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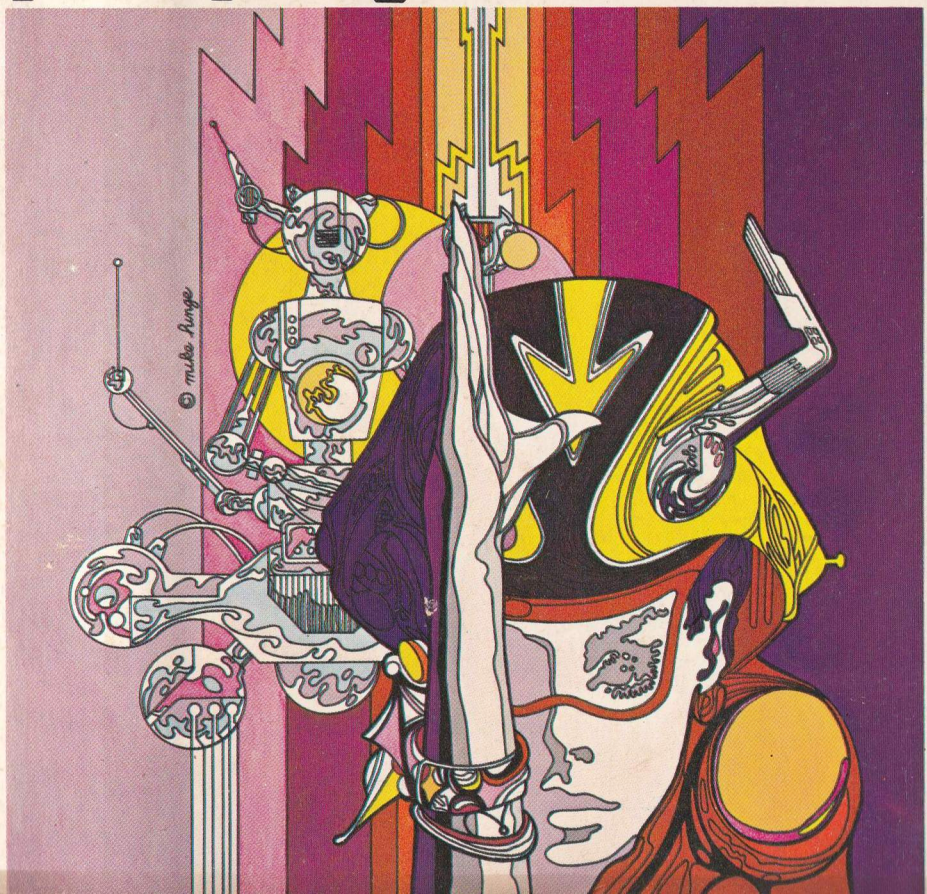
CHARLES L. HARNESS
THE ARAQNID WINDOW



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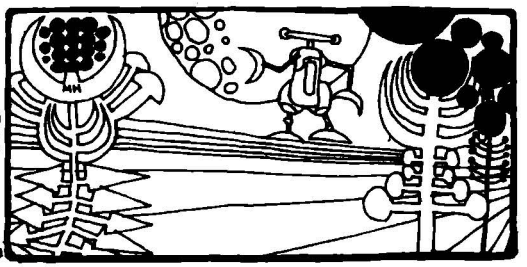
TED WHITE

EDITORIAL



A CHANGE OF ADMINISTRATION: As I write this Richard Nixon has been out of office less than a week. An era in American history—perhaps its most shameful to date—is ended. When I look back over the more than five years of the Nixon administration, I am astonished by the changes which have occurred, gradually but continually, to our country. Perhaps it is simply a matter of mood, of style—of the "leadership" this man supplied—but it seems to me that in many respects we have lived a national nightmare from which only now are we beginning to emerge. Contrasting this year—1974—with the year 1968 (during which I first came to this magazine) I am struck by the meanness of the times. High prices and low spirits came to dominate us. A man who said that as president he would "bring us together" very nearly destroyed us, economically and psychologically. The Nixon presidency was a deepening cloud, the depth and density of which we are only now beginning to assess as it lifts.

I take little pride in pointing out that over the past five years I have more than once pointed with anger and alarm at the machinations of this, the most lawless and opportunistic president our nation has known. It took little prescience to recognize some of the symptoms of his "moral leadership"—they have dominated his public life for twenty-five years. I do take pride in my country, however, for its final rebellion, its ultimate decency. Had Mr. Nixon persisted in clinging to his corrupted office—as by all indications he intended to do until his own attorney and chief of staff forced his resignation—he would almost certainly have been impeached and convicted and removed from office by the Congress. (In the last days before his resignation, Republican leaders guessed that no more than ten members of the House would vote against impeachment; no more than fifteen senators against conviction.) The stench of his moral decay had grown too strong for any but his immediate family (themselves immersed in it for most of their lives) to stomach.

What will happen now?

