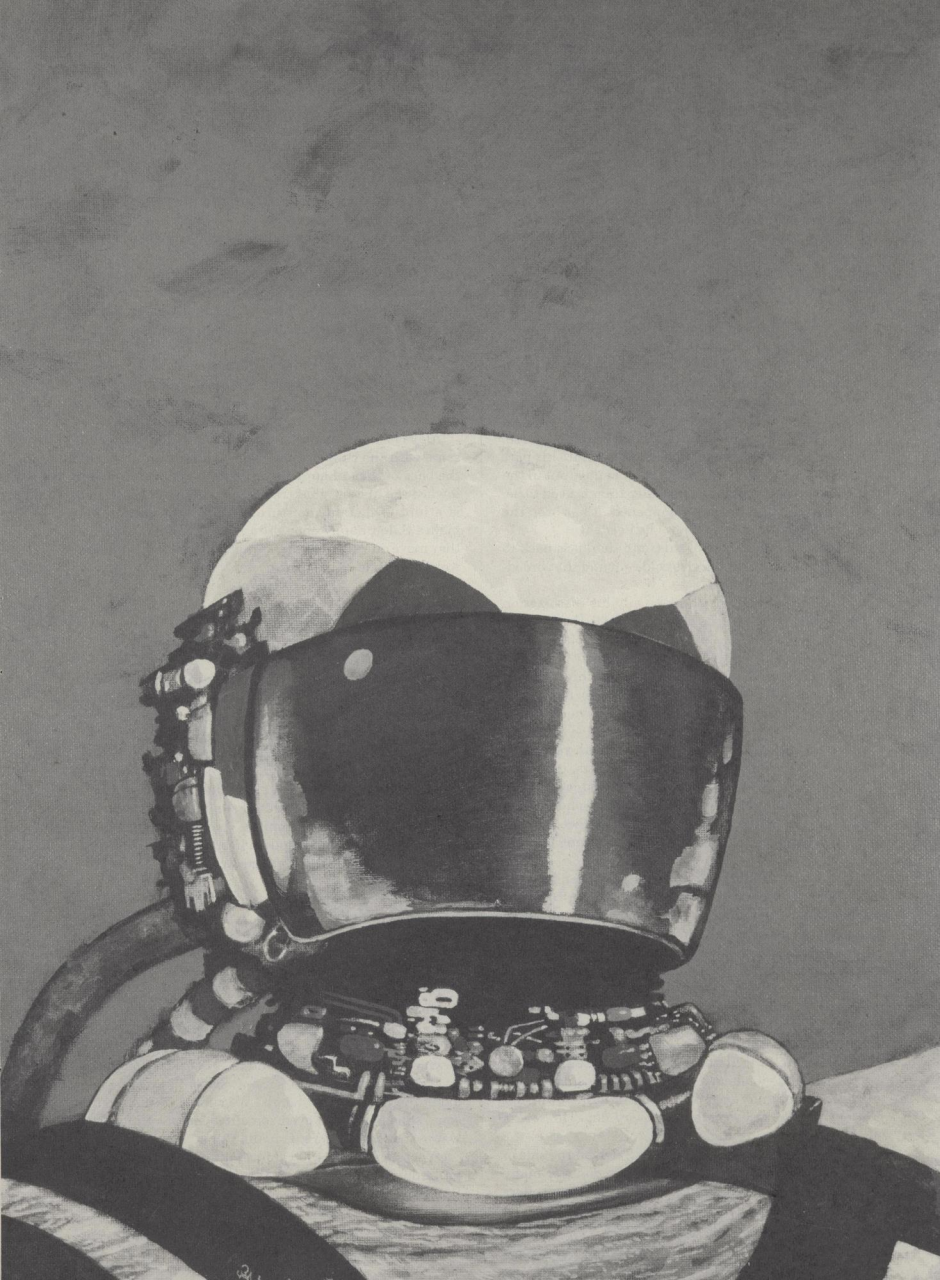
"Fine," says O'Murchu, thinking of cool rain and green grass and a few jars of the Guinness. And he starts walking, sinking into the sand with each step, but making progress, the three cables that connect Helmet to the aircraft trailing down behind O'Murchu's back as he stumbles forward. The thickest one, red-stripped so it can't be mistaken, is the power cable that feeds Helmet her life.

Two

Aleya Samoud tugs at Saleh's reins with that slight, repetitive jerking motion that keeps the camel moving.

As he rises over one dune he sees, in the far distance,

¹Reprinted from W. B. Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" by permission of A.P. Watt, Ltd. for Anne Yeats



the stand of ghaf trees that he's been aiming toward all day. There is water there, and if the wind would shift only slightly the moist scent of the well would reach the camel's flared nostrils and the tugging would no longer be necessary.

It is hard, unforgiving land he is walking over. But the Al Wahibah have lived here, on the edges of the Sands, since...well, Aleya wants to say forever, but knows better. They have been here since the late eighteenth century.

Forced south out of Qatar by the Janaba, then south again by the Al Bu'Isa, the remnants of the Al Wahibah finally found, two hundred years ago, the ghaf tree and the dew and the gazelle and the brief winter rains and a home.

Aleya loves this place, the sea a day's walk in his youth — and thirty minutes now in the Land Hover. He finds comfort in the warmth, the cycles of life, the great peace and calm of the petrified habl, these dunes frozen in place twenty thousand years ago when the winds formed ridges that have never moved since.

He shouldn't have brought Saleh out here, of course. With the Pacific Rim struggles spilling over into his part of the world, Aleya knows that a few quiet days out in the Wahib has become a great deal riskier than it used to be.

Still, nothing untoward has happened. It has been the quiet, brief holiday that he knows he needed.

He sighs. One more day of this, and then it is back to University, back to Edinburgh's cold rain and that brooding castle in the gray mist.

Just one more year, he thinks. Only his dissertation remains, and then he will be able to return to these Sands and begin the task of building the new schools that are already funded and wait only for his return.

His dissertation. He has managed to not think of it for fifty two-thirds of a day, but he never escapes it entirely: the bicameral mind, primitive man and the voices of the gods.

Julian Jaynes at Princeton first put it forth years ago, the idea that ancient man was not conscious, could not "think" in any modern fashion, but, instead, heard auditory hallucinations from the right hemisphere of the brain — voices of the gods that gave guidance, advice, commands based on tribal knowledge or a strong leader's will.

Aleya, on this holiday and others, has been seeking archaeological evidence in support of Jaynes, proof that in ancient man the two sides of the brain were connected only when the gods chose to speak.

And, Aleya thinks, modern man hears the voices of the gods, too, only now the gods are programmed to speak. It is little different, really, from Jaynes's idea of ancient guidance. In both cases someone, some tribal chief or politician or military commander or adept programmer, decides what the gods will say.

Aleya laughs to think of it. Despite his self-reliance, despite the independent nature of his people, of his heritage, he does not exempt himself from his own supposition. He, too, uses computers every day. He, too, is ruled by the new gods of information.

But not always. He turns and pats Saleh on the side of her head. She has been his irritable confidant for many years. This camel, he thinks, is truly his best friend, offers him better guidance than any god: Find water. Live a long life. Don't listen to too much advice. And persevere.

He is thinking of that, of perseverance, as he crests another habl, and there, halfway down the far side, is a jumbled pile of torn wreckage, some of it in the shape of a large chair, other parts not so identifiable.

Large sections, shards splintered away at the edges, almost seem torn as they reach up toward the blue sky. Others, including much of the chair shape, have cut their way into the dune, poking down into the rock to anchor the whole ruined contraption.

Aleya walks up to the shattered thing, pushes at it and finds it surprisingly light. Molecular composites, he thinks. Very high-tech, very stealth, very brand new — harder, better, than any of the titanium skins of a few years ago. Foolishly, he looks up to the sky for an aircraft this must have come from. There is nothing there but hard glare.

He reaches down, pulls at the material, and part of it, a two-meter-long pod, comes free easily from the rock. It is heavy, but he can lift it. The other section, the chair, is immovable, dug firmly into the rock.

Aleya looks the pod over carefully and then, struggling some with the cumbersome weight, lifts it up to tie onto the back of the unhappy Saleh. They begin moving again toward the distant ghaf trees. The wind shifts and there is a hint of distant moisture in the slight breeze. This makes Saleh happy enough to ignore the new load, and they move quickly toward the ghaf, and the well, and some welcome shade.

Three

"Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command..."

O'Murchu groans. He is waking up. Helmet has gone off his head and rolled a meter or so away. She is reciting again. Jesus, Shelley this time.

He wants to tell Helmet to shut up, or pick something less obvious, but everything seems very strange. O'Murchu can't recall falling down this rock-hard sand dune, can't remember blanking out. But here he is, face up in a few centimeters of loose drifted sand atop the rock. The sun has moved toward evening. There are shadows here at the base of the dune, and he lies in cooler shade.

"Shut up," he finally manages to say.

"You're awake."

"I'm awake," O'Murchu agrees. He tries to put his hands down into the sand to push himself up and feels moisture there. It isn't water, it is his blood, soaking into the sand. He has opened the shoulder wound again by falling and rolling down here.

He is very tired from all of this.

He tries to get up, but his arms are curiously weak and he can't seem to push hard enough to get the job done. He gives up after two tries and, instead, just puts his elbows down, sits up on them a bit, and tries to focus in on things.

"*Prosopis cineraria*, a sort of acacia-like tree, grows along the edges of the Sands. We should be able to find some shade, perhaps even some Bedouins with food and water, just east of here, I should think," Helmet says.

"You should think?" O'Murchu asks. Damn thing is programmed to add in these little conversational niceties. Supposed to be sort of a smart, portable friend for the pilots. That's the idea.

O'Murchu once thought it a particularly bad idea, even



tried to get her edited so she would just do her business, just direct the weaponry and keep the damn torch stable while O'Murchu rode around, an aerial Boru, keeping the peace, knocking down the ancient Mirages and F-4s and MiGs that the mercs still put into the sky now and again. But that was in the early days, two years ago, back before he'd really gotten to know her.

Now, though she can be a nuisance, can be irritable and demanding; still, he thinks, reaching over slowly to grab Helmet and pull her from the sand that has blown almost completely over her by this time — still, better a smart little mechanical companion than no friend at all under circumstances like these.

He puts her, slowly, tentatively, back on and lies back again on his elbows, exhausted from the effort.

After a few minutes, things clarify a bit. He sees a small plant, perhaps the size of his hand, only a meter away. It is the first living thing he's seen all day. Past it there are more, and their presence thickens as they rise up the opposite dune and disappear over its top.

"Plants," he says, and realizes as he speaks that he is very thirsty.

"The trees are not far off," Helmet says. "Rest for another minute, and then we'll walk to them. There may be water there."

"Water?" That, thinks O'Murchu, sounds interesting. He will just rest here for a few minutes, and then look for it.

He looks idly at the plant. As he watches, a small bug emerges from a tiny hole in the sand, walks quickly over to the stem, and climbs up the plant to begin eating.

"Tenebrionid beetle," Helmet says. "It lives off that plant and the moisture from the dew that collects between the particles of sand each night."

"Dew?"

"We're very close to the gulf here. A kilometer, no more."

The beetle is taking its time with the plant.

Moisture, O'Murchu thinks. He decides it is all a matter of attitude. He is determined to roll over and then sit up. Then will come standing. Then walking. Then moisture. In that order.

He puts his hand down into the soft sand. A few centimeters down is the rock. He pushes off, as hard as he can, and manages, with a great deal of effort, to rise a bit. Then the right arm gives way and he falls heavily onto the right shoulder.

"Damn," he means to yell, though it comes out a whimper.

In the collapse he has managed to roll onto his stomach. He decides to consider that a positive step. Still, he is so very tired. He should rest. In his ears, amplified, he thinks, by thoughtful Helmet, there is a distant roar, a hover. Someone is coming. That is good. He feels quite ready to be rescued.

Just before he closes his eyes he sees a shape, huge, rising over the dune to his right. Should he be worried about that? He is too tired to care.

At the Diggers he would just nod toward Sally behind the bar and the Guinness would be on its way, cool at the back of the throat. Moist. Pretty Sally. Complaints about all the rain. Wet leaves on tired macadam walking home against the chill and wet rain and hard blue sky to gray to black.

Four

Aleya stands at the top of the hahl and looks down to where he can see the pilot of the downed plane lying in the sand, quite still. Aleya wonders if the man is dead.

There is a small dark stain of blood on the sand under the fellow's right shoulder. Foolishly in this desert heat, the pilot is still wearing his helmet. It must be stifling inside that thing.

Aleya hears a muted, distant rumble and looks west. There, not far away, a cloud of dust rises from the Sands. A hovercraft, Aleya thinks, and heading this way.

It cannot be a rescue team for this pilot, that would come by Harrier or helicopter. No, it must be mercs, and they are confident, to be using such easily detected transportation in neutral Oman. They must be well-armed, they must be purposeful, and they will be here in minutes.

Aleya frowns at that thought, thinking through the implications of the situation. Then he tugs at Saleh and they begin to move down toward the pilot, who is alive, though not by much.

Aleya goes to the bag slung down Saleh's left side and pulls out the medkit and a coolpouch.

He can, at least, stop the blood flow, cleanse the wound, and get some water into the poor man. Then he can try to stabilize him until help arrives.

As to that, he also pulls out the comlink from the bag, keys in his father's home, and talks, quickly, with the duty guard who in turn puts him through to his father.

The Al Wahibah, Aleya's father says, will be quick to respond. They support the peacekeepers, who bring stability and profit, but Aleya must buy some time, even a few minutes will help.

That will take some doing, Aleya thinks as he slips the helmet off the man, gently rolls him over, and begins to bandage the shoulder. Aleya has only hand weapons with him, and they will be nothing against the people he will face in a few minutes.

This is going to require diplomacy and blind luck. He smiles to realize that. Diplomacy is in the blood of the Al Wahibah. As to luck. Well. He shrugs.

The pilot sputters as the water drips into his open mouth. His eyes open and he is conscious.

He tries to speak, but Aleya covers the man's mouth to stop him. There is no need for that.

The sound of the merc hover is quite loud now. It is a kilometer away, no more.

Aleya gives the man a bit more water, then rises from him and walks back to Saleh, who is skittish from the increasing noise. "Calm now, Saleh," he says to her. "Calm, pretty one. We will talk to these noisy people."

And O'Murchu is hearing Helmet say much the same thing, telling him that this sheet is fine, an ally, but that the mercs are close, and that she can set off the self-destruct in the Lantirn targeting pod that the guy, imagine this, has found out in the dunes somewhere and tied onto the back of his camel.

That's what the mercs want, that pod. It's the best targeting system in the world, has some new Euro wrinkles to improve on the old American design. Even better than what Nippon can offer.

If the sheet would just come over here so O'Murchu could pass the message along, they could leave the pod out there for the mercs to find, wait for them to gather around,

and solve two problems at once.

O'Murchu tries to speak. "Hey, you," he manages, barely audible.

The guy hears him, and turns. "Be quiet. Rest," he says, in perfect English.

"That pod," O'Murchu says, and tries to explain by raising his arm and pointing. That is a mistake. The pain is enormous. He faints and falls back onto the shadowed sand.

Five

Aleya wonders what the pilot wanted. He walks quickly down to him, kneels beside him, listens to his breathing. He is still alive, his breathing even seems a bit stronger.

The hover is quite loud now, and Saleh is very nervous. Aleya walks back up to her where she waits atop the hab, and then, to help calm her, slides the pod from her back and sets it on the rock.

Saleh, happy to be freed from the burden, kicks at the pod and sends it rolling down the backside of the dune. Aleya watches it lurch down the slope and is thinking of going to get it as the hover roar ceases.

Moments later four men and a woman crest the hab, just behind. They stare at Aleya, clearly did not expect to see him there.

One of them, the woman, dressed as the men are in khaki pants, shirt, worn brown boots, is wearing a com helmet that connects her to the gods know where. She walks down to the pod, leans over, rises, yells back to the others. They turn and disappear.

Aleya is beginning to think this might be easy. Perhaps they will be content with the pod. They haven't seen the pilot yet, and may not know he is there at all. Perhaps this is not as dangerous a situation as he feared.

He turns to walk back down to the pilot and is stunned to find the man crawling up toward him instead.

"That pod," the pilot says huskily as Aleya reaches down to support him. "That pod. My helmet will blow it for us. Must leave, get away."

It has all come out haltingly. Still, Aleya gets the message. But the man's helmet? Blowing the pod? The helmet is in the sand, back at the base of this dune. Aleya walks down to it, brings it back, hands it mutely to the pilot.

The bicameral mind, Aleya thinks, is alive and well right here in the Sands. And this is no simple analogy to the ancients, this is a step beyond what Aleya has been saying in his dissertation. The helmet is useless, dead, but this pilot still hears the voice of it, the voice of his own personal god.

"All right," says O'Murchu to Helmet, "just give us enough time to clear out, right?"

"Right," says Helmet, "but hurry."

O'Murchu looks up to the sheet. "You hear that?" he asks, "Must hurry out of here. Now."

Aleya, of course, has heard nothing.

Still, he humors the pilot, walks over to Saleh's reins, grabs them and tugs in slight jerks, walking back down the dune, then reaching down to help the pilot struggle to his feet. They set out, one last hab to crest and then into the ghafr trees.

They are almost there when the hover roars back to life, sand and dust rises behind them, and they know the mercs are coming to finish the job. Aleya thinks his luck

has not been good, and the chances for diplomacy look no better.

Then Aleya and the pilot look back as the hover crests the dune in front of it, the Lantern pod sitting upright in the back seat.

O'Murchu thinks it looks as if it belongs there and is out on some kind of crazy drive in the country. He thinks of the tourists — the silly, bloody English tourists — sitting up like that in the horse-drawn jaunting carts of Killarney.

"Now," O'Murchu says to Helmet. "Blow it now. This is the only chance. Please. Now."

But nothing happens. Aleya is not surprised.

The hover screams as it tears its way across the top of the hab and slides down.

Saleh, hearing that scream, finally gives up any semblance of control and bolts, pulling free from Aleya's grasp on the reins.

Panicked, the camel runs straight toward the intervening dune, scrambling wildly down one side and then up the next. There, while Aleya, still supporting the pilot, watches horrified, the camel and the hover meet, cresting the dune from opposite sides.

The driver tries to steer the hovercraft away, but he is no match for the maddened camel. They collide and the pod is tipped as the hover tilts. The pod falls out, jaunting cart ride in the country at an end.

Saleh is still alive, still maddened and now angry as well. Saleh has never met a vehicle she liked, and this one she feels particular distaste for. She kicks it, hard, with her rear legs.

O'Murchu turns to Aleya. "I'm sorry," he says, "but we've still got to blow it. Now." Aleya stares back at him. The man is mad, has forgotten his god's failure of moments before.

"Do it," O'Murchu says to Helmet.

Saleh's anger is pure, simple, direct. She is standing next to the pod. She sees it, kicks it hard, once, and then again, and then a third time before the flame and the smoke and the noise erupt, taking out the hover and the mercs and poor Saleh before washing across the motionless dunes in concussive waves of noise to overwhelm O'Murchu and Aleya.

Six

Aleya sits quietly in the shade of a ghafr tree and thinks over what he has just seen. He can hear his father's hover in the distance, help is one minute away now, too late for Saleh. The camel, he is thinking, was a good friend for a very long time.

O'Murchu, also quietly, is thanking Helmet, who is telling him it was nothing, she is sorry about the camel, and the sheet's people will arrive in another minute or two with more medical aid and water.

Aleya watches the pilot mumble and wonders how the poor man will handle finding out that his helmet has long been disconnected, that the voices he is hearing are of his own making.

Later, Aleya will include the whole incident in his dissertation, writing with considerable insight about the voices of the modern gods.

The dissertation will earn him his doctorate, with honors. He will be offered a postat the new Euro flight

(Continued to Page 87)

Due Process

By K.D. Wentworth

Art by Lori Deitrick

One of those expensive-type gray suits brings her into the courtroom, holding her arm like she was made of pure spun sugar. He takes one look at yours truly, then pulls a chair out for her down at the far end of the table, as far away from the disgusting likes of me as she can get.

Right away, I can see in those tearful soft brown eyes that she hasn't got the guts. I mean, they say only one in five does, so why should I worry?

I lean back in that cold metal chair they give all us prisoners so you'll squirm and squirm and never get comfortable. Then I nod when they shoot me The Big Question, because if I don't, old Jackie's gonna be in the clink for the Duration.

"Yeah," I say in a hoarse whisper and look down at the floor real sad-like. "It was all a terrible mistake. I never meant to kill no one that night. If she says, I'll Trade my life to bring him back." I pause to make sure everyone's listening. "I'll take his place."

Up on the bench, the sleek black box housing the Judicator 4190 flashes a few red lights just for show while it digests my stated willingness to Trade places with the cop what I burned down on the harbor last month.

Of course, it weren't no mistake at all, certainly not on my part and not on his neither. Don't let no one kid you on this. Cops are just as ready to flashcook one of us as we are them. Probably more.

After all, we ain't exactly out looking for *them* every night, if you know what I mean.

Finally the Judicator makes up its plas mind. "As the deceased left no children behind, final decision is in the hands of the widow."

"No!" This fine gent all dressed up in a shirt and tie bobs up out in the gallery like the insides of some rich kid's toy. "Ryan had parents and a brother and a sister! He was married! It ought to be an automatic sentence!"