The cloud has lifted. President Ford has few qualifications for the office he now holds, save one—and that one is of paramount importance: he is an open, honest man. Political pundits are forecasting another, if truncated, "Eisenhower Era." Having lived through the original Eisenhower Era, I'm not overjoyed at the prospect, but I do feel that it, or its retread, would be a welcome improvement over the past five years. Like most people, I'm willing to give Ford

(cont. on page 128)

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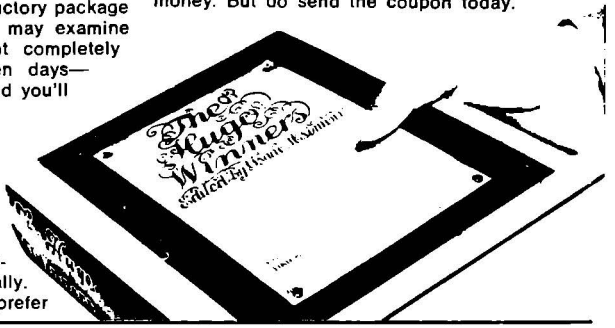

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*Charles Harness first caught my attention with a post-*WW II *story called "The New Reality," in which he introduced me to the philosophies and writings (hard-going for a high-school freshman) of Kant. Subsequently he published an obscure short novel.* The Rose, *and—after a decade had lapsed—was rediscovered by the British* New Worlds *coterie with the republication of that novel. Harness has published infrequently (a small handful of novels in all) but tellingly; his name has the proportions of a half-remembered legend in some quarters. The novella which follows is an anomalous as anything Harness has published —daringly "old-fashioned" science fiction: full of wonder . . . a peep through—*

THE ARAQNID WINDOW

CHARLES L. HARNESS

Illustrated by RON MILLER

1. ARCHAEOLOGY 411

EVERY MORNING, for many years, right after he turned off the alarm clock, and whether he was on campus or in the field, Professor Speidel had permitted himself a brief visionary moment.

He saw a list of names:

Jean Champollion, Rosetta Stone, 1822.

Sir Henry Layard, Nineveh, 1845.

Heinrich Schliemann, Troy, 1870.

Sir Flinders Petrie, Egypt, 1880.

Sir Arthur Evans, Knossos, 1900.

Sir Leonard Woolley, Ur, 1922.

Hon. Jacques Derain, Ferria, 2095.

DR. REITER SPEIDEL, ARAQNIA, *21--.*

Yes!

He might have doubts and reservations about some things. He doubted that the terrestrial Stone Age stopped and the Bronze Age began sharply at 2,000 B.C. He doubted that Egypt was older than Sumer. He doubted that the Mayan cities had died because of local soil exhaustion. But there was one thing that he knew for certain, and which he did not doubt. And that was that he, and he alone, was destined to discover the home civilization of the elusive Araqnids. The name of Speidel would be entered in the hall of fame along with other archeological greats. And from this fame would come great influence and power, and money. He would

wave his hand, and scores of assistants would put together beautifully illustrated texts on Araqnia. The stereo frontispiece would show him leaning modestly on a shovel, beside complete piece of the most delicate Araqnid statuary, done doubtless in alabaster. The statue would be sitting on a black velvet cloth spread out at the very spot where it had been teased out of the dig site. He would be smiling. It would be a faint, very wise, very confident smile.

Everything was certain but the date. This morning, as he slowly rose from his cot and fished for his slippers, he had a presentiment that he would make it this summer. He had a good group on this field seminar. One or two exceptions, of course, such as he always had in a group this size. But by and large, most were competent. In a couple of weeks he would be finished here at the base line, and he would send them out in several search parties to other likely sites where Araqnid artifacts had already been found. They knew what to look for. Somewhere on this very earth-like planet of Ferria were the ruins of a city with a technology so advanced that its builders had visited all the outlying sun systems of the local star cluster over three thousand years ago. But then, very suddenly, they had disappeared, almost without a trace.

It would have to be this year. He was seventy. The Department was going to retire him. Lack-Coeur, the Departmental Head, had told him so, months before the expedition. "No chance of staying on afterward, Speidel. Nothing in the budget. Sorry."

"But what if I find Araqnia this trip?"

"No. The answer is still the same. Firstly, there's no such thing as Araqnia. Secondly, even if there were, there's still the question of the budget. Thirdly, you are seventy years old."

Well, no matter. He had immediately written all the foundations and museums. Somewhere there must be a place for him. But the replies had come back, one by one, each one a kick in the stomach. Every few days he got another one. "Our staff full for the coming season."

God, it was hell to be old. Thirty years ago, when he had yet to write the first edition of *Comparative Archaeology*, he had got a dozen offers when he closed up his first expedition. There was still hope, of course. He had yet to hear from Interstellar Geographic. They had financed Derain, the discoverer of this planet, fifty years ago. He should have a TX from them any day now. He had given them three proposals of varying scope and expense, all directed to finding the lost city. The third and cheapest proposal was simply to toss up an orbiting satellite to make a combination photo-sonar scan of the entire planet, with computerized enhancements. Geographic was his

last hope.

He switched the tent light on, shaved and dressed quickly, and got out his notes for the morning lecture. A few minutes later the twin suns of Algol burst over the horizon like a nuclear explosion. From down the camp street he could hear the chattering begin. Why did young people have to make so much noise?