"You're out of order, Mr. Williams," the Judicator tells him in its deep no-nonsense voice. The shirt-and-tie guy sits down because everyone knows there just ain't no point in arguing with one of these new 4190's.

It takes everything I got not to crack a smile; in spite of my many flaws, Jackie Floyd is not crazy. You wouldn't catch me copping no Trade Plea if there'd been munchkins involved. No way. Even a two-year-old knows the Big Trade is mandatory if the deceased has managed to hatch any rug-rats. Society don't want no maladjusted kids growing up without a mom or dad these days.

Course, if they'd ever got a load of my old lady, they might've changed their minds.

"Mrs. Williams, do you accept?" the Judicator asks.

Then she raises her face to me and her eyes look just like she's staring down from some thirtieth-floor window and thinking of jumping without no go-belt. I get a sudden case of icy shivers that run all the way through me.

"I — don't know." Her voice is so low like I can hardly hear her.

"You have ten days in which to make your decision," the Judicator says. "Court dismissed."

Ten days or ten years, I think, this skirt'll never have the nerve. All little honeys like her know is tennis and cocktail parties and shop 'til you drop. She don't know how to put the bite on me, not even to bring her old man back from the dead.

"Mara!" The shirt-and-tie from the gallery waits for her at the door, his arm around some old broad who's a real waterworks. I drag my heels a little when the security-bot starts pulling me toward the door so I can catch what he's up to. "You can't mean it," he says. "How can you even think about not Trading that piece of trash for Ryan?"

"I know that Ryan is — was your son," she says, "but this has to be my decision."

"He is my son!" The man grabs her by the arms and shakes her. "At least he is until you tell me that he's not coming back!"

"But to Trade that man's life for Ryan's." She shakes her head and I notice for the first time how she's got real fine long ink-black hair. "It would be like I killed him with my own hands."

"It would be nothing of the sort!" The shirt-guy's hands fall to his sides. "That goddamned pusher over there fried Ryan without a second thought. If you let him get parole out of this, he'll do it again, too, to someone else."

Then the security-bot gets wise to my act, kicks in its anti-gravs and drags me on out the door.

Too bad. Nothing I like better than a good show.

One day goes by. Two. I watch the vid and see how this Ryan Williams's father goes back into court to try and get the decision turned over to him. His boy, Ryan, and this Mara-dame were only married for two weeks, he says. She hardly knows him, he says. Not like his own family.

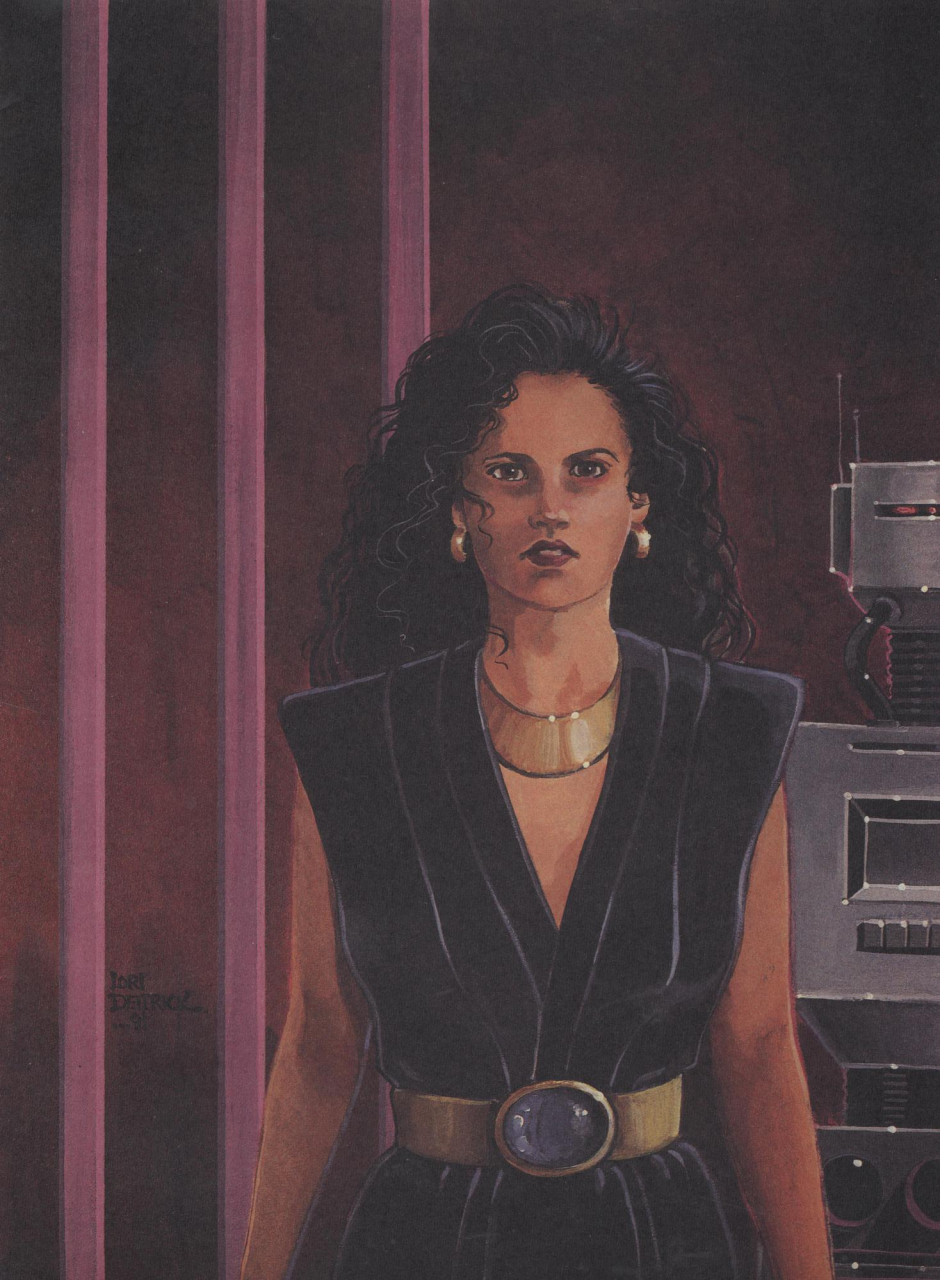
I can see how this shirt wants me to fry real bad, and I sweat it a little bit, but not too much. After all, I did my research before copping the plea. There's no record of a Judicator ever taking the Big Decision out of the spouse's hands.

Three days. Four. I get a request from a visitor coming over the status board in my cell. Someone out there wants to see me. Do I have time?

A crazy giggle bubbles up in my throat. Do I have time? Well, that's a rich one all right. I stand up and type back — Yes, but only a few minutes.

Sure, I think, I got a bit of time I ain't doing nothin' with, about fifty or so years.

It's her, dressed in a little black outfit that rustles like the wind blowing through autumn leaves.



1981
DARROW
L. 21

Black, I think. She knows old Ryan ain't coming back. She stares at me for a long time without saying nothing. I stare back, wondering what the hell she wants. She'll never do it, I think, just like you don't go eating no cow what you've met personally. She's just looking for an excuse not to do it.

"Why did you agree to Trade?" Her words come out in a rush, her voice all high-pitched and strained.

"I dunno." I think that she looks thinner, like she hasn't eaten in a month. Her cheeks are all hollow-looking and her eyes stand out huge and dark in her pale face. "Cause I'm sorry, I guess."

"You don't mean that." Her fingers tighten on the little black bag she's carrying. "You just said you'd Trade so you'd get a possibility of parole."

It's true, but hearing it out loud like that makes me mad all the same. "Look, lady!" I move up to the bars and stare between them at vertical slices of her trembling face. "My life's in your hands now, so either take or leave it, but quit screwing me the hell around!"

She doesn't even flinch back from me. "I have six more days until I have to decide."

I begin to think that maybe this little honey is stronger than what I gave her credit for. "Six more days to make me sweat it, right?"

"No." She drops that out there real quiet-like and leaves it laying for a while. Finally, she edges a step nearer to the cell, so close that we're almost breathing on each other now. "If I let them Trade you for Ryan, then I will have killed you. And if I don't, then I will have killed Ryan." A single tear tracks down her cheek as she turns away. I hear real soft, "I don't want to kill anybody."

I shake my head and go stretch out on my flop. "Look, lady, it's your problem now, not mine." I let my eyes follow the river system of cracks across the ceiling. "There ain't nothin' I can do to make up your mind for you."

"Yes, you can." She's leaning up against the bars now, touching them, trying to see inside. "Tell me why you did it. Make me understand."

For a second, my mind goes back to that foggy night on the harbor, hearing the thrum of the cop's hopper as it comes right down on top of me while I got three kilos of Burn-dust packed inside my jacket. And I know that if I don't deliver this stuff before the night is over, the Big Man himself is gonna slice me personally.

It's either me or the cop. I choose me.

She don't want to know that, though. "It was an accident," I say, folding my arms behind my head. "I didn't see his uniform. I thought he was gonna rob me."

She wraps her hands around the steel bars. Jeez, what tiny fingers, I think.

"What about the drugs, Mr. Floyd?"

I close my eyes. "I don't know nothin' about no drugs, lady. Someone must've planted them on me after my arrest."

When I open my eyes again, she's gone, but I can smell her perfume left behind on the bars.

Funny, but I didn't think that she was wearing any.

Seven days. Eight. Nine. The vid is quiet and I think that maybe no one cares now but me. And maybe this Ryan guy — if he can care, wherever he is.

I lie on the flop, counting the lumps in the mattress,

and wonder, if they do send me back to be fried by myself in his place, will it hurt? I try to remember if I saw my own face when I looked up and lasered the cop, but I remember nothing special, just the flash of the blood-red laser and the falling body, no face at all.

Ten days. She has to say today, one way or another. I smile as I hear the security-bot whirring down the corridor to get me.

If she was gonna do it, she would've done it already. I mean, all the statistics say that only one widow in five ever does.

Now, widowers are a different matter, of course. Men can make up their minds and get on with it. I shudder, feeling glad that Old Man Williams hasn't got the say-so today.

The courtroom is packed, mostly with media types. Mara Williams is already waiting when I get there. The cold metal chair creaks a little as I perch on the edge of the seat and my feet wander around like starving roaches. For some reason, I can't seem to stay still.

"The court will come to order," the Judicator 4190 says real loud, and the buzz dies down until I can hear the ticking of someone's old-fashioned watch.

"Have you come to a decision, Mrs. Williams?"

"Yes." She doesn't look at me, and for the first time I have a real nasty feeling crawling around in the pit of my stomach. "I authorize the Trade."

I stare at her soft round face in disbelief. I can't believe that this little *skirt* has the nerve to kill anyone. Where in blazes did she find the guts?

I realize that I'm standing up, but I don't know how I got there. My lips move, but not so much as a squeak comes out.

"Sentence to be carried out immediately," the Judicator says. "Court dismissed."

The security-bot rises on its anti-gravs and tows me off toward the other door, the one on the opposite side of the room — the door where they do it to you.

Just as I pass through the door, I get a glimpse of Old Man Williams's face. He looks like he just won the lottery. Mara, though, she looks like it's her that's gonna buy it, not me.

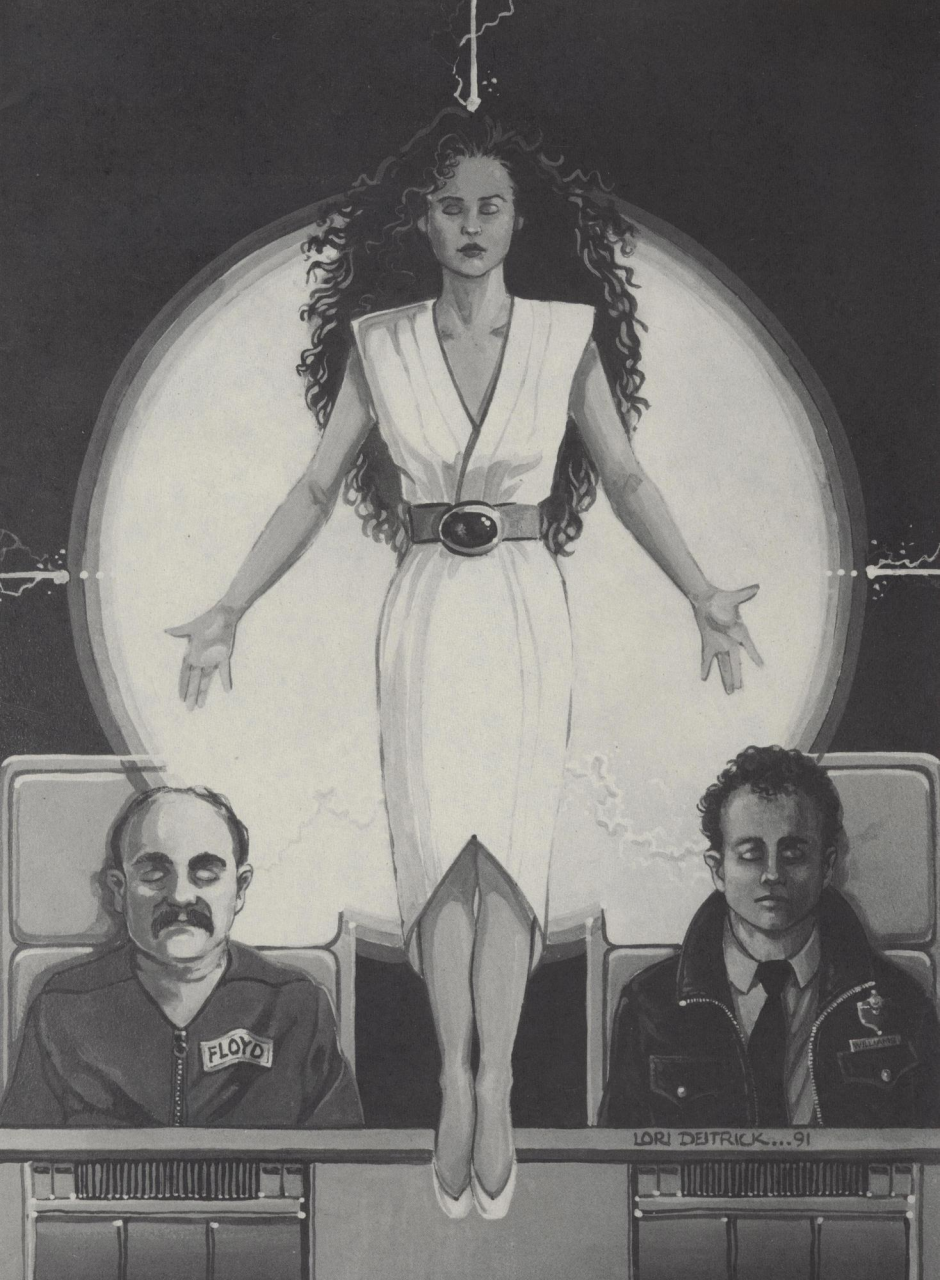
Inside, the lab boys are already fiddling with the coordinates, fine-tuning the Translocation chamber to take me back to that time and place where Officer Ryan Williams and Jackie Floyd crossed paths. They're gonna shove me in that thing, and when they're done, it'll be me lying back there on the docks all fried like a piece of burned bacon, and Ryan Williams will be standing right here.

At the last second, just as they're strapping me in, she opens the door and comes into the room.

She wants to be there when old Ryan gets back, I think. "I hope you both live to be a million years old!" I scream at her. "Because every night when you close those big brown eyes and try to sleep, you're gonna see my face and know what you did, every goddamned night for the rest of your life!"

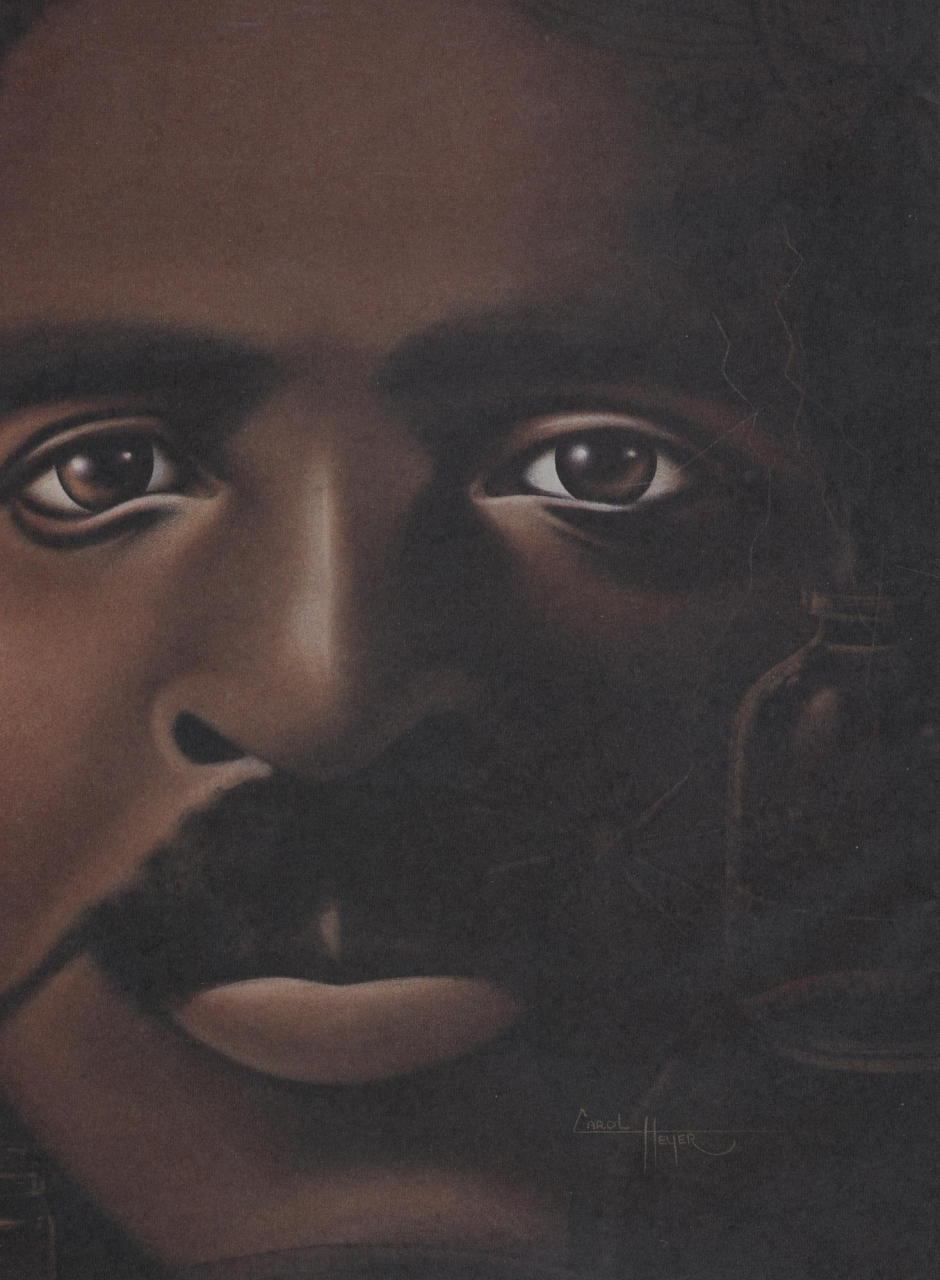
Then a roomful of bees are buzzing all over my body. I tense for the pain, and the world turns inside out. There I am, standing just outside the cop hopper in the drizzle and the fog, holding Ryan's pistol and wearing his

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FLOYD

LORI DESTRICK...91



CAROL MEYER

Black Earth and Destiny

By Thomas A. Easton

Art by Carol Heyer

Come outside, young Henry." The tall black man set aside the new journal he had been perusing and stood up from his desk and the small bundle of mail that awaited his attention. "This just came," he said. "But ..." His voice was thin and piping, the result of childhood illnesses that had damaged his vocal cords. The boy was the son of Henry Cantwell Wallace, an assistant at the Iowa State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts. The older Wallace was also the director of the experiment station where George Carver ran the greenhouse.

Carver and young Henry had met two years before when the boy, then only six, had come across the lanky botanist on one of his frequent tramps along the muddy verge of the Skunk River. Carver had explained that he was hunting for fungi, plant diseases, and the boy had been fascinated. Despite the difference in their ages and their races, they had become fast friends. Now, hand in hand, they left the greenhouse and its ranks of crops and roses, of hybrids and Mendelian adoptions.

Before them now stretched endless acres of Iowa's dark soil, divided into squares covered with new corn, barely begun to spread its blades to the life-giving sun, and other squares, in contrasting shades, with legumes and other crops. The more varied greens of wild vegetation marked the watercourses that bordered the fields. And all of it — the green, the vibrant blue of the arched bowl of sky above, the very tension in the air, as if a thunderstorm were marching, with golden lightning crashes for its strides, in their direction — seemed to presage events of great moment. Carver had felt it that morning, when he rolled from his narrow bed. He felt it more sharply now, as if those presaged events were almost upon them.

Carver took a deep breath. "You know," he said, "that the soil cares for the plants, and the plants care for the soil. What one plant takes from the soil, another returns."

"Corn," said young Henry. "And beans and chickpeas. Crop rotation." His voice, though it was of course a boyish treble, was yet not as high as Carver's.

The man nodded. "Exactly," he said. "God's plan is a marvelous thing to behold, and we have a duty to help it along as best we can. To learn about things like crop rotation and fallowing and fertilizers."

"If we don't, sir, the soil dies, doesn't it?"

"Exactly right, young Henry. If we fail to help God's plan, well, God will shrug us off. He will, let's say, decide that we are just too stone-dumb to catch on, and He will concern Himself with other matters."

The boy looked at the man skeptically. "That isn't what the Reverend says."

"Ah, well," said Carver. "Ah, well. But the truth remains. The poor farmers of the south need not be poor, if only they understood what you know so well about crop rotation. But there is more. Consider the earthworms." They had come to a pair of wooden bins, each one half full of dark, black soil in which grew young tomato plants. The plants in one bin, however, were twice the size of those in the other.

"Earthworms, sir?" The boy was still skeptical, but he knew better than to walk away from George Carver. Time and again, the man had surprised the boy, as he surprised adults of every kind and race, with the ideas that sprang from his brain.

But now Carver simply bent and dug his fingers deep into the soil of one bin, and then of the other. Each time, he churned to the surface several large worms of the sort one might use when fishing. Those from the soil that fostered the larger plants were a trifle grayer in hue. "They till the soil," he said. "Their tunnels let air and water reach the roots, and their casts bring deeper soil to the surface. But these ..." He pointed at the grayer worms. "These do something else as well."

After a pause, he continued. "The legumes do what they do," he said. "Because the bacteria that live in the little knots upon their roots take nitrogen from the air and put it in the soil. Fertilizer, my boy. And Morgan learned two years ago that it is possible to soak one kind of bacterium in the juices of another and so transfer the Mendelian particles that make that other what it is."

The boy's eyes were wide. "Is that what you did?"

"In a way, young Henry. In a way. I ground up nodules I collected from pea roots to prepare the juice. I added some juice from a fungus that seems to help when I want to persuade a cutting of one plant to adopt the particles from a different plant. Then I soaked the eggs of earthworms in the resulting mixture."

"And the adoption worked!"

"Exactly. These earthworms ..." He held a gray one in the palm of his hand. "Their soil is richer because they enrich it not only with tunnels and casts, but also with fertilizer."

"Have you published?" Carver had told the boy many times that it was essential to share whatever one learned with those who might benefit.

"Of course. I was looking at the paper when you came in." He smiled gently. "They were kind enough to put my offer of samples of the worms on the very first page."

Later, after Carver and the boy had inspected the plantings outside the greenhouse, including young Henry's own plot of hybrid potatoes, the man sniffed the air. Thunder coming? he asked himself. Lightning? Something, and he wished he knew *what*. Then he returned to his desk. It stood toward one end of the greenhouse, where he could keep an eye on his beloved greenery, looking up from his paperwork to spot the merest hint of smut or rust, of insect infestation or nutrient deficiency. To one side of the desk stretched the broad workbench where he performed his experiments.

But he had hardly laid a hand on the stack of his mail before the creak of the greenhouse door struck him with all the import of the storm he had been awaiting all the morning. He jerked his head up abruptly, and two figures

were stepping through the doorway. These were no boys, but full-grown men wrapped in long overcoats. Their boots were shiny beneath the mud they had acquired on the grounds of the experiment station, and their shirtfronts were snowy white. One, a little taller than the other, wore an open, cheerful expression on his face. The other's lips were pursed, and his gaze roamed the greenhouse as if he expected attack.

"Where's Dr. Carver, boy?" asked the latter brusquely. "We're in a hurry."

Carver suppressed the stiffening of his face that came to him far too often when whites realized that his skin, for all his growing reputation as a plant scientist and Mendelian engineer, was black. "Not doctor," he said. "Just George Carver."

"Well, where is he?"

"I am he."

"You? A nigger?" The other gave him a long and hostile stare. Then he turned to his companion and said, "Let's go, Alvin. We've got enough niggers in Nashville. There's no point in importing any more."

The taller man looked pained, but he held out a broad hand with no trace of hesitation or revulsion. "Mr. Carver?" he said. "I'm pleased to meet you."

He accepted the hand with a quiet sense of relief that not every white was like the other, and even gratitude for the simple fact of being called "Mr." That was, almost everywhere in this year of 1896, a title reserved for whites. The gratitude was undiminished by the awareness that it might well be just what he was intended to feel. He said simply, "Yes, sir?"

"I'm Alvin Bryant. From the Hermitage." Shortly after the War Between the States, when Carver was still the child known as Carver's George, the Hermitage Federal Research Institute in Nashville, Tennessee, had become the locus for the nation's most advanced biological research.

Carver stole a glance at his mail. The envelope on the top of the stack bore the postmark of Tuskegee, Alabama. That made him curious, for he could think of no one there whom he knew.

Beside the mail was the well-thumbed Bible Aunt Mariah Watkins had given him one Christmas years before. She had also told him that he had a responsibility to give his learning back to his people. She had meant their fellow blacks; he himself had never felt that the return of his gift should be so restricted.

The visitor continued: "Dr. Burbank has instructed us to tell you that in his opinion your earthworm paper represents a marvelous piece of work."

"Ah," said Carver, looking up again. "I have hopes for my worms. If I can just get them into the hands of the small farmer, they should do a great deal to lift him out of poverty. I've thought of taking a wagon ..."

"Just so, of course. But Dr. Burbank thinks you have a great deal more to offer. Especially if you can get the proper equipment. And we're supposed to invite you to come back to Nashville with us."

"They don't know he's a nigger, Alvin. And when they find out ..."

Alvin Bryant sighed. "Shut up, Timothy. You know as well as I, it's the man's brain that matters, not the color of his skin."

"I do not. You know as well as I, niggers are dumb,

filthy, good for nothing but stoop labor. They wouldn't even know what to do with a potato if they couldn't watch an Irishman sniffing at one."

Another sigh. "If you can't shut up, then leave. Go home. I'll follow later, with Mr. Carver if he'll come."

"Good-bye, then. But don't complain to me if you wind up with fleas." He turned on his heel and left, slamming the door so hard that the greenhouse's panes shivered in their frames.

"I'm sorry, sir," said Alvin Bryant. "But I do hope you'll come. They've already set a laboratory aside for you."

Carver stared at his visitor. Even a "sir"! "You take me aback, sir," he said in his piping voice. "I am nonplussed. I am." He paused for a moment before adding, "I will have to think about your kind offer for a moment or two before I can even discuss it properly. Have a seat." He gestured toward a cane-bottomed stool that stood before the workbench. "And at any rate, I must finish looking at my mail before I could possibly leave."

For some reason, he did not wish to open the Tuskegee letter immediately. He set it aside while he opened envelopes from other towns and states. One held praise for the paintings the botanist had lately exhibited at an art fair in Cedar Rapids and invited him to consider sending his No. 99, *Yucca gloriosa*, to another exhibit in Indianapolis. He smiled at the praise but only shook his head at the invitation; then he hastily took pen in hand to put his response into words. Other letters held requests for earthworms, and these made him speak aloud. "Already!" he said to his visitor from the Hermitage. "See? The people want what I can give them."

"And so do we at the Hermitage," said Alvin Bryant. "Those requests only prove your value to humanity, and the nation, and us."

Only the letter from Tuskegee remained. Carver opened it at last and finally read the invitation to come and create a department, a school, of agriculture: "I cannot offer you money, position, or fame. The first two you have. The last, from the place you now occupy, you will no doubt achieve. These things I now ask you to give up. I offer you in their place work — hard, hard work — the task of bringing a people from degradation, poverty and waste to full manhood." The signature was that of a man who called himself Booker T. Washington.

Wordlessly, the botanist held the letter toward the man from the Hermitage. As wordlessly, Bryant took it and read. When he was done, he said, "I know of this man. He wants to build a school for your race. He wants to teach 'the man farthest down' how to read and write and build and make and thus to move him, and all Negroes, toward equality with whites."

"To do that, then," said Carver, "he must also give them food." No one could know the grinding poverty of the southern black farmer — and not black alone, and black or white most truly "the man farthest down" — better than he. He had grown up with it all around him. He had spent all his boyhood and young adulthood wandering through a human landscape scarred by it. "He needs me."

"He can have you just as well if you come to work with us. And with us, I dare to say, you will be able to produce many more such marvels as your earthworms."

"But would I be free, sir, to pursue those marvels? You have a reputation for seeking weapons."

"The alligator cannons?" Bryant snorted. "When Jack-



son won in '24, that legend still obsessed him. He was there, at the Battle of New Orleans, and he saw no one stuffing alligators with cannonballs and powder. But the scholars say that he was jubilant after turning Clay around, and that the mythmakers were able to convince him the possibility was worth pursuing. He put Federal money into our science, and when Mendel discovered his particles, we were prepared to grasp that banner and carry it forward. The rest you know. Alligator cannons are a matter for the distant future."

"But still ..."

"Yes, he was a war hawk. And yes, we did find a gas that can kill soldiers on the battlefield. But Burbank himself developed the whiffle-tree, which removes that gas, and other noxious vapors, from the air. For every weapon, there is a defense, and to those defenses we pay far more attention. Often enough, they have great value in times of peace as well. That whiffle-tree, for instance, is doing much to make the air of our cities sweet again."

Carver nodded slowly. "But the best defense of all," he said. "It must be a strong people, well fed, free of tyranny."

"Even the tyranny of hatred, sir."

He nodded again. "You make your point well. But still, I will have to think on it. You tempt me. But so does Washington."

That afternoon, Carver and young Henry Wallace were walking near the river. "He has taken a room with Dr. Pammell," he told the boy. He halted the motion of his long legs and bent over a weed. "What is that?" he asked, pointing at a spatter of dark spots on a leaf.

"A mold. It will eat into the plant and make it sick," said the boy. He had learned well.

"Yes," said Carver. "And I am afraid there is a mold in the Hermitage as well. It is that interest in those weapons of destruction that our science might yield." He looked upward. To the southwest, the thunderstorm whose promise he had felt all day was finally visible, its towering anvils rising against the sky.

"But you said they work on defenses too."

The man nodded. "Yet the weapons must always come first. You cannot design a defense before you know what you must defend against."

"Can't the weapons come second?" asked the boy. "Your earthworms ..."

"Yes?"

"Couldn't you make them to produce a poison?"

Carver looked thoughtful for a long moment. "Perhaps," he said at last. "Though I would think the poison should kill the worms before much damage was done."

They walked on in companionable silence, man and boy. Eventually, the man halted to stare out over the river, southward. The thunderheads were already higher above the horizon, and the water, its reflection of the sky, was shifting its color from blue to stormy gray. "There is mold in Tuskegee too," he said quietly. "And more than one."

Young Henry said nothing, though he rummaged in a pocket and found a single flat stone. Swinging his arm, he sent it skipping over the water. Fifty feet from shore, it sank, leaving a chain of ripples spreading from its path.

"Washington has nothing but energy and high intentions," said Carver at last. "And a crying need for what he wishes to do. All that may not be enough. And if it is ..."

He paused. "The whites in Tuskegee may not be pleased to see blacks improving themselves."

"Then he needs all the help he can get, doesn't he?"

"Heennrrrryyy!" The voice echoed from the yellow house on the hill behind them.

"That's my mother," said the boy. "I've got to go."

Carver stared after the small figure as it ran, thinking that if he were married, he might have a son like that, only black, of course. Yet he was alone. Surely, he would remain so, for he was sure God had a plan for him that would leave no room for a wife and children. Already, his work consumed all his time and interest. When he learned what God's plan was, he thought, he would be even less able to spare the time and devotion a family would require, and deserve.

What were his choices? He could, he supposed, stay where he was. He was valued, he was doing good work, useful work, work that would benefit everyone when in due time it reached those who needed it. If he went to Tuskegee, well, Booker T. Washington did need help, didn't he? He needed it desperately. And if there he could develop fewer novelties such as his earthworms, whatever novelties he did find, whether they were his own or someone else's, he would be able to take directly to the farmers who needed them most. He would be free to take those farmers in hand and show them how to repair their soil and improve their diet and broaden their choice of crops. He would ... He realized he was smiling. What he saw in Tuskegee would be a colossal pile of work, just as Washington's letter had promised, but work had never scared him. Why, how could it? He had worked his way from town to town as a laundry man and harvester and cook and everything until he could graduate from high school. And then college, though the principal of the first, when he had seen the color of his skin, had said, "You didn't tell me you were Negro. Highland College does not take Negroes."

That memory still hurt, though it had been buried beneath more recent memories of kinder days in Iowa. In Tuskegee, surely, it would stay buried, for he would be among his own kind. In Nashville, there were men like Timothy. There were as well men like Alvin Bryant and Luther Burbank, who had come from California to direct the Hermitage, and Thomas Hunt Morgan, the biologist who had discovered the technique of transduction. There were also the towers of the Hermitage's laboratories, gleaming like ivory though they were made of simple limestone.

Thunder rolled. Distant lightning flashed. Raindrops pocked the river's surface and struck at his head. He felt his face. Yes, his smile was less, just as he had suspected. They wanted Mendelian adoptions. They wanted to put him in a laboratory. If he agreed, he would be far from the soil he loved and farther from the people — his people — whose problems he ached to solve, whether they required his ability to induce Mendelian adoptions or a more plebeian insight into the value of a compost heap.

God's plan. Not money. That was, for him, only a means to an end, to schooling, to food, to helping others. Any more than that was a nuisance. Not fame. That was irrelevant. It meant nothing, less than nothing, to him. But service. And Tuskegee was where his service was needed most.

When Carver returned to the greenhouse, he was soaked through and through, and the wave of heat that greeted him was welcome. "I saw you coming," said Alvin Bryant. "I lit the stove. And the lights."

"Thank you," said Carver as he removed his jacket and positioned a chair to hold it near the heat. "I was not expecting to see you here."

The other shrugged. "There is not much to do," he said. "I'm supposed to bring your decision, if not you yourself, back to Nashville with me, and I must wait. In the meantime, perhaps I can help by answering your questions."

Carver shook his head. "I have made my decision," he said. "God has a plan for me. I've always thought so. A destiny, if you will, though I never knew what it was until this day of your arrival."

"Ah!" Bryant's eyes opened wide with expectancy.

"No," said Carver, and the visitor's face fell. "Something else came today as well."

"Washington's letter."

Due Process

(Continued from Page 80)

uniform, damp with his sweat. "No!" I try to shout to the other Jackie, the one that's standing twenty or so feet away, already swinging the laser's muzzle up. "No, it's m—"

The pain is so bad, I don't even feel it at first, just the pressure of intense light bathing me from head to toe as it turns my body into ashes. Then it comes and I scream and scream, but I have no throat left so it doesn't do any good at all.

Then, just as I feel the blackness sucking me in, I'm back in the Translocation chamber again, all strapped in like before, but it's several minutes until I realize that I don't hurt anymore so it's okay to stop screaming now.

The lab men in white come and unstrap me. "What happened?" I ask them, my throat all raw and hoarse. "Did she lose her nerve or what?" I look down at my shaking hands. They're pink and whole. I still can't believe this. I never heard of an aborted Trade, not even once when I was doing all that research.

No one in the room will look at me. I straighten up and flex my arms, my legs. I don't see her anywhere. Guess she couldn't take it after all.

But then I see *him*. At first, I don't believe that either. I mean, it was either him or me, and it certainly ain't me, so how can we both be here at the same time? But that square face topped with curly brown hair, they show it every time on the vid, the great son, the great husband — the great cop.

Ryan Williams.

I begin to get a funny feeling. "Where's the skirt?" I say, looking around again, because I don't get it. How can he be here, fresh back from the dead, and she not be all snuggled up in his arms? Isn't that what this whole farce was about?

No one answers me. It's like I'm not here.

Then Old Man Williams puts an arm around Ryan's shoulders. "Come on, son," he says, "let's go home."

Ryan's eyes look like he's been to the other side of Hell and back. He doesn't move. "How could you?" he whispers, but he's not talking to me. "How could you let her do it?"

"Do what?" I shout, but even then, I break out in a cold

"Exactly so. Whether you had come or no, indeed whether or no there were such things as Mendelian engineering and Hermitages, my destiny would be the same."

"You'll go to Tuskegee."

"My science is for the people." Carver nodded gravely, though his face seemed illuminated from within.

Carver's clothing steamed in the heat given off by the stove. The two men stared through the greenhouse's panels at the storm outside. The silence stretched and stretched, neither man willing to break it, until a lightning bolt forked toward the ground not far away.

The crash of thunder came so promptly on the lightning's heels that Carver thought of the river and the trees upon its banks, at the mercy of whatever storms might rage.

So too, he thought, were his people. Unless, at Tuskegee □

sweat because I'm beginning to know. The security-bot moves in and clamps its metal ring around my arm.

"She Traded herself for you," Old Man Williams says without looking at me. "She said that she couldn't live with this on her conscience and if we didn't let her, she'd commit suicide the first time we weren't looking." There is a silence big enough to drown Tomorrow in. "She said it was her right. 'All killers have the right to Trade with their victims.'"

Then the security-bot drags me away, out that door that no one is supposed to come back through. Goddamn, I think, who would've thought it? That little skirt had the last laugh after all.

Now, it's her face that I'm gonna have to see every night for the rest of my life. □

Helmet

(Continued from Page 77)

college, helping pilots learn to use their technology and avoid being used by it. The flight college is in Ireland, in County Tipperary.

Aleya will accept the position, but only on a half-year basis. The other half he will spend at home, building the new schools, wandering the Wahiba Sands with a camel that is, sadly, not nearly as irritable as Saleh.

O'Murchu, too, after some months of therapy, will be at the flight college, instructing the next generation in how to avoid the mistakes of the past one.

He will become friends with Aleya, the man who saved his life. From time to time he and Aleya will visit the Diggers, where Aleya will drink mineral water over ice and O'Murchu will have a few jars of the Guinness and they will laugh and smile and reminisce about how it all was.

And then O'Murchu will wander home in the cool rain, shrug off his coat and hang it by the door, take several careful steps into the sitting room, turn and lower himself into the worn armchair that once was Da's, and stare at the book cabinet, where Helmet sits, centered there in a place of honor, an altar almost, a shrine. □

Boomerangs

(Because the last two issues were crammed full of material for the swaps of editorial content between Aboriginal and Interzone, we had very little space for letters. In this issue, we hope to catch up. We welcome letters about the swap, or anything else about the magazine that strikes you. We appreciate praise (because all but one of us is human) and constructive criticism (because we want to keep improving). — Ed.)

LIFE SUPPORT

Dear Mr. Ryan,
"Life Support System" (Aboriginal No.24), by Lois Tilton, grabbed me where I live. I am a Respiratory Therapist. That means I and others like me spend a good deal of our time managing the respirators that keep those preemies alive, and we spend even more time wondering about the ethics of that fight.

It is awe-ful to see those tiny lives struggling against all odds for survival. The pain of living for them must be intense, and we frequently wonder if it is really all worth it. This story captures the feelings I have had time and again in Intensive Care Nurseries.

I read Ms. Tilton's bio, but could not find mention of hospital experience. Somewhere, somehow she must have had experience in an ICN, to have so accurately captured all the questions, the dilemmas, the ambivalence those of us who care for these infants face.

I would like to see an anthology of science fiction dedicated to health care workers. The area in some ways is the most futuristic around. The things we can do to keep a body alive are incredible, and sometimes we lose sight of humanity in our technology. The stories I would propose are those that best capture that tension. Heading the list is Harlan Ellison's "I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream," with "Life Support" a close second choice.

Currently I am teaching Respiratory Therapy, and in line with the above paragraph, I would like reprints of this story for my students. It teaches a lesson no lecture could possibly impress on them as effectively.

Chris Blazer, RRT
Great Falls, Montana

GUNS 'N' BUTTER

Dear Editor,
I received my first issue of your magazine today (#26) and was quite tempted to cancel my subscription — the

cause of this being the Guns or Butter article. (A Message From Our Alien Publisher — "Guns or Butter," Ed.)

This article is probably the worst piece of gun control trash I've ever read! It was either poorly researched or not researched at all. Also, it is full of misstatements and outright lies, like most of the anti-gun items.

One, to purchase a firearm in this country, you must show positive identification and usually wait 48 or more hours to take possession of the weapon, especially handguns. No forms are required for food.

Two, you must file forms with the federal government stating your name and social security number and questions on your criminal record and residency.

Three, ownership of firearms is guaranteed by the Bill of Rights — Article Two. It is second only to the guarantee of your right to say and print the trash you did. As such, it's considered the insurance policy for the Constitution. Without legal, private firearms owners, we would be in the same situation as the various republics in the Soviet Union. Recently the people of Lithuania were unable to prevent the over-taking of their printing and broadcast resources by armed soldiers.

Four, making something illegal doesn't make it go away. If that were so, we could wipe out everything from homelessness to murder to environmental dangers with the scratch of a legislative pen. There are already tens of thousands of gun laws on the books in this country. Unfortunately, many are not enforced, or if they are, a poor justice system lets the criminal go free.

Keep in mind I respect all aspects of the Constitution, not just those that effect me in my choice of occupation. As such, I'm not cancelling my subscription provided you: 1) Print honest, researched material; and 2) Concern yourself with sf-related issues in a sf magazine.

David Kvergas
Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania

Sir,

First, thank you for your personal request that I renew my subscription for life at the cost of \$250! I enjoy *Aboriginal Science Fiction* and was reading my March-April issue and thinking about it. But, because of the article on page 15, *A Message From Our Alien Publisher*, please consider this letter as official notice to cancel my subscription.

My suggestion to the Alien is to butter this.