The youngsters seemed to feel a duty to make a racket day and night. With the lights-out signal, when sane people should be composing thmselves for slumber, the camp put on a new burst of energy. Night brought out the guitars, the concertinas, the singers, and the two moons. One big moon and one little moon, skipping and dancing as it orbited the big one. And there was giggling, music, and waltzing on the sward for all hours, probably with liquor. At night he buttoned his tent flap tight and refused to inquire as to what might be going on out there. God knows what all they did. But they looked fresh and bright in the morning. That was what counted. He did not really care what they did so long as they were ready for another good day's work at the dig.

They made him think back to his own student days. He thought of girls, beer, and drinking songs. Why had he never married? He was out in the field too much. It would not have been right to ask a woman to share the hard life at the dig site with him. And yet, these young people today . . . . There were plenty of girls in the groups he had brought here, year after year. And several married couples. The Thorins, for example. The girls did not seem to mind the rough life. But of course they would change when the babies started coming. No, archaeology was no life for a woman.

He considered the way the young women dressed. Elastic shorts stretched tightly across their rumps. In his generation it would never have been done. In his student days the girls had worn faded blue jeans in the field. Or khaki. Occasionally, perhaps a split skirt. Times had changed, but he had not. Did that mean he was truly getting old? He had to turn up something on this trip. Not that it would help him at the University. The course would have a different teacher next summer, no matter what happened. Too bad. He'd taken a group here for twelve years.

Archaeology 411. Excavations on Ferria. Examination of artifacts. Study of parallel evolution of Araqnid-Llanoan culture. 3 credits.

Araqnia, where are you?

He could hear the young voices in the mess tent, half a kilometer away. What were they talking about? Him? Perhaps.

He knew their name for him. Rider the Spider. They thought him a monomaniac. Well, perhaps he was. It was the only way to

make a name in this field. Perhaps he was like Captain Ahab in search of the great white whale. He saw good and evil only in terms of what helped or hindered his search for the fabled Araqnia. It permitted a crystal-clear morality. Sometimes he awoke in a sweat at night, dreaming that he had died before he had found the city. Get hold of an obsession and never let go. That was the way the others had done it. And so would he.

He smiled grimly. Let them chirp and chatter, if that is what they had to do. Just so long as they turned up an artifact or two today.

He looked up the camp street. Across the little valley and up in the range of low hills he could make out the scattered buildings of the Wolfram Mining Company. The chief engineer had studied under him, many years ago. Last evening they had sat down to supper together in the crude mining mess hall. The engineer was sympathetic to the professor's problems. "Professor, all you need is to find this city, and then you will have so much fame that every foundation on earth will come looking for you. Maybe you are not digging fast enough. Maybe you should borrow one of my blastavators for a couple of days. Goes through solid rock like butter."

Speidel had laughed. "I appreciate it, Zachary. Truly I do. But I'll have to pass up the offer. If we dig faster than a centimeter an hour, we're sure to miss something."

Zachary Stone shook his head. "Well, if you change your mind, just let me know. I will send a machine anywhere you say, anywhere on the planet."

"I—" Speidel sneezed suddenly, then fished for his handkerchief.

"Gesundheit!" declared the engineer, looking at him narrowly. "Professor, you are catching something."

"Nonsense. It's just the afternoon mistral. Starts up on the Plateau of Sylva. Flows down the valley every afternoon." He blew his nose, then buttoned his jacket carefully around his throat.

"Sylva? The volcano?"

"That area, yes. The cone has been extinct for centuries. The lava flows made the plateau. It's all forested over, now. There's nothing there."

"Maybe we should send a 'vator up. Plow around in the lava a little."

"Not worth it. Araqnia is not on Sylva. All the signs point elsewhere. We've picked up artifacts in a dozen places, but nothing on Sylva."

"Maybe it's there, just buried."

"Then it's no good to me. I've got to locate and catalog things I can find quickly. Unless I get something from Interstellar Geographic, this is my last trip. I've got to show results, and I've got to send the kids out where I know they can find something."

"Sure, Professor. It's your

show. Just let me know if I can help."

It was good to have friends. But there was nothing the engineer could do for him. At least not at this dig.

2. FOUR HUNDRED MOUNDS

AFTER BREAKFAST he wound up his morning lecture from the little dais in the mess tent.

"Our topic this morning is the Four Hundred Mounds, located two kilometers north of our camp. As we know, these mounds are lined up neatly in rows, twenty by twenty, and consist mostly of iron oxide, Fe_2O_3. And that was why the great Derain named this planet Ferria. And there the mystery begins. For there were suspicious percentages of other metals along with the iron. Nickel was there, and cobalt, tungsten, molybdenum, chromium. Metals such as are found in our own ferrous metal structures. Our machinery. Our landcraft. Our seacraft. And, most intriguing of all, our spacecraft. Had these rust heaps once been proud ships, challengers of the deeps of space? I am almost certain they were. But the great number troubles me. Had every ship in the Araqnid fleet been caught on the ground by some terrible disaster? Ah, what we would give to know! And somewhere here the answer is waiting for us.