Thank you,
Michael D. O'Dell
Denver, Colorado

Dear Sir,

The first issue of my newly renewed subscription arrived a short time ago, in a "plain brown wrapper." I was enjoying it, until I came to the *Message From Our Alien Publisher* "Guns or Butter".

My suggestion is that he (she, it?) keep its nose (snout, pores?) out of Earthly affairs.

I'm a longtime shooting enthusiast. Even before a four-year stint in the U.S. Marine Corps in World War II, I participated in rifle matches. After the war and college, it remained a hobby. I was active in competition shooting, collected Swiss firearms, handloaded and hunted.

I also worked part-time in a gun shop in Philadelphia and, I must admit, there were times when I questioned the sagacity of selling a pistol to some of the customers.

But your editorial is full of holes. First, it's a lot more complicated buying a gun than "buying butter."

In any case, a person determined to get a gun will do so — in spite of any law that might be devised. The only people who might be deterred are law-abiding citizens who wouldn't use one illegally anyway. Any crook or thug or kook can get one, anyway.

I think your figures are a lot of crap, too.

This latest farce, the Brady Bill, is an example of trading off a right (Second Amendment) for a "higher purpose." I'll bet the media would raise a big squawk if the First Amendment were threatened. The Second Amendment was added for a purpose — it helps to ensure that the people have a final recourse to oppressive government!!

California now has a "waiting period" and they brag about how many felons were prevented from getting guns — BS — that was "how many legally."

Assault rifles are another "buzz-word." Have you scanned stats regarding how many incidents of "assault rifle" attacks there are? Besides, we've had the mechanical equivalent of them around since 1903.

You know, I regard flag burning with great distaste — but I defend the right of any scum to do it.

I look on your editorial with the same distaste. But in this case I can do something. I'll discontinue my subscription if I'm real unhappy!

Cordially,
Wolfert Conover, Jr.
Northville, New York

Dear People,

As an avid reader of science fiction, I would like to compliment you on your fine magazine. In fact, as a demonstration of my support, my subscription runs through, I believe, issue 60.

However, after just reading the editorial by your "Alien Publisher" in the March-April '91 issue, I felt compelled to write to you, and I want you to know that I have very rarely written letters to publications.

I read *Aboriginal* because I enjoy good science fiction, and because it is, in my estimation, one of the best publications in the field. I do not read *Aboriginal* for social commentary or such controversial issues as gun control where your expertise has not been proven or demonstrated.

Please accept the fact that shooting is an Olympic sport, and please at least entertain the idea that the right of Americans to keep and bear arms is guaranteed under the Second Amendment to the constitution of the United States. I have enjoyed shooting in competition for years, and I don't appreciate *Aboriginal* commenting in a way that might interfere with my right to legally engage in a sports activity.

Please do not stereotype me as a red-neck gun nut; I have a master's degree in a social science; I am a member of the ACLU; I am a member of American Mensa; and I am a life member of the NRA.

I will not bore you with any of the clichés in current vogue on the issue of gun ownership rights; you've made up your mind, one way or the other, and there is nothing I can say here that will change your beliefs. I would, though, ask you to do what you do best — publish the finest science fiction around and to stay away from issues irrelevant to your area of expertise.

With all due respect,
Brad Chandler
Olympia, Washington

Dear Sir (and/or Alien),
Terrible, terrible, terrible!

Even if you could get the "powers that be" to convert the clean-up charge to "but-ter," you'd never get them to equally distribute it. Even if you could actually get them to keep it as something so simple — you know that they would each have to put his/hers/its proviso/riders. Somehow, they would slip around it.

Pat Schwab
Atlantic City, New Jersey

(Perhaps I should have known better, but I was surprised at the anger and threats, stated and implied, we've received in response to our Alien Publisher's humor column in issue No. 26, titled "Guns or Butter." Admittedly, with only nine species

on its planet, our publisher did not learn to hunt as it was growing up and it has little experience with firearms [unlike me, whose misspent youth included most anything you can imagine]. But its lack of experience has nothing to do with its ability, and right, to express itself humorously — or otherwise. Nothing is sacred when it comes to humor, and anyone who doesn't understand that does not have a genuine sense of humor. And certainly, no issue is so inflammatory that both sides can't express their views without expecting threats or acts of petty vengeance for doing so.

I have no intention of muzzling the alien, regardless of its topic. This magazine is a forum for ideas. The First Amendment is first for a very good reason. The right to bear arms also is part of the Constitution for a good reason. It is not healthy for a government to know too much about its citizens, even if it is a benign government. When I was at the World Science Fiction Convention in Holland, a Dutch writer told me how the government of the Netherlands used to keep all sorts of information about its citizens on record, simple things such as their age, sex, religion, and whether they possessed firearms. When the Germans invaded, those records proved quite useful in rounding up the weapons — along with Jews and political agitators to be carted off to the camps. No one can entirely discount the possibility of something similar happening here, from within or without.

That said, the issue of guns in a presumed civilized and peaceful society is complicated. Massachusetts has a law imposing a one-year mandatory prison sentence on anyone who illegally owns a handgun. The city of Boston also has a growing murder rate, and an increasing number of innocent victims injured or killed as a result of drug deals gone bad that are settled with firearms or knives. Unfortunately, no matter how well intentioned, laws only affect and regulate those who choose to be governed by them.

Our participation in a society is the result of a willing suspension of some of our freedoms in return for other considerations. It is a trade-off. Laws, and laws on top of laws, have not prevented, or cut down on, a variety of "illegal" activities ranging from drinking alcoholic beverages during Prohibition, to prostitution and using or selling illegal drugs today. All these prohibitions appear to do is to drive up the price of the "illegal" activity. And even when the laws are enforced, it's often feebly — a man in a nearby community sentenced to one year (of a two-year sentence) in jail for dealing cocaine, was out in one month on work release. So much for crime and punishment.

Please understand, I am not advocating any of these activities, I'm simply recognizing a fact of life. People do what people want to do. Laws have never stopped them. The speed limit in Massachusetts is 55 mph, but the average speed on any of its major highways is 65 or more — unless a State Trooper

happens to be in sight.

As with so many social issues, rather than realistically look at the problem, too many people tend to develop an early opinion and then defend it to the death, meanwhile attacking (at least verbally) those who hold opposing views. What we need in many cases is a new approach to the problem, not more rhetoric, or more fortification of rigid views.

No one wishes to be the victim of a shooting, intended or accidental. No one wishes children to be injured or killed as a result of playing with guns, or because of a nearby drug war. Guns that literally can only be used in self-defense (as a result of a built-in computerized logic circuit) might be one answer, but experience teaches that for every new safeguard developed, criminals devise a counter-measure.

What we need to solve many of the social problems facing us, including improper use of guns, the genuine moral dilemma surrounding abortion, drunk driving, an inadequate education system, short-sighted business and investment policies, the decline of literacy, etc., are better ideas and different ways of looking at the same problems, rather than blind followers of positions on either side. Reason works only when people are reasonable. — Ed.)

GLOOM, DESPAIR, AND MISERY

Dear A.S.F.,

What has happened to your magazine? I have felt compelled to write this letter for the last two issues of ASF, but after receiving my latest copy and reading "The Cry of a Seagull" I could wait no longer. Stories of dead children, brain-eating tribesmen, brutal murders of prostitutes, Hell on Earth, and now beatings, torture, rape and disembowelment of pregnant women. Come on guys (*We're not all "guys" — Ed.*), when I want to get sickened and depressed, I'll just turn on the news or go to a Rambo movie. I read sci-fi and fantasy to escape to other worlds and use my imagination.

If you recall the letter I wrote in December, I said: "I look forward to every issue. The stories are top quality, amazingly creative and varied and importantly to me, non-sexist." Well, I no longer look forward to each issue. I don't read it at night anymore because I never know what kind of disturbing thoughts I'll be left with. I don't consider multiple forms of brutality very creative, and forget about non-sexist, it's just the typical media treatment of women as weak and vain (what was that one about killer make-up?), hysterical ("The Holes Where Children Lie"), nagging victims ("The Cry of a Seagull"), incidental ("Hell on Earth") or non-existent (if there's one thing I get tired of quick, it's male bonding stories). I will say I enjoyed "Appliance" and I thought it was because it was creative, surprising, and had a sense of humor. But now that I think about it, that android idea wouldn't be such a bad way to live. Uh oh, this could be some kind

of anti-male sentiment growing in me as a reaction to all the violent material I've been reading lately!

Please put the variety back into your magazine. I know creative stories are harder to write, but I'm sure there are some capable authors out there. Maybe they just need to know some of us like stories with a happy ending!

Sincerely,
Karen Traub
Montague, Massachusetts

Dear Sir,

Your publication is so full of gloom, doom and misery that I don't even open it anymore. It goes straight to the trash can. (You have X-ray vision, perhaps? — Ed.)

William M. Carey
Mt. Holly, New Jersey

(We make an effort to balance each issue of *Aboriginal* with a mixture of stories. In issue No. 27 [May-June, 1991] "Like a Flithiss from Its Shell" was an amusing tale, with "The Matter of Beaupre" offering a tongue-in-cheek caution against getting what you legislate for. Even though humorous stories and well-done stories with happy endings are hard to come by, we make every effort to have at least one in each issue. Anyone who only finds "doom and gloom" isn't reading very carefully. Nor do any of the stories glorify violence or doom and gloom. Quite the opposite. Science fiction has always had the task of warning us about the dangers waiting in the future. Mary Shelley did with her tale of Dr. Frankenstein's monster. Jules Verne took us 20,000 leagues beneath the sea to address the horror of war. H.G. Wells's time machine rode through a nuclear holocaust to warn of an even greater danger — *Lotus Land*, the destructive harm of too much of a good thing [like television]. All good and lasting science fiction addresses real issues. Lois Tilton's excellent tale "The Cry of a Seagull" cites a very real threat for the inhabitants of Hong Kong in a few years. The story is also based on what has already happened to similar refugees from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. You cannot create a better future if you refuse to know, understand, or even think about the pressing problems of today. Should science fiction entertain? By all means. But don't mistake it for rose-colored glasses. — Ed.)

Dear Crazy Alien,
Since I am now 72 years young, I cannot go beyond six additional issues with my subscription (already extending to issue 51). This is a remarkable collection of stories and artworks. Continued success.
Thankfully,
Henry Friedman
Cincinnati, Ohio

Dear *Aboriginal Science Fiction* Subscription Dept.,

I don't want to cut up my copy (issue #26) of your magazine, received today

(even if the Post Office managed to fold, spindle, mutilate and dog-ear the plastic-wrapped copy [@@@%*!##@#!]) to cut out the self-renewal coupon on page 21 (I have not received a renewal notice) so I'm copying the appropriate parts, filled out, and I am enclosing my mailing label in the address section; and I am enclosing my check for \$24 — 12 issues.

Your Alien Publisher puts out a damn good magazine, one that I enjoy tremendously and that my friends' eyes go glassy from when they see its title — but I will not loan to them! I tell 'em to subscribe for themselves! Being slightly alienated myself, and a bit ancient, with round feet that don't go out to many places — I have but few friends. I hope at least some of them have taken my advice.

With very best wishes for *Aboriginal* (did you ever hear of the Abomunists of San Francisco in 1959??? (Nope. — Ed.) I was known as Bingo in those days of *beatitude*, with my comrade, Bomkauf: Bob Kaufman, who discovered the Abomunoid Philosophies...).

Sincerely,
William J. Margolis

LIFETIME SUBS

Dear Mr. Ryan (or esteemed lieutenant thereof),

Comments on #26:

Faves:

- 1) "Nectar"
- 2) "For Fear of Little Men"
- 3) "To Whom Shall I Tell My Sorrow?"

Heaven knows if you keep track of that kind of stuff, but just in case you do, *voilà*. All but sucking aside, every story in March-April was good. I subscribe to (and read carefully) *Analog*, *Amazing*, *Weird Tales*, *2AM*, and *New Blood*. The latter ones are admittedly small press. But in any case, I gotta hand it to you guys — you're blowing the doors off them all.

Really, keep it up and you might single-handedly respark an interest in reading, just as VR (virtual reality) and HDTV games burst onto the scene. The importance of that save to the overall game of human achievement cannot be overstressed. We need fiction like *Ab SF* to pump up America's flabby, girly-man imaginations. So listen to me now, and hear me later, sit-com junkies. Pull the love handles on your brains out through your ears and tie them into a jump rope, so maybe some day you can look like this...

Now for some financial observations: Page 21, renewal policy, six months for thirteen bucks. The slip you sent me said fourteen, which I happily paid. Question: What's wrong with this picture? (Yes, I'm a starving type.) OK, so it's only a buck. But you can get five pounds of potatoes for that kind of green. (We revised our rates. — Ed.)

Another thing. Lifetime subscription: \$250, banked at 5.5% interest will earn \$13.75 per year, well over your subscription price. Question: Why not keep the

money and the mag, deposit the \$.75 every year to cover future price jumps and then will the subscription to your descendants *ad infinitum*? Riddle me that, Caped Crusader.

Ya ever notice how much Ryan's picture smiles like the Mona Lisa? What have you been up to, Chuckie? (It's just gas — Ed.)

Now for the bad news:

Sorry, all your non-fiction except Schweitzer's review of *Frankenstein Unbound* was anemic. And only Eggleton's art did anything for me. Do you direct your illustrators to use that muted, cartoonish style or what? I wouldn't ask, but it has been fairly consistent. Let's have some energy in the art. God knows fantasy artists in the bookstore have it. For example, I know he uses a lot of scantily-clad babes and bulging biceps, but Frank Frazetta is the direction I'd like to see your stable of painters leaning. Passion scale, energy period.

Like un-decoded Playboy Channel.

Take it easy, guys, if an ***hole like me says you're the best, it just might be true.

James T. (Chip) Hughes III
APO, New York

Dear Mr. Ryan,

In response to your "Editor's Notes" in issue No. 25, this letter may be one of the reasons to kick yourself. I plan to live a long time to enjoy science fiction and I would eventually "get even" by getting a lifetime subscription — as long as my demise predates *Aboriginal's*. But what if it doesn't? (We have no problem if both of us live forever. — Ed.) I would like some more details on this offer. For example, do charter subscribers get a further cut rate? (I fit) Do current subscribers get any partial credit for the unused part of their "regular" subscription? (I'm current until issue 31.) Will "lifetime subscribers" be getting any other nifty benefits?

Jean Anne Gove
Poland, OH

(The price for a lifetime subscription is normally calculated by multiplying the cost of a 12-issue subscription [\$26] by 10 [years] — assuming monthly publication [we are working on going monthly]. Unfortunately, there is no discount for the balance of a subscription, nor is there a discount for charter subscribers. In fact, the price has gone up to \$260 since the original offer. The basic assumption is that both parties are taking a risk/gamble against a greater reward. The magazine gambles that lifetime subscribers won't live for 10,000 years; the subscriber gambles that the magazine will last long enough for him or her to make a profit on the deal [i.e. get the magazine for an average price below the regular subscription/renewal rate, taking inflation and increasing prices into consideration].

At the moment, all lifetime subscription payments are being put into a subscribers' trust fund. *Aboriginal* is not using the money from lifetime subscriptions as it

comes in. Instead, each year it will draw off 5 percent of the funds to be used towards the magazine's operating costs [10 percent, when it goes monthly]. Theoretically, the fund will continue to grow, with inflation, providing a steady, dependable source of income to the magazine for decades. Putting the money into a trust fund also lessens the risk to the lifetime subscriber.

As to additional benefits: Yes, we hope to be able to offer some. First off, all lifetime subscribers will be receiving a certificate stating they are lifetime subscribers [which we will be mailing shortly]. We are in this for the long haul and are certain there will be many opportunities to offer lifetime subscribers additional benefits, such as discounts on Aboriginal T-shirts [when we get around to designing one], on Aboriginal videos, Aboriginal records, Aboriginal travel realities, Aboriginal time virtuals, Aboriginal writers' workshops, Aboriginal trips to the moon, etc. While our lifetime subscribers are figuring out ways to live forever so as to make a profit on us, we'll be figuring out ways to live forever and spread to alternate realities to keep the edge. — Ed.)

Dear Sir,

It was a stroke of genius for you to first publish Joyce Jensen's "To Whom Shall I Tell My Sorrow?" a story about the more or less good aspects of a memory and personality transfer in the March-April issue, and then follow it with Wil McCarthy's "Amerikano Hiaika" in the next issue. Though Wil's story deals with the same subject matter, it touches on the decidedly bad side effects. Did you plan it that way? (Of course. Except we feel both stories looked at the good and bad side of the possibilities. — Ed.)

I like the non-fiction essays in your magazine, too. In fact, David Brin's "The Dangers of First Contact" has inspired my first completed work that I plan to send to you.

By the way, I see poetry in your magazine, and although you mention how much you pay for short stories, nowhere did I read about submission and/or acceptance of unsolicited poems. How much do you pay? (\$20 per published poem. — Ed.)

Barry Midgett
Bay City, Texas

Dear Sir,

Good magazine, except:

1) Art work — Too much. One recent issue had 14 full four-color pages — could have been good stories (in that space), or are you short of stories?

2) Biographical info on your authors and artists takes up too much space. Reduce photos (corny, most of them) and type size for often repetitive information.

3) Too many book reviews. Six pages one issue plus again large illustration/photos of the covers.

Good luck,
Colleen Rodgers, Publisher

Diagnostic Imaging International

Dear Sir,

Since the Postal Service is sometimes quite slow and I'm usually a bit slow, I'm probably late, but here's a check, anyway.

A few suggestions:

The table of contents is the readers' guide to what's in it and where and so should be the most easily-located feature. Page two or three is good, page six is not. (Maximizing use of the color plates on the press forces us to use page 6 for the contents. — Ed.) The absence of Boomerangs seems to me also good. If you would like input from readers on the ideas of other readers, you could mention them on the editor's page instead of filling space with letters.

"Full color, full slick" may be important to some, but what I want are good stories. Except for the cover, *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* has no story illustrations at all, just excellent short fiction. And it's for the best stories that you've published that I don't let my Aboriginal subscription run out.

M. Thompson
Denali Park, Arkansas

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Charles C. Ryan,

Been reading and reading — finally caught up with you. **HAPPY BIRTHDAY!!!** Your life-time subscription offer sure is tempting. (Great incentive to sell you a story...) I, for one am happy with the format and delighted with the stories and the art 90% of the time. Am I too late to vote for the Boomerangs? Art — "Undiscovered Country"; Story — "Eyes of Chaos"; Poem — "Android Lover."

Larry Cutthbert
Victoria, Canada

DANGEROUS TECHNOLOGY

Dear Charlie,

I got a kick out of your editorial in the March-April issue ("Dangerous Technology"). Of course, I figured that karaoke affected only sake-besotted *sararimen* in Japan, and at the worst, there were probably only one or two infestations in the U.S. Wrong.

Enclosed is a flyer from the Holiday Inn in Blacksburg, Virginia. Yes, even here in the Old Dominion, we have been cursed with this musical equivalent of hoof and mouth disease. And, like most bad things, I suppose it will spread if left unchecked. Fortunately, what technology can create, it can also eliminate. For karaoke, I recommend 2000-pound laser-guided bombs, followed by a topical application of napalm. A harsh remedy to be sure, but an effective one. Disco was bad enough; this is intolerable.

Regards,
Mike Byers

BOOMERANG AWARD-WINNER SPEAKS

Dear Charles,

I wanted to thank all of the people who gave their Boomerang Award votes to "To An Android Lover." Not only was it a wonderful (and complete) surprise, but it also gave me a chance to go through my Rolodex to call every long-distance number I found and howl in my friends' and acquaintances' ears at high volumes, high speed, and low coherency. (Yes, I babbled.)

Receiving the Boomerang Award also gave me the opportunity to copy mass quantities of the editorial page of the *Interzone* issue, circle my name in yellow, and travel to such diverse places as my bank, my supermarket, and the hospital where I work to hand them out. I haven't had so much fun in ages.

Finally, the award proved to me that at least a few folks out there share my warped sense of humor. There are days when this is reassuring.

So for the fun, for the sense of camaraderie, and especially for the honor of the award, please tell them I said thanks.

Holly Lisle
Laurinburg, North Carolina

LOST STORY?

Dear Sir,

I have been trying to trace a short story, but without success. It is "Eight O'Clock in the Morning" by Ray Nelson. The film *They Live*, directed by John Carpenter, was based upon it.

If any of your readers can help, I would be most grateful. Information can be sent to the address below. Thank you for your help.

Yours faithfully,
Terehi Dony
6, Arthur Street,
Pembroke Dock,
Dyfed,
Wales SA72 6EN
Great Britain

Moving?

If you plan to move, please let us know at least 45 days in advance of the mailing of the next issue of *Aboriginal Science Fiction* to make sure you don't miss any issues. That may seem awfully far in advance, but it takes 45 days between the time we ship the mailing labels and the magazine's arrival at your home.

For the Jan.-Feb. 1992 issue, we need to know if you are moving by Nov. 15, 1991.

Thanks.

Mr. Ryan,
(You too, Mr. Alien Publisher),
Wow, woocooooooooo, yahooooooooo,
thank you, thank you, thank you.

I have been waiting for this issue (*Interzone* 2) since you (the kindly editors) decided it would be a good way to help introduce the United States reading public (that should read the *intelligent* reading public) to a new source of mental stimulation and entertainment.

I was most favorably impressed with the alternate reality story "Ten Days That Shook The World."

I do have trouble believing the idea that Mr. Hammett, most especially since he had been such an active member of Pinkerton's Detective Agency, would have been just a Sergeant, had he been active in the war, although it does move the plot along nicely. Unless these gentlemen have a source of information I have not found, I do not believe Mr. Hammett was involved in World War I.

The writers are quite well versed in United States history and with a small exception to a detail about Mr. Hemingway, they know their stuff.

Now, unless I misread the chapter of the story concerning the trial, wherein Hemingway admits to the age of sixteen, I cannot agree that Hemingway had been the age ascribed to him in the story.

In reality, at the time of the alternate world's trial of Eddie Bartlett, Mr. Hemingway was five months shy of his eighteenth birthday, being born on July 21, 1899, which at the start of World War I would have made him sixteen, while, unless I am misreading the chapter, he admits to being of the age of sixteen while at the trial and under oath.

This would have made him fourteen while he was crawling around in the trenches, dragging bodies to the rear to allow burial of the same.

Nit picking, true, but there it is.

Also, for those who do not know, he actually was a member of the United States Military Expedition to the European Theater as a member of the Ambulance Corps, doing basically what was described in the tale. Admittedly, the telling of the tale does not suffer for this slight mishap, other than to misinform (only slightly) those who would read this story, but I feel it is important to have certain details in the tale correct.

The rest of the magazine was really quite well constructed and edited. The full-color art that was given to us by the illustrator from Great Britain, Mr. Mark Harrison, was, to agree with Mr. David Pringle, extraordinary. It is really a shame that the editors of *Interzone* don't have the budget which would allow the use of such art constantly within the pages of their extremely interesting publication, which brings me to the fact that I am hereby submitting a subscription request for the next twelve issues of *Interzone*, starting with the next available issue to the United

States.

I am also quite pleased that our "neighbors across the pond" have now had an opportunity to take a glimpse at just what is going on in the "colonies" as far as our speculative fiction is concerned, and here is hoping that some of the illustrious readers in Great Britain will have the spare change to subscribe to the publication which I have grown so fond of in these past months.

With that statement, I wish to dedicate this portion of the letter to the wonderful staff that, in my estimation, has created one of, if not the, finest speculative fiction magazines in the United States today. Your efforts are always top notch, your editorials stimulating and thought provoking while still understandable to the "common man" (something we never get enough credit for, being intelligent). The art presented is always good and quite often excellent and I am glad that the Alien Publisher has seen fit to keep the costs such that it allows the budget of this wonderful magazine to go with full color illustrations when the editor, our dear Mr. Ryan, so chooses.

With hope for the future,
A. James Nicholas, Jr.
Penfield, NY

Dear Charlie,

Outstanding last issue (May-June 1991), and that's a righteous rating not lightly given by an old ex-sergeant, it being the highest compliment possible. Please, pass it along. Sure, I know you really put yourselves out for the *Interzone* issue, but I've been reading you from the first, way back in October 1986, and you just keep getting better and better. Semper Fi.

Yours truly,
K.L. Andersen
Webster, FL

Dear Mr. Ryan,

I hope your crazy alien stays interested in publishing (and commenting on us weird human beings) for a long time; you have a fine magazine. In the March/April issue, I especially liked "For Fear of Little Men" and "Nectar," reviews, and your own column. (Was it the Newton Marriott where you "discovered" karaoke? I want to be sure to avoid it!) (*Nope, the Burlington Marriott. — Ed.*)

Yours truly,
Christine Beckert
Groton, MA

Mr. Ryan:

A friend of mine recently mentioned your magazine during a discussion about the current state of the art in the SF field. When I allowed as how I had never had the chance to read a copy he dumped his entire collection from the first issue to the present on me. I spent the entire next week reading your publication. Then, when I was done, I managed to breathe a deep sigh of relief — somebody out there was still managing

to put out quality short pieces in the field and just generally raise a little editorial hell with the often mediocre standards many seem willing to accept. Admittedly, this is the part of the cover letter where I do my boot-licking, but in this case it is truly heart felt.

Sincerely,
John P. Withers
Huntington, WV

Dear Editor:

Just finished the special *Interzone* issue (2). I liked all the stories, though a few were over-long and even a bit redundant in places. My favorite was Garry Kilworth's "Hamelin, Nebraska". He handled the story very nicely, leaving it short and pointy, like an ice pick. Most writers would have taken an idea like this and spread it out over ten thousand words or more, till it was as dull as a manhole cover. "Gene Wars" by Paul J. McAuley was also very nicely done.

Michael T. Dillon
Methuen, MA

Dear Mr. Ryan,

Long ago, I subscribed to your magazine as a trial from my sister's school magazine campaign. I had never heard of your magazine and, to tell you the truth, I really didn't expect too much at the time.

What a surprise! The first issue that I received was number six and I have not missed a single one since. I thoroughly enjoy your magazine's style and attitudes (especially those of that crazy alien publisher) and am looking forward to many more years of excitement and entertainment from within these pages.

Thank you again for your willingness to provide us with new faces and talents through your pages. Keep up the good work. I look forward to many more years of your quality production.

Thank you for your time.
Sincerely yours,
B. Wayne Ketter
Winston-Salem, NC

Dear Mr. Ryan,

This is my first letter even though I have been a subscriber ever since I heard of *Aboriginal*, and have all the back copies and the Anthology. Everything seems to be going well and you certainly know what you are doing without my interference.

If the *Interzone* issue did nothing else for us, I think it made us appreciate the art that MATCHES the stories. Unlike one of the other readers who didn't like the art because he has a good imagination, I like it, even though I think I have a good imagination, because I like to see someone else's tangible view of a scene (I'm no artist). The *Interzone* art by Mark Harrison was unusual (especially the two for "The Niiakantha Scream" and "Ten Days That Shook The World"); but I did not like the fact that the art was not related to the stories. The requirement that the artist

read the story for inspiration is greatly appreciated by me (and I hope others as well).

Also, I like your choice of new paper; the color art shows up better than ever before — thank you.

If I can come up with the \$250 in time for my renewal, I will surely renew forever. I hope my 10,000-year life span will be no problem for you to handle.

RE "Bob" Bows
Memphis, TN

(Interzone's art normally matches its stories, but because it doesn't use color art, we decided instead to showcase Mark Harrison's art, which was wonderful, rather than deprive our readers of the color art they have come to expect. — Ed.)

Dear Mr. Ryan and Staff,

I found the Special Interzone Issue to be an interesting experience, but I'm homesick, I want my *Aboriginal* back. I found the special issue to be very heavily laced with non-fiction. There did not seem to be enough stories to keep me interested. The artwork remained impressive, as usual.

As to the stories, I was favorably impressed by Mr. Egan's "Infinite Assassin." This is the type of story that keeps me hooked. "Ten Days That Shook The World" was an impressively researched work that I had a lot of trouble following and might have been interesting at half the length. One of my hopes for this issue was to get a glimpse of another culture and see what some other corner of the world looked like or at least get some insight into their thoughts and feelings and impressions of us and our culture. Instead, it seemed the whole issue was dedicated to their feelings and impressions of us and our culture. Sometimes this can be an eye-opening experience, but I would have preferred less familiar subject matter.

The non-fiction section was perhaps the most disappointing. I left several sections mostly unread, abandoning them after struggling through the first few paragraphs. In particular, I wonder about the inclusion of a letters section that references items that we have little or no possible reference for.

I did find a lot of pleasure in this issue and apologize for dwelling on the negative factors, but I had a lot of high hopes that were not quite met. Also, when you get used to the highly entertaining and informative work of Mr. Metzger, as well as the useful reviews by the regular columnists, it's hard to accept anything else.

Looking forward to your next issue.
Steven S. Cooke
Stanton, CA

Dear Sir or Madam:

I received my long-awaited first issue of *Aboriginal* today, sat down, read it cover to cover and was relieved to discover it was an *Interzone* issue in disguise.

While this is the first issue of *Interzone*

I've read, I can only hope *Aboriginal* will surpass (or at least reach) my expectations. I have to agree with David Wingrove's assessment of British fiction. If I have to force myself to continue after the first page, the writer has failed signally the purpose of his craft, to tell a STORY.

All the authors in this issue with the exception of Garry Kilworth and Nicola Griffith were so concerned with style and appearance, there was nothing under the surface. THERE WAS NO STORY!

A STORY catches your attention. It reels you in and makes you dream, think, yearn, fear, thrill, weep. It engrosses you. It DOESN'T leave you wondering what was the point. Why did this author even waste ink on superfluous words, the strained plot (what there is), the tortured attempts to create worlds that give you a headache just reading them? Even the American author, Greg Egan, is a little guilty (is he at heart an Anglophile?).

So I'm keeping my fingers crossed until my next issue arrives. As for *Interzone*, keep digging. Maybe someday...

Sincerely,
Keri D. Emerson
Portland, OR

Dear Mr. Ryan,

I recently finished the *Aboriginal* issue of *Interzone*. "The Cry of a Seagull" was the best fiction of that issue for me, a very impressive story that managed to be both powerful yet pathetic; the predicament of the refugees drifting across the oceans in a decaying ship became the microcosm of the present global situation, a striking allegory of the ecological catastrophe that awaits us as we continue to put off making those essential repairs. I'd like to see used in this intelligent manner more frequently. Us Brits are supposed by some to have a monopoly on "downbeat" sf, but Tilton's story was a bleak and admonitory vision which never strayed into empty alarmism.

"Like a Flithias from its Shell", I suspect that it may be as impossible to write about realistic aliens as it is to film them; however weird an "alien" can be made to appear, we know that it's just someone wearing a scaly suit. That said, Messrs. Mitchell and Clarkson made a valiant attempt to get inside an alien mind in this story, and the end result was a thoughtful and quite effective tale.

"Amerikano Hiaika"; I rated this second in the issue. It was an ingenious and successful blend of Dick and Gibson, an immensely readable piece. It also had possibly the best artwork.

"Darkness on the Face of the Deep" was perhaps the least impressive piece overall. Although the writing was polished, the plot was hackneyed; strong overtones of Indiana Jones country made me wonder if I'd wandered into the novelization of "Raiders of the Lost Ark." The characters too were familiar from other contexts — the "unlikely" (yet ubiquitous) friendship of the ne'er-

do-well and the scholar, the sage Arab guide... The denouement was pretty predictable — don't guys who violate ancient tombs always come to sticky ends?

"Targets" was a fairly effective piece, a kind of Walter M. Miller in reverse. Quite a pithy, wry sort of ending; not bad.

"The Matter of Beaupré"; I was glad to see that Pohl hasn't declined, unlike some of the Grand Old Men of SF. This was a neat, sardonic little tale, again complemented by the first-rate artwork.

Overall, I liked "Abo" enough to take advantage of your special subscription offer. The non-fiction was interesting, and the general style of the magazine was distinctive, better than some of the bigger publications like *Asimov's* and *F&SF*, whose endless pages of closely-typeset print I find a turn-off to read.

That's about it. I hope your readers enjoy *Interzone*.

Yours sincerely,
Matthew Dickens
Somerset, England

Dear Mr. Ryan,

Your magazine has such a ridiculous hold on my subconscious that I stopped writing a short story that means a lot to me (based on the life and death of blues great Robert Johnson) to read it. (How's that for a *grand-mal* rationalization.) Either way, you're responsible for my latest failure as a writer and subsequent emotional collapse.

Of course, I read Harlan E.'s story first! *Le mot juste*... Masterfully handled just as expected.

Then I read the non-fiction, to include the "Boomerangs" section where I found my own bad self, thank you. A year is kind of a long time to wait for an answer... but thanks. Having my name between the sheets with Harlan Ellison and Frederick Pohl is grounds for forgiveness. Consider yourselves indulged.

But then I read "The Cry of a Seagull".

It gave me pause. In fact, I put down the mag, seethed into my lucubrium and knocked off a really choice piece of hate mail with your name on it. No doubt, had the missive seen postage, titters of mild amusement would have lit up your work spaces all day. But no such luck, Charlie, that document is nothing but a back-up file with a password now — a few thousand magnetic imperfections in a CrO₂ coated plastic disc...

Thank God.

It was a scorcher. (That's pronounced "howler" at your end.)

But let me say this: I dig a good tragedy as much as the next guy. I can even grope on a side order of gross now and then. But if I had visited an art gallery (a familiar, traditionally friendly one, say) showing life-sized photos of the things Tilton so artfully described... Man, yuck!

(Continued to Page 114)

Classified Ads

(CLASSIFIED ADS may be placed in *Aboriginal Science Fiction* for \$30 per column inch, or \$1.00 per word, per appearance, payment with order. A one-inch ad paid in advance for six issues is \$150. A one-inch ad paid in advance for 12 issues is \$270. Our recent survey shows that, based on a paid circulation of 21,000, each issue will reach an estimated 48,300 readers.)

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Thief

(Continued from page 5)

to touch them. Fur is horrible to her.

From a rolled bag of tools I assemble the parts of a muffled drill, using the biggest masonry bit. The drilling takes a while. When the hole is through, I ream it smooth, then telescope a tube through it. Arlo pushes herself through the tube, trailing nylon thread that spools from my belt. She gets lost inside houses and it's hard for me to direct her. Arlo can taste with her whole skin, can see with patches of it sensitive to light, but what Arlo sees isn't like what a human sees.

Arlo's size makes her invisible to the motion scanners that tick in every wall. She flows around chairs and across carpets, taking the turns that I've told her will bring her to the master bedroom, flattening like a sheet of paper to slip under doors. I can almost feel it, the way you can almost remember a dream. How she loves the rhythmic sleighride of a flight of stairs.

On the third floor landing the cat finds her, and Arlo sheds the skin from its bones in fury, oozes to the next room where she can rest and lick herself clean. I stare up at the stairs, trying to block it from my mind. What would Carmel think of my underground life and its weird rendezvous?

Arlo almost panics when she realizes there are people in the room she's in. I have to think at her to calm her down, tell her that the man and woman in the sarcophagus will not wake this hundred years. Their thoughts are thick and slow as molten glass, though in their dreams I catch a glimpse of soaring.

Back in our salon, Arlo lazes before the fire, finishing off a brace of lobsters. I'm prying the stones from an ankle bracelet and studying them with my lens. It's a good score, a baker's dozen of rings and brooches, for all that Carmel would think them dress-up toys.

Sleep deep. Arlo's thoughts are a purr. *Deep and deep. Wake and the world be better.* She keeps thinking about the utopians, slow-breathing in narvo solution inside their airtight coffins. When I was a kid narvo had just been invented and Adam Thor's crazy book had just come out. Now every year more people take the Long Journey. It makes more sense to Arlo than it does to me.

"They're just giving up," I tell her. "They're lazy."

Arlo shimmers slow and steady. *New world for them, she purrs. Old skin peels off.*

When I remember to check my home phone, there's a message from Carmel. She wants to know what face I'm wearing to the wedding.

Nothing changes in the Gullet. Brick shops and tenements still shove against each other. Gaunt urchins churn the muddy streets crying their sisters' wares.

Inside one shop, cheap goods are piled on shelves three meters high. The old gaffer who runs the place sits behind the counter, the slit of his one keen eye slipping over the cashiers. He leads me up a narrow closet of stairs. On his unmade bed, I open my pack and unroll my black bag of jewels.

We settle on a price quickly. We've done business for a

long time. He pays me in morphine, which the street people use for cash.

"You carry narvo?" I'm just wondering.

"How much do you want to pay?"

"Maybe sometime," I say.

I have coffee in the geisha shop up the block, at my regular cushion by the window. In the glassworks across the alley, aproned workers pace back and forth. White sparks of glass seep from their hands. My muscles tense, remembering the motions, and the woman massaging my feet rubs a little harder. I sit and sip coffee until I glimpse my father's sweaty face through the window. I always leave as soon as I see him.

When dawn has etched the clouds with rose, hundreds gather for the wedding masque. Carmel's daddy is a fat bearded genie who helps me obtain my heart's desire. The sword I carry is heavy as a sack of grain. High on the cloud slopes, Carmel waits, naked and embarrassed; she reaches for the robe my boswell carries as soon as I cut her chains. Around us, the larval dancers hatch and flutter and droop and die.

Later, in the stone nave lit with paper lanterns, waiters hoist racks of meat and fruit in the aisles. Fire-breathers and blade-swallowers leap up and stroll. In the pits, men chain-mailed on one side, naked on the other, twirl and slash with steel-footed birds whose feathers are all the colors of flame, and maidens in streaming dresses fling them coins and swoon.

After the violas and French horns, the ghost show and the giving of rings, the rain that never falls there murmurs through the Gardens all night long, and in our bed I strip one silk after another from Carmel's delicately-boned body. Sometimes she pulls me to her, sometimes she struggles, and I ready her for a long time with a hand of milk and honey. In the event it hurts her and we cannot finish, but oh how tired we are, how ready to hold each other and sleep. I kiss the tears from her face and promise her all the nights to come.

In the middle of the night Carmel's screams and thrashing wake me. Light streams in and maids in pajamas envelop her and calm her down. In the corridor, guards smile beneath their helmets.

"It stuck to me," Carmel sobs. "Like a tongue." A ribbon of ripped skin hangs from her thigh.

"Promise me you'll find it," she says to me. "Promise me you'll kill it."

Carmel's mother takes her to sleep with her. "Newlywed jitters," she whispers. "She must have caught her leg on the bedspread bangles."

Arlo must have slipped into one of the trunks the servants brought from my boat. I can feel her hiding somewhere in the walls. I scold at her in my mind but she doesn't answer.

Next day I talk to Carmel about it. I don't tell her about the burglaries. She can't ever know about them. I tell her how Arlo kept me company on voyages, how I sneaked her through customs in a ration can. Carmel listens, fingering the pink layer of new skin just above her knee.

"You're a sensitive man," she says. "I love you for it." Her lips graze mine. "If you don't kill it, I will," she says, and signs to her maid for coffee.

We argue about it all day. Carmel thinks it's funny I'm so devoted to my pet. Finally she agrees to see her.

Arlo purrs beneath my palms, between my fingers. I lift and pour her in a bright cascade from hand to hand.

"She's beautiful," Carmel says, but won't touch her. "Why did you hide her from me?" Her face has an expression I haven't seen before — lean and hawklike.

"I tell you everything," she says. "I told you about how I used to touch myself." She blushes, but through the rosy flush the hawk blinks and flutters. "I won't have secrets between us."

The room gets a little blurry. Arlo is nervous. I let her slither away.

"What's wrong with you?" Carmel asks.

My hands are sweating. I reach for Carmel. She shoves me away.

"That thing's in your mind," she hisses. And walks away, long skirts swishing.

I calm Arlo down, then go find Carmel. The maid says she's gone to stay at her father's.

Glass is mostly sand. I've got the tools spread along the counter in one of the playrooms for our future offspring: shears, calipers, wood-jack, pontil, and blowing rod. The new furnaces I had put in are hot, and I've got sand and lead flux mixed and heating in them. When the glass is molten, I take a large gather of the viscous red-glowing stuff onto the rod, blow it, and spin and shape it till I've got the thick-walled globe with the hole in the top that I want. I put the glass ball on the treadmill, and all night it shifts slowly through the gradually decreasing temperatures of the annealing ovens. Finally I fill it with water, mix in salt and copper and the narvo I've got from my fence.

Arlo will do anything for me, but it will be hard to get her in there. I may have to hurt her.

Back at the sailboat, Arlo stretches beside the fire. She knows we're home but she doesn't trust it. I show her the glass globe I've made.

"This is your new home," I say. My voice sounds big and hollow in the cabin. Why do I always talk out loud to Arlo? She has no ears.

She doesn't like the globe. I try to talk her around, but I can feel her dread and suspicion, and the room becomes ominous and small. Every shadow scares me. Sick and trembling, I give up and switch on the video. Arlo curls down to watch opera, her thoughts a purr. I try to call Carmel, but they say she can't be reached.

In the morning we play a game. I put a ring of keys in the globe and Arlo retrieves them. We try it with fish and small crabs, and she has to go inside to fetch them. She likes the glass globe's slippery sides, and the way the water tastes. That night she sleeps inside of it for me. I leave the hole uncovered. After two days, she's used to the globe, and she's drowsy all the time: the narvo is starting to affect her.

Rather than take her back to the palace, I call and have my tools sent down. The secretary says there are some routine papers Carmel needs to sign. I tell him she'll take care of them soon. I'm trying not to think about Carmel, so Arlo will forget about her.

For a day I make whatnots while Arlo plays, so she'll be used to the hot glass. I keep the globe on a stand beside my workbench, and I spread out Arlo's feedings, so she stays a little hungry all the time. Her thoughts gets more

and more sluggish. She knows from my mind I'm planning something sneaky, but she thinks it's a job.

Sometimes I ask Arlo what it was like on her home planet, but she doesn't understand what I mean. She seems to think our boat is moored in the same bay where she was born. She doesn't remember her life before me very well, just that she was always hungry and scared, and everything was heavier then.

I've got sand and flux heating in my small furnace, and some shrimps swimming in the globe. As soon as Arlo is inside I take a dollop of hot glass onto the rod. But I can feel her getting scared, and before I can seal the opening at the top she surges out of it. I put my hand on her mantle and try to shove her back in. She engulfs my hand and I feel bones break. She flows across my chest and along the salon wall. My shapeless hand hangs Arlo-like from my wrist, throbbing with red heat, and my head throbs with fury.

I think hate at Arlo, think *fur* at her, thick dusty wads of it. But linked as I am to her mind, it all comes back to me, as Arlo drowns me in a storm of nightmares. I end up curled into a fetal ball in the far corner of the room, slick with sweat and too weak to move.