"It has been proposed that this area was indeed the lost city, and that these piles were the houses. Impossible. Iron houses? No. And only four hundred houses? Not acceptable. And not storage sheds or warehouses, either. No, these were space-ships. How do we know this? Next to the area of the four hundred mounds is a concrete apron, several hectares in extent. Like all of this area, it is covered with fifteen centimeters of volcanic ash. Last year we borrowed a remote-control blastavator from the Wolfram Company and scraped off the overburden on a two-meter path, right down to the concrete pads. We took skin samples from the concrete and picked up some nice radioisotopes of alkaline earth silicates. So we are even able to identify their nuclear fuel mix. And not only that, from the isotopic residues we can date their last blast-off. The radiology lab at the University gives it as three thousand plus or minus three hundred years B.P.—before the present. This coincides nicely with data from the other known landing sites on the four other planets, including two on Earth, which is to say, one in the North Sahara and one in California. Students, just imagine those marvelous explorations of thirty centuries ago. They blasted off from this very place, just a few kilometers away, and they landed on our own home planet. You can almost see them. And then . . ." His voice dropped uncertainly. "And then, they disappeared. No more flights to earth, no more explorations anywhere. Overnight, they vanished. Why? What terri-

ble disaster struck them? Well, perhaps on this trip we shall find out.

"Now then, enough talk. Let's get to work!"

Nevertheless, within the hour the Professor found himself making another speech.

"It has been said—" (And here the Professor deliberately quoted himself.) "—that archaeology is a process of destruction."

The circle of seminarists dropped spade and sieve and assembled around the savant.

"Destruction, yes," the Professor continued grimly. "But we mean *informed* destruction. And don't forget the modifier. Is *this*—" (he pointed to John Thorin's trench) "*informed* destruction?"

The class looked at the young student in secret sympathy. It was going to be a bad day.

"The Llanoans," continued the Professor, "built a wall here. A wall of sun-baked clay bricks. Then the wall crumbled, as such walls do. The desert moved in and covered everything. And now Mr. Thorin comes along with his spade, some four thousand years later, and digs a fine trench. And runs it right through the wall. Mr. Thorin, this is destruction, but it is not informed destruction. May I ask, sir, why your trench did not stop when it came to the wall?"

"I guess, sir, because the wall texture was the same as the soil. I just did not see the line where the soil stopped and the wall began. The bricks were made from the desert soil in the first place, and I guess they sort of weathered back into soil."

"So that you should have been specially careful, eh, Mr. Thorin? Well, then, can you now show the class the wall which you have zoomed right through with such enthusiasm?"

Thorin flushed. Forced to rub his nose in it. Thank God the light was just right. He could barely pick out a band of something about one decimeter thick. But he knew that if the professor had not told him it was there, he would have missed it. He knelt and pointed at the boundary.

"Very good. And now let's trade." He took the spade gently from the student's hands and gave him a digging knife. "You will now proceed to define the wall. Carry on, class."

Thorin sighed. He hoped this wasn't going to set the pattern for the field trip. He was glad his wife had not been present to witness his humiliation. Fortunately, Coret was busy today typing reports in the administration tent.

And that bit with the knife. As though to tell him he couldn't be trusted with anything so gross as a shovel.

He set his jaw philosophically and began to hack away. Just how he was going to run a trench a meter wide down the full length of the wall using only a handknife, he did not know. The shovel was the only way to do it. But he wasn't going to risk the shovel

again. The professor might send him home. Even though he was majoring in instrumentation, he needed this 3-hour credit in ark. He had to finish this field trip. No, he could not risk antagonizing the professor.

DIGGING alternated with lectures.

"On a rock in Tassili, in the northern Sahara, on our home planet, is carved a line drawing of a figure in a space suit. Who were these creatures?" The professor looked across the assembled group, sitting on the ground around the camp fire, and his eye fell on John Thorin.

Thorin knew his lines by heart. "Most likely the Araqnids," he mumbled.

"Most definitely the Araqnids, Mr. Thorin. And there are similar markings in the Tulare region of California. And where did the Araqnids come from, Mr. Thorin?"

Thorin bore it in patience. "Here on Ferria, somewhere."

"Yes. Very definitely. Somewhere here on this very planet. We have already detected several of their rocket sites here. We have found their artifacts here, and fragments of their statues. We have a fair idea of what they looked like. A rather small spider-like people, with tentacles. And just as we ride horses, they rode furry bipeds—the Llanoans. We have established this in drawings on pottery. We postulate a home city for them,, which I have named Araqnia. Our prime objective for this seminar is to find Araqnia."

"Good," thought the instrumentalist. "He is off on Araqnia. Nobody will get chewed out for the rest of the lecture."

3. THE WIND

NEXT DAY, the professor said to Thorin, "I am assigning you to the sifting screen. The excavators will bring you the soil they have dug up, one wheelbarrow after another. They will help you shovel it on to the screen bed. You press the button, here, and the machinery will vibrate the screen. The soil will drop through. Potsherds, small artifacts, anything the shovels missed, will be retained on the screen. When you see anything, pick it up right away and put it on the collection table. This is very simple. A child could do it. Do you think you will have any trouble?"

"Of course not, sir."

"Don't say 'of course not'. I am taking a chance on you. Just do it."

"Yes, sir."

As he expected, there was nothing to it. The hours passed, and the wheelbarrows kept rolling up. He helped them unload. The waste dropped through the sieve into the little mining car, which moved off down the slope to dump its burden, and then rolled back again. Once in a while he caught an over-size pebble on the screen. That was all.

After lunch, it became hotter,

but the afternoon breeze from the plateau got stronger and kept the perspiration stripped from his body. The breeze felt fine. He shifted around to windward of the sieve to keep the loess from blowing over him.