Somehow I forget that Arlo is dangerous, that she could kill me anytime. I can't see her, but I feel her mind's slow pulse. The room fills with our remorse.

Lying on the thick rug, I stroke Arlo with my good hand. Her body licks along my fingers, shimmers like a pile of living jewels. My other hand is starting to swell and bruise, but I can't feel anything. Arlo has taken the pain away.

"It's just for a little while," I tell her, although I know it's not. "Carmel loves your colors. She'll want to let you out."

Never do, Arlo thinks. Never touch, never feed. Her words are cleaner and sharper than they've ever been. On her world she'd be just a baby.

"Just for a little while," I tell her.

Something Arlo doesn't have words for oozes into my mind. Then I realize she wants me to kiss her. I touch my mouth to her for the first time, caress her with lips and tongue. She tastes of salted butter, then of lemon rind. Fantails of bright-brass and copper-green sweep across her, and with each heartbeat the taste of her flesh changes.

Sleep long, Arlo thinks. Her colors tick slowly. Her arms wind my fingers like rings. New world. New water. You grow arms. Sleep long, deep. Old skin go away.

I'm making more glass things, gifts for our friends. Carmel likes it that I have an artistic hobby. Arlo's globe has pride of place in the gallery off my chambers. The narvo won't hurt her, and I can see her every day. In her sleep, she still changes colors, but very slowly.

She'll be there if I ever need her. □

Double Issue

Please remember that this special double issue counts as two issues on your subscription. See the Editor's Notes on page 56.

... But Fear Itself

By A. J. Austin

Art by Larry Blamire

I remember the first time I saw a Black Widow spider, back home. Back on Earth.

I was seventeen.

We'd learned as kids how deadly they were, always imagining how the spider could kill with a single bite, a single scratch. When we were older, we found out it wasn't the deadliest. We learned later that the tiny Brown Recluse was far more poisonous, and that there were worse ones, bigger ones in South America and China. We heard about some real monsters out here that made those back home look like nothing at all. It didn't really matter, though. The impression was there.

But even after a lifetime of having the image of this black thing buried in your mind, you never quite anticipated the feeling you got when you saw one, "in real life," so to speak.

I'd angered my dad about something, I don't recall what, and he punished me by making me clean out the junk that had been accumulating under the back porch for years. I wasn't even expecting it. I moved something, a stack of roofing shingles, I think, and there it was.

And all the pictures, in all the tapes, in all the libraries just never did it justice. A cold chill spread over me at the sight of that impossibly shiny black; a jet-black darker than blindness itself. It moved — *no*, I reminded myself; *she* moved — gracefully in her disturbed web.

I froze. I wanted to get away, stand back, move, run, cry; but couldn't. My eyes were fixed in horrible fascination as she climbed away from the sudden light. She rotated slowly among the silky strands, and I saw it for the first time: the hourglass shape I knew would be there. The tapes always said it was red, but calling it "red" was like calling the sun "bright." Crimson, maybe, or scarlet. Even those words weren't strong enough.

Something, maybe a sound from the yard or a shift in the wind, broke my concentration and I acted, suddenly, and without thinking. I grabbed for an object, anything of weight, and smashed down, hard, and kept smashing and smashing till there was nothing left of her. When she was gone, I dropped the object and stood shaking, arms hanging limply at my side, my skin cold and damp. I rubbed my forearms to warm them, felt the goosesh and each individual hair standing on end ...

That's the feeling that shot through me the instant I saw the Johnny.

We were in a waiting area of the port. It was early and the lounge was nearly empty, maybe half a dozen customers at most. I was the only Terran, however; the rest of my crew was on board making final prep. My duties completed, I'd left the ship to take care of a few things before we left station. He, on the other hand, was probably the only Johnny in the port. They do that. They like working alone, and enjoy the treaty-guaranteed freedom of movement offered by a Neutral Port. They stay in one port for a while, make a few kills, then move on, because

even in an N.P. questions get asked after a while. Unfortunately for a Johnny's victim, questions weren't usually asked until after the fact.

For all their deadliness, however, they were basically cowards. They wouldn't hit until sure of a target. Not exactly telepaths, they nonetheless had a way of "reading" you, and determining a threat-versus-profit ratio. If the threat was too high, they moved on to someone else, someone easier. If the profit margin was high enough, you died. Trouble was, you could never figure out what was valuable to them in a particular instance. I mean, walking through a Neutral Port with empty pockets, you might *still* be a profit to them, depending on what they considered profitable that day. Like a bit of knife practice, say, or a temporary respite from boredom.

Unfortunately, they liked Terrans a lot. We, lucky us, are one of the easiest to read of the known races.

He was watching a group, his back to me, at one of the far tables. They were talking loudly in a language I didn't understand, and appeared to be having a good time. I didn't recognize the race anymore than I did their words.

As if suddenly hearing someone shout his name, he turned and scanned the room in my direction. He saw me and stood, and I knew I'd been read. Our feelings were an open book to them, and he had "felt" me from across the room. His eyes met mine, and yet another wave of cold swept over me when he approached my table. I hurriedly flipped the tinted visor of my flight cap down over my eyes, hiding my features as best I could.

Dear God, he's coming this way! I fidgeted nervously and cursed myself for not running the moment I saw him. *Why the hell did I leave the ship?*

He sat heavily opposite me. Like the Black Widow, the reality was much more frightening than what I'd heard about them for years. They were big. This Johnny would have stood head and shoulders above a tall man; I was tiny next to him. He was humanoid — as were most of the crewmen using this side of the N.P. — but the similarity didn't go far beyond the fact that he walked upright and had the right number of eyes, arms and legs. His head was incongruously small on his massive frame, his facial features even more so. The sleeveless wrapped tunic and matching breeches he wore were typical of natives of Johnson's World. His high boots and wide belt were of the same leather, probably from the hide of the same animal, and glistened even in the dim light of the lounge. He flexed the muscles in his long arms as he sat, the translucence of his hairless skin making them appear deceptively weak.

It was the smile, though, that was most unnerving. His lips were pulled back in a never-changing grin, giving him an appearance made up of equal parts meanness and





cunning.

"I am hoping to sit with you, Earther," he said in a deep, melodious voice. "Please to do?"

I've got to get away from him! Got to get back to the Freebird! I couldn't move, and stared at him stupidly through the visor. My lips moved soundlessly.

"Here, now. Let me to buy." He tapped a long, bony finger on the table top, and a menu appeared like a placemat before each of the four seats. Glowing a bright orange, the words were meaningless to me. "Please to choose; I am insisting."

Leave me alone! Please, please, please don't hurt me.

"I ... I haven't much money," I said. "I have nothing of value. Nothing."

He burst out laughing. As alien as he was, the bellowing laughter was disturbingly human. The group at the far table turned to stare, distracted momentarily by the sudden outburst. They shuffled their chairs a bit so that none of them sat with their back to whatever threat they perceived the Johnny to be, then returned to their conversation, ignoring us once more.

"Do not to have fear for me ..." he said, pausing to extend a fingertip to the blue port pass on my jacket, "... Jack-Son." He laughed again, amused at the sound of my name. It was the only time the permanent smile seemed to match his actions. "Please to choose something," he repeated.

Keeping one eye on him, I tapped at the menu, cycling it through several languages till it came to a readable blue. Fighting the urge for something stronger, I selected a non-alcoholic fruit drink and nodded to him.

The Johnny stared at me in silence for several seconds and, apparently satisfied, punched the call code into the menu.

Wait, just wait. He won't try anything here. Wait for him to turn, then run. Find someone, anyone of authority.

"I'm sorry," I said at last, trying to sound calm. "I didn't mean to offend you. It's just that, well, I've always heard stories, and —"

"Ah! Now I am to understand your reaction to me. Please to not fear; I am not a, ah, 'privateer' like so many of mine."

It was difficult to tell, but he seemed sincere. Judging from the thickness of the pouch at his belt, he seemed well-off; maybe he wasn't hunting today. My drink came. The barman gave the Johnny a wide berth, circling the table carefully to place the drink before me. He left the table hurriedly, glancing back several times at my companion.

"Where do you plan to going?" The sudden question caught me off guard. I moved my hand only slightly, but his eyes went instantly to the pocket where I kept my travel papers. He seemed to take pleasure in what he had just "read" about me.

"We leave for sector three in about an hour," I lied. "New Charleston, for a pick-up. We're hauling empty right now." If he thought we were empty, maybe he'd think I had nothing for him. I couldn't tell if he believed me or not. *Think of anything else but the ship. Don't give him a reason to want you. Wait, then run.* My hand shook as I took a sip of the sweet-flavored drink; that much would be obvious to even a casual observer. But could he see me, see my eyes through the visor? I hoped not.

"New Charleston! Cold planet; better to dress warm

there." He continued staring at me, staring through me. "Dangerous there, too," he added quickly, meaningfully patting the silver sheath at his side. "Better to dress safe there." Again he read me, and again learned something about me. Once more, he seemed pleased by what he'd just learned.

He knows, dear God, he knows I'm unarmed. Get away, now. He knows, he knows, he knows ... I finished the drink, nearly choking on the sudden burst of cold sweetness rushing down my throat, and set the glass down as firmly as I could.

"Thank you for the drink," I said, rising from the table. "I'd better be getting back. They're probably wondering where I am." I laughed nervously, then added, "In fact, they're probably looking for me right now." It was evident he didn't believe it for a minute.

"Please to sit a while longer, Earther friend Jack-Son." I expected him to grab me at any moment, but that remained calmly seated.

"No, really, I can't stay —"

"Here, then, let me to please escort." He slid his chair back to get up.

"No!" The single word slipped out, more suddenly than I would have liked. The other table turned, startled; from behind the bar a delicate breaking sound — a glass? Several glasses?

Get away! Now! I turned and ran from the lounge area, scattering as many of the chairs behind me as I could to try to slow him down. Once in the main corridor, I paused a moment to find the blue arrow and get my bearings. I located it, on the far wall right where I remembered it, and started running in that direction just as he emerged from the lounge.

At this hour there were few crewmen about as we ran down the hallway, and those that were stood prudently aside to let us pass. I rounded a corner and ran panting to the first near-human I saw. Despite his confusion, he seemed to understand Terran well enough and was trying to give me directions to the Terran dock when he saw the Johnny barreling down the corridor. He moved quickly away, pressed his back to the wall, and forcefully put his hands palms-out in front of him in a universally understood "No!" It was clear that no one would risk helping me.

Hide! Lose yourself in the port. Find a crowd and lose yourself. I was smaller and faster than the Johnny and could easily outrun him in a short contest, but he was stronger. If it came to a race of endurance, he would surely outlast me.

I ran down another corridor. It was deserted and I kept running, looking for a lift to another level. He was a couple of hundred meters behind me when one finally appeared in a small alcove set into the wall. My panting was almost uncontrollable now, as was the sharp pain in my side. Ignoring the awful metallic taste in my mouth, I fought for breath and slammed my palm repeatedly against the call button. And waited.

It was no good. Those long legs carried him steadily closer and I abandoned the lift, running once more down the corridor.

Hide, find a stairway! Anything, anything at all!

The corridor turned several more times. Left, left again, then right. I finally found a doorway, yanked it open, leaped through, and slammed it closed. My head swam as though I might pass out, and I leaned heavily

against the welcome support of the door. It felt good, damned good, to rest, the metal surface of the door invitingly cool against the dampness of my back. I would have stayed there, motionless, but the sound of heavy footsteps treading down the hallway outside the door forced me on. Looking around, I saw that I was in a service stairwell of some kind.

"Perfect," I whispered.

I ran down several flights and stopped on a landing halfway between levels. *Surely he can't find me here. Rest, just rest awhile. That's it, rest; then back to the Freebird and safety. Rest now, then run.* Leaning against the wall in a position that enabled me to see the doors on the levels above and below, I allowed myself to sink to the landing. My breathing echoed in the empty well as I brought my knees up in front of me and encircled my shins with my arms. Resting my forehead on my knees, I closed my eyes at the thought of how close I'd just come to being dead-meat.

"Think you I need to see you, Earther, to follow?" He stood on the landing above, staring down at me with that goddamned smile. For all his size, it was incredible how quickly and quietly he'd approached.

My legs aching, I jumped to my feet and stumbled down the stairs to the level below. I tugged at the door and found it locked, much to the Johnny's amusement. I hurried to the next level, but that door also refused to open. I tried the next level, and the next, until finally reaching the bottom of the well. That door, too, refused to budge. I looked around the floor of the landing; there was nothing I could use as a weapon. *Help me, dear God, help me.*

"They will all to be locked from inside!" he called from above. He was only a level or two up now. He knew I was his and took his time descending — clomp, clomp, clomp — stopping at last a few meters in front of me.

"Do it!" I suddenly shouted at him. "Come on, you grinning bastard, get it over with!"

"Strong words, so? I am pleased you are not to be so weakly as I thought." He came forward and grabbed the collar of my jacket, easily lifting me off the floor. Holding me pinned at arm's length against the door, he reached for the sheath at his side. The knife that came up was sharp, and looked every bit as deadly as its owner.

"Please to tell something, Jack-Son, before I kill you," he whispered close, his sweet-smelling breath misting the visor lenses. "There is something I am not understanding. When I was first to see you, above, before I came to one's table, I felt you think of me 'Black Widow.' I was feeling Earther fear, and Earther respect. What is meaning?" He held the knife to my face, waited a moment till he was certain I'd gotten a good look at it, then touched the tip of the blade lightly to the cleft of my chin, sending a trickle of warmth running down my neck and into the collar of my shirt. "Tell, what is meaning!" he repeated, his body pressing heavily against mine.

"It's my guardian angel, deadmeat," I replied, not a hint of emotion in my voice. I touched my belt lightly and the Johnny staggered back toward the steps, releasing me from his grip. He leaned momentarily against the hand rail, a look of utter shock on his face, and I touched my belt once more. There was a tiny *fffft!* sound as a puff of compressed air from the buckle shot another flechette into the Johnny. He dropped heavily to his knees, his knife clattering across the floor.

He fell to his back, his whole body arching painfully upward, jerking in rhythmic spasms from the quick-poison now spreading through his system. The sickening motions continued for several long seconds, each spasm coming faster and shorter, until finally ending with his back arched so high, his muscles pulled so tight, that I heard several ribs snap loudly before he collapsed in a heap on the floor. There was a long, heavy sigh as the life ran from him, and he lay still.

That was close, I thought, flipping my visor up. Too close. I almost got myself killed that time.

Retrieving the knife, I cut loose his belt pouch. Nobody in his right mind messed with a Johnny, and, as I expected, he wasn't afraid to carry a good deal of cash in several nationalities. There were travel papers and gate passes, too, which could come in handy. One of the passes had a colorful stain on it, and I wondered idly what race's blood it was. I transferred the contents of his pouch into mine, then reached into an inside jacket pocket for my remote.

"This is Jackson," I said into it. "I got him."

"Any trouble?" asked a man on the other end.

I wiped my chin on a sleeve. The cut was minor and the bleeding had already stopped.

"No. No trouble at all."

"Listen — if you feel up to it, we've got another one for you." I thought about it a moment, and examined the workmanship on the knife. It was beautifully crafted, nicer than any I'd yet seen, and would make a nice trophy. Two might be even nicer. I slipped it into my sleeve.

"Sure, why not."

"OK, then. He's been spotted on the lower level, area five-oh-one. That's a shopping plaza, not far from where we monitor you now."

"Got it." I thumbed the remote off and pocketed it, then went to work on the door. It took only a second to pick the lock, then open it just enough to be sure the corridor was empty before slipping out.

The plaza was noisy and crowded with shoppers of so many different races that I thought I might have lost him, but then I spotted an open area that had formed in front of a booth about thirty meters away. The crowd was wisely avoiding that particular booth while the Johnny idly examined the merchandise. The merchant stood fearfully back, no doubt hoping he'd just steal what he wanted and go away.

I stepped behind the cover of the booth nearest me and pulled out the remote. "Found him. Monitor and set for playback on my signal. Jackson out."

"We got you. Good luck, Tony."

I walked slowly in his direction and felt the nervousness build within me. My skin went cold and clammy beneath my shirt. No matter how many times I did this, the feeling was always the same. He read it when I was still a dozen meters away, and turned immediately to face me, the permanent grin sending yet another chill down my spine.

Damn, I hate these things, I thought, and clicked the visor in place over my eyes. There was a tingling sensation on my scalp as the shielding kicked in and the playback started ...

Dear God, he's coming this way! I fidgeted nervously and cursed myself for not leaving the moment I saw him. *Why the hell did I leave the ship?* □

Squeezed for Space

So much for advance planning — it looks as if I haven't left myself any space ... again.

As with every situation in life, there is a good side and a bad side. The good side for me is that I don't have to write as much to fill this space; the bad side is there won't be as much of my bimonthly wisdom for you to read ... or have I got that reversed?

Anyhow, with so little space, I can't get into any real deep trouble.

The increase in the postal rates has once again put the magazine behind the economic eight-ball. Not just because of the increase in second class costs, but equally important because of the increase in bulk rate — the method by which we gain new sub-

scribers.

We are looking at options to avoid a price increase, and we'll let you know what option we chose in the next issue.

The U.S. Congress has tentatively given its approval to a reduced space station program, which might give a bit of a kick-start to related private space efforts and jiggle the economy a bit.

Government construction projects, whether they be bridges, highways, or space stations, usually give the economy a temporary boost.

What is really needed, however, is for private industry to get into the space race and to launch orbital factories and support facilities, which

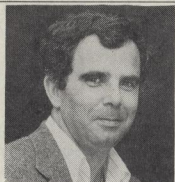
would be the beginning of the real colonization of space. For after workers come shopkeepers, then families, and soon you need more room. A growing housing market creates space for even more colonists and permanent residents, and so on.

But how can that ever happen, if private business is only concerned about the dividends for the next quarter?

Maybe it's time for SF fans to form their own corporation to develop space, with a more realistic dividend schedule.

How about it?

Who volunteers to found a space-going version of the British East India Tea Company?



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The Coming of the Newest Messiah

By Nina Kiriki Hoffman
Art by Charles Lang

The Rev says if we have enough ego-glue, Glopagos Island won't cook us, and maybe it's true: he's still big and black and raw. And he's been here among the stewpots and fumaroles and geysers longer than anybody else, so long nobody but him knows what he was sent up for.

I remember what I was sent up for. When I was still fresh off the mainland, and missing all the things the island doesn't have, I carved my crime, "Murdress," on my leg. I had run out of ego-glue and was looking for a cooking. Carved my thigh with a sliver of sharp rock I knocked off a warm springs terrace. Sat there for an hour whittling on my leg, squatting over a geyser basin, waiting for the steamfuck of a lifetime to lift me off the island and into the afterlife. But geysers never come when you want them to.

The word on my leg's turned to white chickpecks now. The Rev came along and gave me mouth-to-mouth ego-glue, at least that's what he called it. Made a neat excuse for sucking face. Guess it worked — that and his other therapy, which was him saying, "Sheba, *te absolvo*. Come to my cave for supper. I still have a little of Hubert left." That was the last time I seriously considered getting stewed or steamed, until now, since the coming of the newest messiah.

The newest messiah arrived in the evening, when steam was rising thick from the hot springs and fumaroles. The air smelled of rotten eggs. The twenty-three of us who were still alive, not stewed, screwed or 'qued, were hanging around waiting for the rations at the dropzone. The warden was six days late. Rationdrop was supposed to be every twenty-six days, like the full moon here on Malta, and this time the moon was already half-eaten by the sky wolf, and we were getting awfully growly. Nobody had any food left, and the water blisters had been empty for almost a week. We could drink from the hot springs if we had to, or catch steam off the vents in ration cans and cool it, but the water it turned into was full of tastes, and it made me sick.

Cake, who had looked so pale and white and pretty when he came out that we all wanted to eat him, but the Rev wouldn't let us, heard the skimmer first. He had the best ears on the island. He could hear skimmers even over all the chunks, pops, hisses, and growls of the landscape. He nodded to us, and we nodded back. I felt relieved. I'd been seriously thinking about pushing Harvard into a porridge pot. He was the smallest; that's why, even though I liked him, I considered eating him, though he would only make a salty mouthful for each of us. I was the next smallest, though, and if we cooked Harvard, I would have to worry about me every time a shipment was late.

Then Cake frowned and shook his head. Something was wrong. We didn't know what until the skimmer arrived. It wasn't the puke-green government skimmer, with the warden dumping ration cases and nets full of water blisters over the side. It was an angel skimmer, a

souped-up mainland job, pink with black spots. It hovered pretty low, its bottomjets humming like wires in a wind and kicking up an acid dust.

For an instant I thought, angel. I used to be an angel. I had me a skimmer like that, green with lavender V's, only I didn't know I was an angel. I was just a girl out to have fun.

The driver trained a light down on us, looking us over. We separated and posed. Angels came out to Glopagos from the city once in a while to pick up convicts for cheap labor or for something else. We didn't ask what. We didn't care as long as they took us off the island.

But the angel didn't lower a rope or a tractor beam. Instead, the skimmer dropped until it was just too high for us to jump and grab the rim, and then something big and cloth-bound rolled over the edge. "Sheba, I'm sorry, I'm sorry," said a woman's voice from upskimmer. The light fixed on me a minute while I tried to remember who was talking to me. I'd been out here so long I couldn't tell one mainlander from another anymore; before I figured it out, the skimmer rose into the night and streaked away, tailjets leaving a gleaming pink trail across the sky.

"This could be the next messiah," said the Rev, walking over to the bundle the angel had dropped. He had a lightstick left over from a ration cache some maverick Samaritan had dropped a couple of months back, full of things we mostly didn't need, like clothes and powdered milk and Tainment tapes and calculators. He broke the lightstick, starting up a green glow, and we all approached to examine our newest donation.

"Harvard," said the Rev, "bring your knife."

The bundle didn't look like a big enough feast for everybody. I growled in my throat, like everybody else, then, like everybody else, left it to the Rev to decide the divvy. He was the biggest person on Glopagos and kept the rest of us more or less in line, mostly by being much more fair than any of the rest of us would have been.

Harvard knelt beside the bundle, which was wrapped in cloth and rope, and worked on the bonds, trying to salvage whatever he could. Inside was a person. It was still alive. We all groaned.

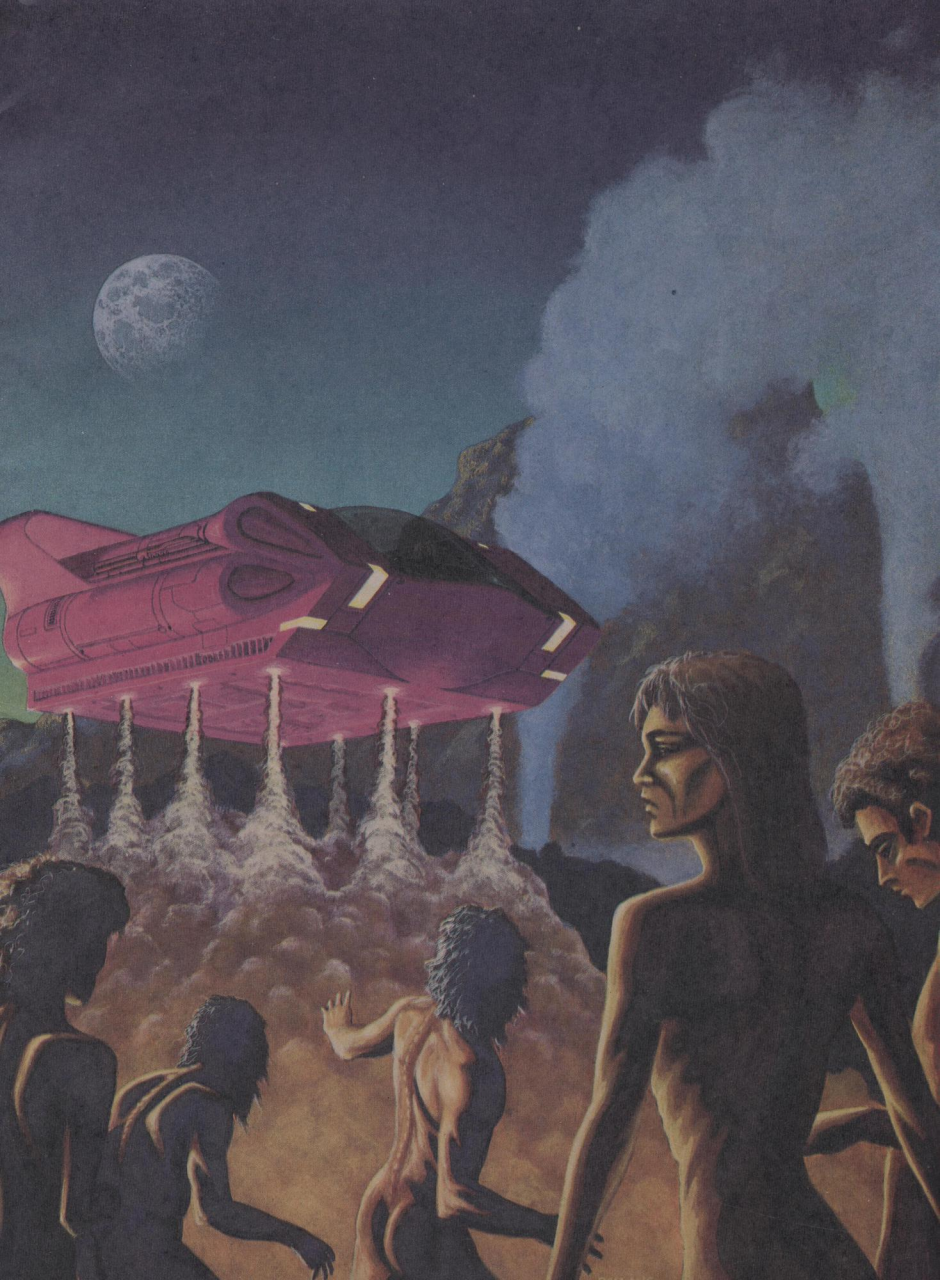
"I voted we stew it before it wakes up," said Hag Allie. She liked them stewed; she didn't have many teeth left.

"Now, now," said the Rev. "You know our policy. Talk first, eat later. Maybe he knows something useful."

"Oh, Rev," said the Hag. "Once you get to know them, you always want to keep them around."

"I'm starving," said Polo. The rest of us growled agreement.

The body stirred. He opened his eyes and sat up. I had been studying the muscles in his legs and arms, thinking he worked out too much and would probably be stringy and tough. When he sat up, I looked at his face for the first



time, and then I felt sicker than stink water could make me. It was Douglas.

He looked all around, with those bright eyes of his, and smiled that smile that had charmed me the first time I saw it. His gaze lingered on each face, came to rest on mine. "Sheba?" he said, not as if he believed it.

I felt the ego-glue running out of me like piss. "Rev, how long I been here?" I asked.

"Six or eight years, I think," said the Rev.

"You know why?"

He shrugged, jerked a thumb at the white marks on my leg.

"Yeah," I said. "I got sentenced to the Glop 'cause I killed my husband. This guy. And he's not even dead. Eight years I been here, for nothing." If I'd had anything in my stomach, it would have come up. Eight years on Glopagos; I got my ego-glue from knowing I was here, because I had done something that needed doing, and I had decided it was worth it. Believing that had given me enough equilibrium to stay out of the really hot stewpots, even when Polo or somebody tried to convince me to jump in. We all did that to new people on the Glop when the rations got short, and sometimes they went for it, and we had a high time. A willing messiah was the best kind.

I had managed to survive here. I had even felt a certain satisfaction, when I thought about Douglas being dead. And now... "I vote I do it right this time, and dump him in Solly's stewpot."

Everybody cheered.

"Sheba, let me explain," said Douglas.

"No," I said.

"Quiet," said Cake, holding up his hand. We all shut up. He raised his head, listening, then nodded to us. Rev hoisted Douglas, still half wrapped in rope and cloth, over his shoulder, and we all scattered, leaving the dropzone clear. In the darkness we heard the fanjets on the government skimmer. The circle of lights around the dropzone turned on, and a load of rations thumped down.

That tabled the discussion about whether Douglas was dinner or not. We settled into our drop routine; everybody carried everything up to the Rev's cave. I helped Cake set up the counter, with stacks of water blisters and three different kinds of ration tins on it, and everybody lined up and took one of each. We always had a group meal after the rations arrived. The Rev said it was civilized. Most of us thought other things about it, especially when the rations were this late and all we wanted to do was tear into them. Being second to the smallest, I was grateful for the routine, especially the part after dinner when the Rev divided everything equally.

When everybody except Douglas had their tins open we sat in a circle on the Rev's floor and waited for the blessing. "Praise the Sword," said the Rev. "Dig in."

The eating part didn't take long. We all wanted more, but we could wait, now; after Topics, the divvy.

"Tonight's Topic: the stranger," said the Rev. "Scripturally speaking, this may very well be our new messiah."

Douglas, sitting in the center of our circle and trying to charm everybody at once, sat up straight and looked hopeful.

"Yum," said Polo. Solly was our last messiah, and he went out with class. He searched out the best porridge pot on the island to cook himself in. He had sniffed the air on all of them, tasted the water in the ones that smelled the

least rancid, and finally picked the one that tasted the most like rain. We named it after him. He even had the style to yell, "This is my body. Take and eat," as he jumped in. He knew we'd do it anyway, but it was nice to have an invite. I drink out of Solly's stewpot when I have to drink unblistered water. It still tastes a little like the broth of God.

Douglas stood up. "I am the new messiah," he said, holding out his hands like he was dropping something.

"Well now," said the Rev. "A messiah may declare himself, but it's up to the faithful to say yea or nay. Preach at us a little."

"I—" said Douglas. For a moment his charm failed him. He glanced around at us. I tried to look at us with main-laid eyes for the first time in ages. In the light of the Rev's lanterns, we were naked and dirty, gaunt, our bones showing through our salt-varnished skin, our bodies sculptured by steam and starvation. I blinked away the vision and saw us as just us again. I shook my head.

"I haven't done anything wrong," said Douglas.

I had forgotten his voice was so pretty. It had been pretty when I heard him say that last time, too. When I found him doing it with my sister. That was one of the reasons I murdered him. The other main reason was to get him to shut up. He could talk the paint off a skimmer. No matter what I found him doing or how much it hurt me, if I let him talk to me, he got me believing he hadn't done anything wrong, or it was my fault, or both. "That last time, I slashed his throat before any words could get out of it, and he bled all over my sister and her bed, and I didn't care.

"Shut up, Douglas!" I yelled. "Not another word!"

"Sheba," said the Rev. "A messiah gets to preach."

Douglas flashed the Rev his best smile, the pretty one that could fell a woman at five feet. "Thanks," he said. I leaned closer, trying to see his neck. Yep, there was a scar there. Why hadn't it clipped his vocal cords? Oh, hell, maybe it had. He probably got some woman to pay for a clone job.

"Sheba," said Douglas, "I'm sorry you ended up out here. After you attacked me I was in the hospital a long time. I didn't even know you were on trial. I don't know how all the facts got mixed up, but by the time I got better, it was too late."

"You couldn't tell somebody to come out here and get me? You couldn't prove my innocence and get me a pardon?"

Douglas looked at the sky for a minute. Then back at me. "Well, I didn't think you were exactly innocent." He touched his throat. "And I didn't think the Glop was such a bad place for you to be." He glanced around at us again. The tiniest shudder touched him, but he stilled it right away.

"Who dropped you off here?" I asked.

"Gina Frazetti."

Gina, my best friend. She had come to the trial. She had cried at the verdict, and given me a farewell hug before the feds loaded me on the Glopagos skimmer. But she hadn't come out here to angel me off the island, and that was one of the reasons I'd gone looking for a good geyser after I'd been here a year. The feds put a one-year ban on sentence lifting, but after that, real friends some-

(Continued to page 115)





CORTNEY
SPUNNER

Jingle Jangle Morning

By Paul A. Gilster

Art by Cortney Skinner

The colony complex hung in endless night, navigation lights flashing red and green. Two-thirds of the huge cylinder was complete. Around the far end (the "north cluster", according to the voice in the headphones) fat factory ships swarmed, their ports yawning wide to discharge girders and struts. From within the scaffolding of the solar panels, the flares of the work crews shone, their torches forming a strange and moving constellation.

Strader clung tightly to the arm of his seat, fighting vertigo. Open to space, the tiny ferry wheeled dizzily as its pilot matched rotation with the docking complex. A nudge from the attitude thrusters brought the hangar doors into view. The craft fell forward, guided by a double row of winking lights.

They emerged into sudden daylight. The ferry, now an open touring car, swept down an elongated track toward the valley floor. But Strader quickly realized that it was no valley. Rolling farmland, green as Nebraska, curved up and out all around him. Directly above, the elongated radiance of an enclosed sun eclipsed the farthest fields, seeming to nudge them with fire.

He sat up slightly in the viewing couch, poking Jack's arm, but the boy barely responded. Strader couldn't blame him. The simulation was the most effective he'd ever seen.

Outside, barely audible from within the theater, a siren wailed past the museum. Strader closed his eyes, snatched back from the space colony into a crowded Washington amphitheater, and a crime whose consequences he could not yet imagine.

You could go to jail for this, he thought. Father or no, it's still kidnapping.

The whole thing had been ridiculously simple. A drive past the schoolyard, a quick stop by the curb. Jack, running after a soccer ball, looking up, jumping in.

"Where we going?" was all he wanted to know, and Strader said the first thing that came into his mind.

"The Air and Space Museum."

He'd taken Jack there the year before, on one of their infrequent vacations together. It seemed like the right place. But it could have been anywhere, as long as it wasn't New York. How far did you have to go to survive a nuclear blast? Strader didn't know. All he knew was that his stomach didn't unknit until they were well into New Jersey.

The drive from New York took four hours. They spent the night at a Days Inn. Every time Strader saw a police car he got jumpy. When Jack was asleep, he found a liquor store and bought a bottle of George Dickel. He sat in the darkened room, glass in hand, listening to the roar of the beltway.

At the museum the next morning, they walked in under an Eastern Airlines DC-3, its markings silver and purple in the skylights. The place should have been a gold mine for a ten-year-old. They moved through rooms packed with planes Strader had seen only in grainy black-and-

white combat footage. A Japanese Zero. An ME-109. But Jack wasn't paying attention. He looked perfunctorily, nodded, asked few questions.

The tension was catching up to Strader. Don't you like it here? he asked, but Jack always nodded, and when Strader tried to draw him out, he took a sudden, frantic interest in an exhibit on planetary exploration.

"It's Amalthea," Strader said of the image that cycled onto the monitor. "One of Saturn's moons. It wobbles."

Jack leaned across the guard rail, scrutinizing the fractured moon. Then he pointed to the solar system map above. "The chart's wrong. There's another planet beyond Pluto."

"Well, there's some evidence for one. But they haven't actually found another planet out there."

"I read it was discovered already."

Strader ruffled his hair. "Maybe it will be soon."

Jack pulled out from under his hand and walked ahead to the next exhibit. They spent an hour in virtual silence, then took a break for lunch. Strader ordered hot dogs from the stand outside, and they ate under a tree facing the mall. Jack took only a few bites and they had to throw his hot dog away.

It took the space colony simulation to bring him to life. "I read about those places," he said after it was over. They were walking out of the theater into the museum foyer. "Someday people will live on them instead of earth. Millions of people."

"Hard to imagine, isn't it?"

"No, Dad, really. They're going to build one someday. They're going to build lots of them."

"It's a great concept, I'll give you that. But don't be disappointed if it never happens. Imagine how far away it would be, how hard to build. Imagine trying to keep it supplied."

"That's just it. My book says it could supply itself. It's self-sufficient. It's an arcology."

"Ecology," Strader said.

"Whatever. See, the farms feed the people, and the plants make oxygen. Actually, it works a lot like earth."

"They made it seem so real ..."

Jack's hands were knotted. "Hey, what's gotten into you?" Strader dropped to his knees to look into the boy's face. "I guess this is all pretty confusing. You feeling homesick?"

"It's just that you won't tell me where we're going."

"We'll head south when we leave here." He looked down the long corridor. South. Down the seaboard, maybe as far as the Florida Keys. But what would they do when the road ended?

Jack pulled out of his grasp. "We didn't see that bomber," he called, pointing to a huge double-door. He walked

forward, peering in. "It's big. What kind of name is that? *Enola Gay*?"

They left Washington at 2:00. Now, fifty miles down the interstate, traffic thinned as they left the Beltway tumult behind. Strader felt good for the first time in days. The wind roared through the open windows and mussed his hair.

On the road, you set your own course and nobody told you what to do. So different from the job he had left behind. First he had been the fair-haired boy, racking up new accounts at a record clip. Now he was just another broker waiting for the economy to turn around, drinking a little too much, hanging on.

What you need, Marty Wellon had said, is a change of perspective. Take a couple of weeks off. Jesus, Carl, you need to pull yourself together.

Five days later, Chase & McKay could have existed in another world. What was it like there now? The paper he bought in Alexandria said plans for a full-scale evacuation were being drawn up. Strader tried to imagine what would happen. The highways out of New York motionless, bumper to bumper, horns blaring. Army trucks in intersections. Helicopters.

He ran a hand over his cheek, the aftertaste of last night's bourbon sour in his mouth. What happened next depended on Jana. He'd called her clinic in Queens before they even left the city. As always, she was icily controlled.

"I'm going to bring him back," Strader said at the end. "But not until this thing is over." He felt like a lawyer summing up a preposterous case, not sure whether he himself believed what he was saying.

"You're using this bomb threat as an excuse, Carl. But it won't work. You get him back now or I'll call the police."

Strader simply hung up.

His ex-wife was convinced the threat to New York was a hoax. There was no way to prove the terrorists had been able to build a bomb, and the fuzzy VCR pictures they sent to CBS only showed something that looked like an elaborately-wired garbage can. But there were National Guard troops all over the city, and those who could travel weren't waiting for the evacuation order.

Meanwhile two more army divisions were en route to Ecuador. A pro-Western government clung to power in Quito backed by U.S. military muscle. And the Shining Path guerrillas who already controlled Peru had linked up with the Ecuadoran revolutionaries in the mountains. A communiqué from their joint command said the guerrillas were running out of patience. The new deadline would be the last.

They drove down I-95 through North Carolina, eating Cajun chicken and talking baseball. Strader jumped onto old U.S. 1 as they approached Henderson. South of Raleigh, the land became more heavily wooded, the trees sometimes reaching all the way across the narrow road. They coasted through canyons of violet light as the sun sank in the west.

He glanced at Jack. "You want a Coke or something?"

"Yeah. Sure is hot."

They pulled off the road at a McDonalds. Strader bought Cokes and an ice cream cone for Jack, taking them to a table by the window.

"I used to read a lot about space," Strader said. "I remember one book that had a picture of a space station,

kind of like what we saw in Washington, but a lot smaller."

He could see its cover. A wheeled platform, half of it still a skeleton of girders and cable, hung suspended above a blue earth. With the memory came a sudden fragrance of apples.

"I just remembered. I used to sit under the apple tree to read. Funny how the smell of a place comes back to you. Is it like that with you?"

Jack sipped his drink, puzzled. "I don't know what you mean."

"I can remember where I read every book I ever read. I've always been like that. I remember everything."

"Can you remember when you were ten?"

"Sure. I remember how coppery my dog's hair was in the sunlight. And how my dad's pickup was scratched under the driver's window where she used to jump up on it to lick him. Dad used to take me into town with him when he'd go for seed and fertilizer. I can remember driving back to the farm with him and seeing geese heading south in the fall."

"What you remember is details," Jack said.

"I remember images. I actually see these things."

"Maybe. But I know what it *feels* like to be ten."

"OK, so tell me what it feels like."

"You get in trouble a lot. There's too much homework. And people don't listen as much as they should. Mom always said it was polite to listen to other people and not interrupt. But nobody listens to kids."

"I'm listening," Strader said. He took a sip of Coke. "Look, I've got an idea. What say we go to Cape Canaveral?"

"Where the rockets are?"

"Sure. There's a launch day after tomorrow. Some kind of military shuttle flight. We could watch it from the beach."

"OK."

"I thought you'd be excited."

"I am." Jack looked toward the door. "But where are we going afterwards?"

Strader paused. "We'll decide that when the time comes."

They got up from the table, stowing the trash in a canister. Back in the car, he eased into the intersection, shifting into third as they gained speed. They bumped over a raised set of railroad tracks, passed a small grocery as they approached the highway.

"Don't you think I listen to you?"

"Most of the time. But I don't see you much."

"That's true."

"I want to go to that space colony some day," Jack said. "They'll have fifty thousand people in it. They're going to put it in one of the LaSalle points."

"Lagrange."

"What?"

"That's what they call them. Lagrange points. Not LaSalle. They're —"

"I know what they are, Dad."

"Sorry." Strader tried several topics, but Jack had nothing else to say. They sped through the evening in silence.

After staying overnight at a motel in South Carolina, they spent the morning at a local amusement park and got off later than Strader would have liked on the drive to

Florida. It was almost eleven when they reached Titusville. Strader found a Motel 6, saw Jack to bed, and went back out. There was a Handy Way two blocks away. He picked up a pack of Oreos for Jack and a couple of pastries for tomorrow's breakfast.

Back at the motel, he pulled onto the lot by the garish light of a full moon. The light was so bright it almost hurt his eyes. He was reaching to turn off the radio when the news came in from New York.

Low yield. That's what they were saying the next day. And a lot of people had left the city in the days before the blast. So maybe three hundred thousand dead. Nobody really had any idea.

The trick is to keep thinking about the launch, he told himself. Not about where that thing went off. In Queens.

Hardly anyone was at the beach. Strader spread out a towel he'd brought for the occasion, and they sat on the sand, looking out past the causeway to Merritt Island. A low fog hung over the sea, coloring everything copper. Across the water, the huge booster caught the first rays of a cauterizing sun.

A couple in their thirties took position a few yards in front of them. They looked to Strader like holdovers from the '60s. He wore a bushy moustache. His denim jacket partially concealed a Led Zeppelin T-shirt underneath. She had tied her long blonde hair back in a pony-tail and stood with her hands in her pockets, framed by the launch complex.

Strader heard another voice behind them. He glanced back, seeing a short man in Bermudas setting up folding chairs for himself and his wife. "We watch this and we're gone," he said. His voice was tight and angry. "There'll be radiation coming down the coast. We're starting back today."

Jack hadn't heard, as far as Strader could tell. He was sitting with his chin in his hands, staring out over the water. Strader wondered what he was going to say to him. He planned to wait until they were on the road again. But the road to where?

The pictures from the television superimposed themselves on the beach. Sidewalks turned to slag. Molten automobiles and shattered glass.