At this point an unfortunate thing happened. Coret had wheeled up a load of soil. Together they had shoveled it on to the screen. Then she had turned the wheelbarrow around, and he had switched the shaker on and was watching her push the barrow back down the boarded path. The wind was gusting sharply, and she had to stop for a moment to retie her kerchief about her hair. The bare hint of her jasmine perfume brushed his nostrils. As he faced back to the sifter, there was Professor Speidel, frantically picking things out of the sieve box.

"Turn it off!" cried the professor.

Thorin turned it off. "What's the matter?"

"Do you know what you have just shaken to pieces?" He held up a handful of shards.

"No, sir," gulped Thorin. "What?"

"A pollen box!"

"A pollen box, sir?"

"Yes, 'a pollen box sir.' Pollen was a delicacy the Araqnids fed their Llanoan mounts, just as we feed pieces of sugar to a horse. They kept it in little pottery boxes. Such as this used to be."

"Well, sir, I will be happy to restore it. I can glue the pieces back together."

"I'd never trust you with it. And even if you knew how, the pollen is gone, totally blown away. The box was full of it. When the box broke, the wind completely scattered it. Not a grain left. Nothing to give our botanists. They could have identified the plants." He studied Thorin glumly. "I am being punished. But why? What have I done to deserve this?" He shook his head and stalked away.

4. THE PACK

AT THE EVENING LECTURE the professor expounded on practical matters. "The competent archeologist carries a knapsack into the field. This knapsack should contain the necessary working tools, nothing more. You will need a small folding shovel: the so-called trench shovel. And a mason's pointing trowel. A small hoe. You can make one by sawing off most of the handle of a small garden hoe. Next, a small camp axe. A jacknife. And for cleaning the artifact, a small paint brush. If the artifact is fragile, you may want to strengthen it immediately with celluloid-acetone solution before you even take it from its matrix. We had a case this afternoon . . ." He looked over at John Thorin severely.

The instrumentalist squirmed. The pollen box was all over the camp, now. Was the professor going to bring it up again in front of everybody?

But the professor had other ideas. "Mr. Thorin, do you have a knapsack?"

"Yes, sir. Sort of."

"Sort of?"

"I made my own back-pack, sir."

"It has, of course, the things I just mentioned?"

"Well, perhaps not all of them, sir."

"Could you demonstrate your pack, Mr. Thorin?"

"Well, I guess so, Just a moment, sir, while I get it."

Perhaps this was an opportunity to redeem himself. Actually, he was rather proud of his pack. There were some pieces of special equipment in it that he had made in the tool shop back at the museum. He ran all the way to the tent and back.

"Here, sir." He put it on the lecture table. "It zips open here."

"Yes. And what is this?"

"A coverall, sir. Very light. Folds to a very small size, as you can see. There are gloves, and wrappers for the feet. Covers the body from head to toe."

"Why would one want to cover the body from head to toe, Mr. Thorin?"

"Well, rain, sir?"

"Do you know the last recorded rainfall in this area, Mr. Thorin?"

"No, sir."

"It was before you were born. Well, now. What is this?"

"It is a polarizer, sir. It measures stress in transparent or translucent objects."

"Does it have any significance for an archeologist?"

"Well, suppose he found a piece of glass, or something like that, and he wanted to find out if it was in a stressed condition . . ."

"Next item, Mr. Thorin."

"Well, this is an orientor."

"A compass?"

"No, sir. Actually, it is more than a compass. It is a tiny recording gyroscope. Once you set it you can go on a very winding path, even in three dimensions, and it will record all the twists and turns and guide you back when you are ready to return."

"A compass is much more reliable, Mr. Thorin. But what have we here?"

"A sonar device, sir. It sends sound pulses into rooms and chambers that you can't get into, and it will give the position of things in the chamber."

"Indispensable, I am sure. And this?"

"I call it a flexiscope. It's a periscopic, extensible probe. An advanced model of the type that Carlo Lerici used to lower into Etruscan graves in the twentieth century."

"Well, possibly. And what's this?"

"Infra-red scope, sir. You can shine it on any surface, and it will reflect back a heat image of anything warm that has recently touched the surface."

"I am sure we have many warm-blooded creatures underground who will appreciate your interest in them. And what have we here?"

"As you can see, sir, it is a pistolet."

"A weapon? My God!" The professor struck his palm to his forehead. "You think the mummies will rise up and attack you? That perhaps the Araqnid skeletons will go after you with their tentacles? How long do you think the government would permit us to continue to excavate if we came out of the digs each morning wearing a gun like your ancient cowboy gangsters. Get that thing out of here! The whole pack!"

After Thorin had slunk away the professor continued his lecture. "It is a great mystery. The Araqnids certainly achieved interplanetary and interstellar travel thousands of years before we did. Their culture and technology was vastly ahead of ours. And when we find their ruins, we may be the first to establisha great archeological paradox: the buried culture is more advanced than that of the diggers. It has never happened before, and even now it is difficult to imagine. For if they were that far advanced, they should have been able to deal with almost any catastrophe. They should have been able to recover from earthquakes, flood, disease, even nuclear warfare." The professor sneezed violently, then blew his nose. "The mistral has given me a cold, students. Take care you keep yourselves warm when you are out in the wind." He returned to his theme.

"We have been able to study at first hand certain of our primitive arrested cultures which exist today, or did until relatively recently, as they did five thousand years ago. For example, the Australian aborigines, the eskimo, the bedouin, the bird-raisers of the planet Avia, the sea-harvesters of the planet Thallassa. But these cultures have been limited, generally devoid of writing skills, permanent dwellings, or specialized professions. All men were hunters or shepherds, for example. And so it is a bitter irony that these primitive cultures have survived, and the marvellous civilizations of Memphis, Rome, and Araqnia have long vanished. Ah, what were the sounds and smells in the Piraeus on an average day, and what was the chant of the slave gangs that raised the great blocks of Cheops? What were the Araqnids like—the scientists, the workers, their families? All is lost, except in our imaginations."

John Thorin had meanwhile crept back, and was listening on the fringes of the circle. The professor was not poetic by nature, and Thorin conjectured that the archeologist must have read this somewhere. No matter. It was all true.

5. THE PECULIAR HOLES

THE NEXT MORNING, while Thorin was scraping (very very carefully) on the soil in his allotted grid, he uncovered a small hole, which seemed to slant tortuously

down into the ground. It was about two centimeters in diameter. An animal burrow? He thought not. Rather too small for that, unless of course it was a very small animal indeed. More likely, an insect burrow. Well, he would soon know. He continued to scrape, removing a plane of soil about one centimeter thick at a time, in the approved fashion. And then he uncovered another hole. And then two more. Well, now, he thought, a whole family of whatever it is. We are getting somewhere. I will bet these lead to some sort of central nest. He scraped cautiously. Ah, there it was. The burrows all converged into a larger chamber, somewhat larger than his head. He bent over and peered into this hole. And there seemed to be an even larger cavity below this one. Well, he would soon get to the bottom of the matter. He continued to scrape. In another fifteen minutes he was able to remove completely the dirt defining the upper chamber, and he was well into the lower chamber. At one point he stopped and peered down into the lower hole. To his surprise, it seemed to have four burrows slanting downward from it. More and more interesting. He wondered for a moment whether he should call the professor. But the professor might scold him for the interruption. After all, it was still just a hole. It wasn't as though he had uncovered the top of an artifact.

Just then a shadow fell on him. He looked up. It was the professor. Thorin smiled uncertainly. Then, as he studied the professor's face, his smile vanished. "Is something wrong, professor?"

"What is it?" asked the professor hoarsely.

"A hole, sir, that's all. Just a hole."

The professor climbed down into the excavation with him and squinted into the little chamber. After a time he shifted his position and peered down again. "I need more room, please get out for a moment. Do it as carefully as you can."

"Of course."

The professor pulled a handlight from his side pocket, got down on his hands and knees, and made a final examination of the hole. Then he stood up laboriously, pressed a hand to the small of his back, and asked, "There was a chamber just above this one?"

"Yes, sir," said Thorin uneasily.

"And four burrows leading down into that one?"

"Yes, sir. How did you know that?"

The professor groaned. It was a mournful, heartrending sound. Afterwards he was silent for a time.

A cluster of students had now gathered curiously around the pit. Coret put her arm protectively around her husband's waist.

A tear began a zigzag course slowly down the furrows of the professor's cheek. "It is true," said the professor sadly, "archeol-

ogy is a destruction. But as I have already explained to all of you, it is a controlled, informed, and educated destruction. We destroy the matrix of loess, mud, and gravel in order to recover the primitive skull, the *object d'art*, the bronze brooch."

"But I didn't destroy anything," protested Thorin. "There was this hole in the subsoil, about one meter down, and I—"

"This *hole*," said the professor, dignified, but white-faced, "was where an Araqnid statue used to be. Alabaster is slowly soluble. It had been leached away by ground water, probably centuries ago. Only the empty ouline was left."

"But surely, the *hole* wasn't any good," said Thorin.

"Good heavens," whispered the professor.

"You were supposed to fill it up with plaster of paris, dear," said Coret. "That would give you the exact shape of the original statue."

"It would probably have been the first complete reproduction of an Araqnid on his Llanoan mount," said the professor heavily. "Worth the cost of the expedition."

Coret walked her husband back to the tent, so that the professor would not be tempted to do anything foolish.

6. THE FALL OF CIVILIZATIONS

NEXT MORNING, the professor opened his breakfast lecture with his inevitable theme. "The Araqnid-Llanoan mergence took place about four thousand years B.P. Prior to this time the Araqnids had advanced approximately to the state of our own Egyptiac or Mesopotamian cultures, of say three thousand B.C. They had spears, the crossbow, the battleaxe. They fought battles in chariots. They cultivated plants equivalent to our wheat, corn, and barley, and they had fruit orchards. Curiously enough, the Llanoans were beginning to develop their own very primitive culture. In the preceding hundred thousand years they had evolved from a furry quadruped to a furry biped, although we may speculate that they still had a somewhat shuffling gait and might from time to time touch the ground with their knuckles. Although the Llanoans had no agriculture, they had a varied diet. They ate wild berries and fruits, they trapped and ate small animals. Their only weapons were improvised clubs. The evidence suggests that before the mergence of the races, the Araqnids and the Llanoans were about the same size and build. After the mergence, the Araqnid shrank in size and the Llanoans became taller and heavier. That, of course, was to be expected. The Araqnids became totally parasitical on the Llanoans. We lack concrete evidence as to the mechanism of the Araqnid body structure that permitted this parasitism to function. We speculate, however, that when the Araqnid was mounted on the Lla-

noan, two or more tubular probes were thrust into the spinal column and the bloodstream of the mount. This system permitted the Araqnid to dispense in large part with a digestive system. In evolving in this direction they might well have lost fifty kilos. In their final form, they must have been mostly head and tentacles.