A guitar chord thrummed, snapping him out of the nightmare. The man with the moustache was playing a battered acoustic instrument, stopping frequently to tune it. There were three of them, Strader now saw. The woman, who was humming along with the chords, and a black man dressed in a flowered shirt.

"What do you think?" he asked Jack. "Is it going to get off on time? Only a minute left."

"I hope so."

As the countdown descended through its last seconds, a plume of exhaust blew sideways from the rocket and the deep rumble of its engines began to vibrate in the ground. The sparse crowd watched it in a mesmerized silence. The shuttle moved up and away from the tower quicker than Strader thought possible, an incandescent sun at its tail. The full roar reached them now, a sound so dense that it seemed to squeeze them like huge fingers.

"Go, go, go!" shouted the guitar player. He stood behind the woman with his hand on her shoulder, shielding his eyes.

As the rocket moved downrange, the whole scene began

to take on an eerie familiarity to Strader. He seemed to be watching not one launch but many. The billowing exhaust, the thunder of engines, were old friends. Only in those days he'd been watching on televisions, in crowded school auditoriums or on the black and white set in his father's living room.

Names began to come back to him that he hadn't thought about in years. Each of them appeared in his mind with mathematical precision, as if laid out on the pages of a mental almanac. M. Scott Carpenter. Gordon Cooper. John Young. Go.

The breeze blew cool on his face. Guitar music was in the air again, the notes almost lost in the rocket's roar. Hey mister tambourine man, play your song for me ...

The shuttle booster was a second sun cutting into the morning, muscling relentlessly up and east. Like the Apollos had done. Strader remembered 1969. He'd been engaged to a girl from Detroit, a sandy-haired art major who wanted to be a sculptor. Remembering her brought back that long summer punctuated by a tiny landing craft touching down on the Sea of Tranquility.

Jack pulled at his sleeve. "Can we leave now, Dad?"

He looked at the boy in surprise. It was as if they had exchanged lives. Out of an empty sky, Strader had been pierced by an inexplicable hope. But Jack's face, squinting up at him through the orange sunlight, seemed tired and old.

"You know, don't you?"

"You wouldn't let me turn the TV on. But it's in the newspapers. I saw it when we walked past the lobby."

"I was going to tell you as soon as we left."

"Is Mom dead?"

"I don't know. I think so."

They watched more pictures at the motel. Strader remembered the Hiroshima photos, the famous aerial views of the gutted city in stark black and white. Now the aftermath was modernized. The shots included color, blue sky and sunlight. But the shells of the buildings were still gray, and everywhere there was a grimy coating of ash.

Strader couldn't tell which street was what. Everything looked the same, twisted girders, a charred bus, the ghostly outline of intersections choked by rubble. Jana's clinic was well within the blast radius. And her mother confirmed she had been working there the night the bomb went off.

Jack had asked about his grandparents on the drive back from the beach. Jesus, Strader thought, they won't know what's happened to you. They may think you're still in New York.

Inside the room, he hesitated, his fingers on the keypad. But Jack hunched on the bed, looking at him expectantly. He took a deep breath, lifted the receiver, and began to punch numbers.

"Thank God he was with you," Margaret Morris said after he explained where they were. She was polite but formal. No one knew anything, she said; Jana might still be alive. But Strader didn't think she believed it. He put Jack on and let him talk for ten minutes. Afterwards, he took the phone again.

"Mrs. Morris, we're not that far from Atlanta. I think it would be good for Jack to see you and Bill just now."

That had been four days ago. Jack had spent the nights

with his grandparents while Strader stayed at a motel. They'd been to a memorial service at the church together, a quiet ceremony with recordings of Bach and Mozart, and the kind of non-denominational atmosphere Jana preferred. On the last day, the Morrises took Jack to dinner and a movie. When they got back, it would be time to go. Strader needed to begin.

It had begun to drizzle again in the darkness. The rain ran down the windshield and fogged the glass. Rain was good, Strader mused; it took fallout from the air. Maybe it was raining in New York and down the whole eastern seaboard. The thought hung before him, multiplying his plans, but he fought them back down to one.

He shifted in the car seat, fumbling in the glove compartment for a map. He unfolded the sheet, smoothing it out in the dim light of the overhead. First north, then west, all the way to Lincoln. He could find work there. And maybe a small house with a back yard.

Lights appeared ahead. A dark blue Mercedes came over the hill, braking for the turn into the steep driveway. Strader got out into the rain. "Can you come inside, Carl?" his mother-in-law called.

"Thanks, but we've got to be on our way." He walked up into the driveway under the overhang of trees. Mrs. Morris was bending over Jack, straightening his collar. She nodded to the back of the car, where Strader saw a blue and green plastic bag.

"We bought him some things for the drive. Just some shirts and underwear. Get them out, will you, Bill?"

Her husband, a tall man in his sixties with close-cropped gray hair, grunted as he swung from the driver's seat. He appraised Strader with steady blue eyes rimmed with circles of fatigue. "You should wait till tomorrow. Why head out this late, and in the rain, too?"

"I'd like to get started. We'll just be going as far as Chattanooga tonight."

Morris ruffled Jack's hair. "Looking like his mother," he said. "Don't you think so, Margaret? So much like Jana."

The rain was easing by the time they left the city, but patches of fog had begun to form. Strader stopped at a cafe in Roswell to get his thermos filled with coffee. After two cups in the car, he felt more alert than he had for days. They moved up I-75 toward Calhoun with the brights sweeping out fuzzy arcs ahead. The windshield wipers thrummed a staccato impulse to their journey. Go.

"I was thinking about the museum," Strader said. "I don't guess they'll build that space colony while I'm young enough to live there. But maybe you'll get the chance. I hope I'm around long enough for you to tell me what it's like."

Jack didn't answer. Strader glanced over and saw that he had fallen asleep.

It's going to take time, he thought.

The sight of his sleeping son forced him to concentrate on Nebraska. One by one, the options opened up like pages in a book. There were schools to think about; you had to look at houses with school districts in mind. He began working out alternatives. They'd go to the Chamber of Commerce first. Then they'd visit a few schools and start asking questions.

The night was the darkest he had ever known. The road moving beneath his tires was like a ramp across a starless void. But he knew there were people out there. Small

towns backed off the interstate, closing down for the night, their lights winking out. Farms tucked behind the rolling hills, unreachable as Centaurus.

In that incredible blackness, the image of the colony came back to him unbidden. It floated in its precise gravitational matrix, the nictinic flares of workers' torches too intense to look at, the huge panels taut on their scaffolding as they were drawn inward and down to shape a world.

Strader wanted to be there, to walk toward that curving horizon where the sun touched the distant fields with fire. In that moment of yearning he balanced between two worlds, a shattered city behind, a dark and uncertain frontier ahead.

As the vision faded back into the rain, he braked coming around a curve, skidding on the wet tarmac. Realizing he had outrun his headlights, he eased off on the accelerator. The car broke suddenly out of the fog, and Strader looked ahead for some sign of the next town. But they were in the mountains now, and the cycling pavement was all he could see of journey's end. □

Launch Your Own Fight for Literacy

The recession — we won't use that D word — has caused hardships everywhere. Local community budgets, fire and police departments, schools, health care, and poverty programs are all facing cutbacks as the recession continues — not just here in Massachusetts, but all across the country.

Local libraries are on the front line for budget cuts.

And yet books, and the literacy they represent, are the tools for educating children and adults who can't afford the best schools, or whose local schools don't measure up.

Do what you can to help. Donate your books and copies of *Aboriginal Science Fiction* and other magazines to the local library after you have read them.

If your collection's too precious to part with, then you could buy your public library, and local high school libraries a magazine subscription or two.

It's tax deductible, and a magazine is a terrible thing to waste. — Ed. □



Something on His Mind

By Chuck Rothman

Art by Larry Blamire

"Your husband's been acting very strange lately," Grace said.

I continued pulling weeds from the garden. "Really? I haven't noticed."

"Haven't noticed? What about the way he went to work yesterday? His shirt was on backwards and he had both feet in one pants leg. He was hopping."

I took the cultivator and loosened the earth. "So would you, if you were dressed that way."

My answer seemed to fluster her. "Yes, but ... but how about last Saturday? He was cutting the grass."

"So?"

"With pinking shears?"

"Brian's a perfectionist." The ground was ready. I took out the packet and began to sprinkle seeds over the turned-up soil. It was perfect growing weather.

"But —"

Just then, Brian pulled into the driveway. He turned off the motor and began pushing on the windshield.

"Not that way," I called. "Use the door!"

Brian shook his head, then nodded — he still gets the two gestures mixed up. Then he began fumbling for the handle.

"You don't think *that's* a little strange?" Grace asked.

I sighed. She would have to find out eventually. "Can you keep a secret?"

She nodded.

"Well, you know that Brian and I have had our moments. Lately, a lot of them. He'd been staying out late or disappearing behind the paper whenever I tried to talk with him. Then, about a month ago —"

"Honey, I'm home," Brian said, finally extricating himself from the car. He had dressed himself wrong again, with my hot pink blouse and a pair of Bermuda shorts with an ascot tied around the waist. He took me in his arms and kissed me.

When he finally stopped, Grace had turned bright red.

"Maybe you two want to be alone," she murmured.

I shook my head. "As I was saying, about a month ago — oh, hell. You'll never believe me if you don't see a demonstration. Brian, show yourself."

Brian put his hands behind his ears and pushed.

With a sound like a wine bottle popping, the top of his skull flipped open, showing a pulsing green mass. Two antennae waved, then made an approximation of the Cub Scout salute.

A strangled sound came from the back of Grace's throat.

"Better close up now," I told Brian.

He shook his head and snapped his skull into place. Grinning, he went into the house.

Grace stared as he left. "That ... that's ..."

"Gross," I admitted. "Still, it's the only drawback."

"But what is that?"

"Oh, come on, Grace. It's an alien. Took over Brian's mind."

"That's horrible."

I shrugged. "It wanted to know how to pass for human. I told him. I figure they won't conquer very much acting like that. And once he gets home he's the perfect husband. *Really* perfect. He's thoughtful, and listens to me, and doesn't mind doing the dishes or helping me around the house. He brings home flowers and always puts the seat down."

"Perfect? In *every* way?"

I smiled. "You saw the kiss."

Grace sighed gently.

I returned to fixing the garden.

It was a few minutes before Grace spoke again. "It's wrong," she said. "I don't know how you could do that. That alien ... animal in his head."

"Not animal," I said, smoothing the last of the newly planted patch. "Vegetable." I held up my packet of seeds. "So how are things with you and Phil?" □

Boomerangs

(Continued from Page 93)

Futility and ugliness I can get from the news. From you I want the one slice of positive karma on the *Golden Crane*. The story line deserves no more commentary than that. Suffice to say, that even after reading the five other *nonpareil* tales in number 27, my opinion of *Aboriginal* is shaken. Tilton took an easy and obvious plot road that most writers have the good taste to avoid, and you bought it. Why? Is she a name already?

What the hell were you thinking?

But... Congratulations and major kudos to all our other authors, especially Evans and Mitchell/Clarkson team. I do, however, qualify that accolade with this: I don't speak Japanese — a poll of your readers would probably show that less than one percent of them do either. All that beautiful Japanese stuff in "Amerikano Hiiaka" cruised over my head without so much as a *banzai*. In fact, I resented most of it as elitism (remember T.S. Eliot? *Shantih shantih shantih* my balls...). The story was wonderful, but the foreign words were a few too many. That's all.

Eggleton should have got the cover, I'm afraid. His stuff was the best. Second place was a toss up between Chadwick and Heyer. Great work all around, though.

I'll be in England next week. I plan to pick up a copy of *Interzone*. Just to check up on you.

I wanted to also mention in this already far too long note that I always enjoy Ms. Ellison's column. It's really the only exposure to info that sort that I get (not being a reader of *Thrust* etc.) so thanks and keep 'em coming.

And take it eeee... fa Chrissake!

James T. Hughes III

APO, NY

Dear Messrs. Ryan & Pringle:

I hope I'm not too late to get my two cents in. I've been spending most of this year finishing my degree and I've just now managed to get caught up with reading *Aboriginal*. Having done so, I felt a great urge to write to you two gentlemen and share some of my thoughts on recent developments.

First of all, what a great idea it was to do your little foreign exchange program! It wouldn't bother me one bit to see it happen again if the opportunity arises. Giving your readers a taste of something different every once in a while is a good way to keep vitality in the magazine. It also gives you a chance to see what we think is the best in both worlds... and the worst. And so, I'm going to give you my humble opinions on both.

The stories from both sides were excellent. Both of you show a good knack for finding stories that have a lot of interesting science and ideas but still manage to be mainly about people. I'm a sucker for a good character even if the writing and the plot

are a little weak in spots. Though both magazines are homes to obviously skilled writers in all areas.

I'm especially glad to see that neither one of you shies away from printing a story that might not be what some enthusiasts define as pure science fiction if the story is good (such as "Darkness on the Face of the Deep" by Harlan Ellison and "Hamelin, Nebraska" by Garry Kilworth). I will mention that a personal dislike of mine, however, is alternate history stories; so, I wasn't particularly interested in "Ten Days that Shook the World" by Kim Newman and Eugene Byrne. (The only one I really liked was Orson Scott Card's Prentice Alvin series. Even *The Difference Engine* was only interesting in parts. Just a personal bias, I guess.)

I've long wanted to say a few words on the art in *Aboriginal's* pages, so I'll take this moment now as both of you can profit from my wonderful advice. Full page color art is wonderful. It's one of the reasons I buy *Aboriginal*. However, two pages of art per story is overdoing it. First and foremost I buy a magazine to read the stories. Reducing the art to, say, two pictures for the cover and the lead stories and one for the rest would allow you to fit one and, possibly, two more stories in per issue. In addition, I'm a great fan of pencil and/or ink drawings (such as Michelangelo sketches, Durer's drawings of hands, Escher's numerous pictures, et cetera). I wouldn't mind seeing some black and white art in *Aboriginal's* pages. As a former subscriber to *Interzone*, I can say that some of their art appeals to me more than page after page of full-color art. Less is more sometimes.

As I mentioned before, the stories are what appeals to me the most in any magazine. The more stories, the better (as long as quality can be maintained, of course).

I think you should be able to see where I'm going with this. I love the stories in both magazines and that's what I buy the magazine for: stories. Some of what are, in my opinion, the best stories are being printed right now. Give me as many stories as you can fit.

I would also mention that it would be nice to see a little more poetry. I love poetry and would like to see more of it in *Aboriginal* and any in *Interzone*.

Sincerely,
Timothy R. Haugh
Quincy, IL

Dear Sir/Lee,

Look, I don't mean to be disrespectful, but you're going to hear this from other lips than these D.P., the stories in the special *Aboriginal* issue were of a quality far superior to anything seen recently in *Interzone*. If things don't improve here soon, and if *Aboriginal* in August, or whenever we receive it, pleases as much as the sampler, then it won't be just your babyspeak, partner publication to which I'll be declining to re-subscribe.

Yours ever,
Louis Kesh
Stretland Isles, Scotland

Dear Editor,

On current form, the sub [to *Interzone*] I bought is a very sound investment: of late, the fiction has become more eclectic, while the high quality has been maintained. Ironically, the strongest of recent issues was #47, the *Abw* swap, with the stories by Lois Tilton and Wil McCarthy standing out from a very impressive array of fiction. Readers of *Abw* seem not to have fared badly either: Greg Egan's story, while not one of his best, was fascinating in its complexity — a quite literal reality shift! Nicola Griffith also flexed her considerable talent — "Song of Bullfrogs, Cry of Geese" was another understated, entrancing tale, short on action but long on depth and in the end, genuinely moving.

Peter Siddell
Manchester, England

Dear Crazy Alien, or whoever;

The *Interzone* edition was very interesting, and I enjoyed the contents, even the "Hamelin, Nebraska" isn't Science Fiction — maybe horror? "The Nilakantha Scream" was barely SF; the "science" was perilously close to magic. "Ten Days that Shook the World" was outrageous enough to be interesting, but apart from the implication of a parallel world, there wasn't any science in it. "The Infinite Assassin" was distinctly unscientific "science" also. Still, they were readable.

Erik S. Buck
Dayton, OH

Dear Sirs:

I doubt that this shall see the light of day, but I take certain satisfaction in at least putting it down on paper:

I would rather castrate myself with a rusty knife than read anything I know to have been written by either Robert Silverberg or Harlan Ellison. However, the danger of doing so through their use of pseudonyms is quite remote; I toss aside after a few paragraphs anything I have begun that proves itself to be utter tripe.

I shall make one exception: their suicide notes I would read with considerable relish.

Curtis D. Janke
Sheboygan, WI

(If you are serious, we have a rusty knife we could loan you, since we will publish both gentlemen whenever we can get their stories. Of course, we don't recommend anyone do anything as silly as using a rusty knife for that purpose, or as silly as not reading Ellison or Silverberg, who are both excellent writers. Also, as far as we know, neither one currently uses a pseudonym. — Ed.) □

Messiah

(Continued from page 106)

times came out and took their friends home; Glop was a medium security island. I figured Gina had given up on me. Forgotten me. Decided I deserved Glop.

Now I figured maybe she and Douglas had gotten together. I was so mad I wanted to kick rocks.

"It's not what you think," Douglas said. He was talking to me as if we were the only people in the cave, and as if what I thought was important to him. It had never been important before, except when he wanted money from me.

"How the hell do you know what I think?"

"She didn't even know I was alive until last week." He hugged himself. "Then she kidnapped me and made me tell her everything. And brought me out here."

"Who took you to the hospital after I cut you? My sister?" My sister, who had cried all over the witness stand at my trial, describing my evilness. Had she known all along Douglas wasn't even dead?

"Yes."

I stared at him. Thinking about all these dead things hurt my head. That afternoon all I had been thinking about was what to eat next — Harvard, or rations. "Rev, I need some ego-glue."

He patted the ground beside him and I went and sat next to him. He gave me mouth-to-mouth. Mainland was no way to think on Glopagos. All that life was lost; there was no way back. I thought about the Rev being a holy man, and giving us the rules and tools we needed to live alone in this steaming, stinking wilderness, and worked on forgetting Douglas. By the time we came up for air I felt settled into my real self again.

Douglas still stood in the center of the circle. He looked upset. "All I'm asking for is one phone call," he said. "I know, if I can just explain this to the authorities, somebody will be by to pick me up. Gina victimized me."

He was just some stranger, squawking like they all did. I felt much better.

"Son," said the Rev, "we don't have phones out here. We've all been victimized. Some more than others." His arm was around my shoulder. "What we want to know is if you have anything interesting to say. We'll give you till tomorrow, as we've already had dinner."

"Till tomorrow? Till tomorrow for what?"

"Till tomorrow to tell us something we don't already know."

He didn't come up with anything that night. In the morning, people asked me what I thought, whether we should keep him around alive a while or not. It was the first time I remembered anybody asking me something like that — anybody consulting anybody instead of just voting. "Stew him," I said.

As we were leading him off to Solly's stewpot, he babbled a lot of things. I kept to the tail end of the procession, because I didn't want to listen to him.

It wasn't until we were sitting around, full, just munching on bits and pieces, that Hag Allie told me Douglas had said he loved me. She said the last thing he said before boiling and screaming was that I was the only one he had ever really loved.

For a minute mainland thinking came back to me and leached out all the ego-glue. I looked at the finger I held. Was it the ring finger or the middle one? Hard to tell. "If

that were the truth," I told Douglas's finger, "if you had only behaved like that was the truth —" If I had never found him with my sister, if I had never slashed him, if I had never been sentenced, if I had never come to Glop —

I scratched a salt burn on my ankle and came home to myself. "Your timing always was rotten, you bastard," I said and bit the finger so hard I broke it. □

White Light, White Heat

By Robert Frazier

*Attuned to the data-feed at the core
of his pseudobrain, that knot
of fiberos and magnetic bubble clusters,
Mantler stares out over the wind erosion,
the rivers and plains of fused glass; and
in the countless scintillae, the tracers of sunlight
through the shattered land, he seems to
find some meaning, some reading
of his own fate at this hunt.
This is his last tracking job.
And the quarry's the last serial murderer,
code name: Thin White Rope.*

*Once a corporate mule, the boy had used
his influence to hide elaborate travel codes,
to mislead the investigative software that
can spot a pattern from just three incidents.
And the boy was obvious, leaving a rigging line
at every scene, around every throat.*

*Mantler crushes his butt against his palm,
tests the juice level of his stiff.
The cybody seems functional.
The .44s in his forearms smoke.
He straps on the diamond-edged blades
of his skates and spins a figure-eight.
A smile curves on his brass lips.*

*We have ways to rock you, Mantler says,
broadcasting on all frequencies.
I run on guts, not programming.*

*He starts down the slag floes,
setting a good racing speed, targeting
all movements on infrared,
skirting the hard radiation pockets and
the rubble fields of the old high-rises,
marking his own freeways through
old Los Angeles, the wasteland.
Yes, this will be an easy retirement.
He loves this work; he'll miss
the austere beauty of the Dead Coast.
Perhaps, after he's found the hunted,
his renegade wolf with the hobbled run,
Mantler will just keep on: defying mortality,
riding south into the land of pure heat,
and no motion save
his own.*



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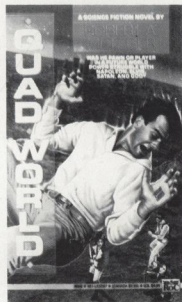
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