"It was a strange symbiosis. Exact analogies are lacking in our own terrestrial history. As pairs, we think of *homo sapiens* and *equus*, but the analogy is inexact. The horse never had any culture of its own, and of course there was no blood-to-blood contact between the two animals.

"The Araqnid-Llanoan relationship was unique. Its potentials were immediately recognized by the Araqnids. All manual labor, all menial tasks, were done by their mounts. The master race was freed to think, to create, and to invent. In one thousand years they had steam-powered vehicles. A few hundred years later they were in space. We know they visited several planets in the local sun cluster. And then they vanished. They must have had a great city, with tall buildings and several million inhabitants. But it has vanished without a trace. Civilizations have come to an end before, of course. The Babylonians destroyed Nineveh in 612 B.C., and it never rose again. But at least the ruins are still there. Rome destroyed Carthage, but at least we know the site, and how it happened. Knossos fell beneath a combined earthquake and tidal wave. Ankor Wat has been deserted for a thousand years, but we know where the city is. The Mayan cities of the Yucatan are long deserted, but at least we know they are there, and we can see and touch the buildings and temples. Not only do we not know where Araqnia is, we don't know why it disappeared. Was it flood? War?" He coughed raucously and blew his nose. "Disease? Some nasty virus such as I have?—God protect them!—It might well have been a genocidal epidemic.

"Yes, an epidemic. As we know, the population of Easter Island was wiped out in the early nineteenth century by exposure to Europeans. The Mediterranean area was ravaged by a brand-new disease brought back from the New World by Columbus's sailors. Today we know it as syphilis. Whole tribes of North American Indians have been destroyed by a single exposure to variole, which used to be our mildest form of smallpox." He wiped at his nose. "And even a little thing like the common cold was fatal to thousands of eskimos when they were first exposed to it by the early explorers looking for the Northwest Passage. As a matter of fact, if I and my cold were transported back into Araqnia of three thousand years ago, I myself might be a contributing cause to their destruction. To them the common cold might be a lot worse than the Black Plague was

to Europe in the Middle Ages.

"So much for disease and the fall of civilizations. Next week we shall divide the group into search parties of two or three students, and we will all look for the lost city. And we shall find it. Have no doubts about that. Just think. We shall stand there, looking out into a street that once was filled with these remarkable beings. In our inner ear we shall hear the ordinary street noises of an ordinary Araqnid day. We shall watch their wonderful cars and vehicles move at tremendous speed up and down the airways of the city."

The professor looked dreamily off into the distance. "What we need is a window on the past. A sort of time machine that rolls back a couple of thousand years, and lets us see the natives as they really were, what they wore, how they talked, and the million details of their everyday living."

At this point, unbeknownst to his listeners, he had a momentary flashback into his own past. For he had stood on the steps of the Acropolis and looked down on Athens. He had stood on the steps of the Roman Forum and had looked out on the Via Flaminia. He had looked out on the Egyptian desert from the temple of Karnak. He had stood on the great tragic Mount Masada and looked down on The Dead Sea. He had gazed forth from a ziggurat in Babylon, and from the Temple of the Sun near Mexico City. From all these places he had let the times of the structure take over. The hoverbuses and modern buildings and people in their twenty-second century clothing had vanished, the millenia had rolled away, and he had seen the ordinary people and carts and wagons and boats and animals of bygone times. And he would do the same here. He would find Araqnia, and a window in Araqnia, and he would look forth upon the remains of the lost city, and for him it would come to life again. And when this happened, it would not matter whether he had found a new post, or whether he would have to take his little University pension and disappear. If he ever found the right window, he just might walk through it and be gone forever.

The professor sighed, then became embarrassed. "Well then, let's be off. All of us have work to do. Dismiss!"

John Thorin looked covertly at his wife. "Nutty as a fruitcake."

"Don't talk like that. He loves his work."

7. POOLSIDE

NEXT DAY the sub-groups were named and assigned their search areas.

Thorin and Coret were named as one group. Their assignment was the Plateau of Sylva.

"But Professor, sir!" protested Thorin. "That's the only place on the planet where no Araqnid artifacts have been found!"

"Exactly," said the professor

grimly. "It is up to you to remedy the lack."

"But, sir, I need to collect material for my thesis. The plateau is a thousand square miles of virgin forest. Where do I start to dig?"

"Consider it a challenge, young man. Look harder. And since you have so little time, I suggest you start immediately."

"Sir, if it's the Llanoan wall, I can explain—"

"Perhaps you can find another wall, Mr. Thorin."

"And I'm truly sorry about the pollen box, and the holes, or whatever you call it. I'll be very careful, if only you can switch my assignment."

"Check back with me as soon as you turn up something, Mr. Thorin. Someone will be on the TX at all times."

"Yes, sir." Thorin backed out of the tent. This was the end.

POMPEII JONES let the skiff hover over an open place in the forest. "There's a stream, and a pool. You might as well have a decent campsite."

"It's pretty," said Coret gamely. "Take us down, Pom-pom."

"Say a hundred meters or so from the pool," said Thorin. "We don't want to be in the path of animals coming down to drink."

The staff man helped them get their gear out of the luggage rack. "Need any help with your tent?"

"No. It's a pushbutton."

"Don't forget to file your evening report."

"Yeah."

"Well then, see you in a couple of weeks."

"Yeah."

"Sorry, old friend."

"Yeah."

AT SUNSET the instrumentalist filed a nonchalant TX with the professor. "Camping in clearing near pool. Coordinates A26, Q19. Biosensored area for one kilometer diameter. Numerous small avians and herbivores. Nothing dangerous. No trace intelligent life past or present."

That night they cooked over a primitive campfire, and later Thorin got out his concertina and they sang mournful songs by the light of the dying embers.

Finally they yawned, zipped up the electroscreen, and got into their sleeping bags.

Thorin had just dozed off when Coret awakened him. "John, there's something out there."

He listened but heard nothing. "Probably an Araqnid. Go to sleep."

"I'm not sleepy."

"Well, I am. Goodnight."

"With the moving and all, I didn't get a shower all day."

"So? I haven't had one this week."

"You don't mind being dirty. I do."

"You can get one in the morning. In the pool. You'll have it all to yourself."

"You're sure there's nothing out there?"

"Just an Araqnid."

"Don't be funny. They're ex-

tinct."

"Yeah. Goodnight, Coret."

8. THE CREATURE

IT WAS MORNING, and he was barely awake when he heard the scream. He squirmed from his sleeping bag and grabbed the pack. Even as he ran out of the tent he began fumbling in the side pocket that held the pistolet. "Coret! I'm coming!"

But there were no more screams. Nothing, until he reached the edge of the pool where Coret had gone for her morning bath.

He saw her at the same instant he got the gun out. She was naked, and running and stumbling up the path away from him. There was something horrid and bristly on her back.

He stood there transfixed for the briefest fraction of a second, as the color left his face. "My God," he whispered. But within the time it took him to set the pistolet to 'stun', his wife had disappeared around the bend of the path.

He picked up the pack by one strap and dashed off after her.

He cursed himself for letting her go down to the pool without him. But yesterday it had all seemed perfectly safe. He had evidently missed a crucial life form. And the omission might well kill his wife.

Coret had now vanished around a turn in the path. But when Thorin arrived there, seconds later, he saw that it was more than a turn. It was a fork. The path branched off to both the right and the left. And another thing. The main path had been open overhead. But the forks were roofed over with some sort of pastic monofilament.

Coret had taken one of the paths. But which one?

He pulled a handlight from the pack and shone it down each of the paths in turn. He could see nothing, except more of this strange garlanding filament. He would have to chance one or the other. He turned again to the right-hand fork.

And now he noticed something strange. It was an odor. Traces of Coret's perfume were coming from the right hand path! This was the one, of course. And he was about to dash down this passage, when by chance his eye fell on the soft soil floor of the other path. And there was an incomplete impression of a human foot. Just the ball of the left foot. It had to be Coret, running. And the next footprint would be a couple of meters into the left-hand tunnel. But something . . . someone (the creature?) wanted him to think otherwise, and in fact had immense skills and technology for persuading him. As witness the scent. The realization stunned him. Definitely, the left. But how then could he account for the delicate traces of jasmine wafting eerily from the right-hand fork? A pang of fear shot through his intestines. It was so violent that he bent

over for a moment. The . . . thing . . . that possessed Coret was emerging as a fantastically cruel and intelligent adversary. Was it possible that it had already got into Coret's cerebral cortex? And even if the creature knew, in some unexplained way, that Coret used a certain perfume, how had it recreated it? Especially from a different tunnel?

The intimations were . . . appalling. But he refused to think about it. He had to get moving.

He picked the bag up and started into the left branch. And then he stopped suddenly. Something was hanging from the filament-network. The skeleton of a small winged creature. It had apparently got stuck there, and then something had eaten it. Or most of it. One of the wings, fairly intact, had fallen half a meter to the floor, where it was again stuck in the felted mass. And a couple of meters farther on, a pig-size skeleton was netted to the floor. And beyond that, another. The place was full of bones. Animals had wandered in here, and they had been caught in these strands. And then something had eaten them.

He picked up a dead tree branch from the pathside and jabbed it into one of the strands. It stuck instantly. He pulled at it. The strand yielded a few centimeters, then firmed up. He pulled at the branch with all his strength. His efforts served only to force it into contact with other stands. It was held so tightly now that it stuck out into the air.

And yet, Coret had passed untouched through these ghoulish garlands.

He shook his head dizzily. If he were ever going to see his wife alive again, or vice versa, he would have to get a grip on himself before the strands did.

He had no idea how Coret had managed to evade the filaments. Yet, perhaps he had a few tricks, too. He took his cape, gloves, and shoe-wraps from the pack and pulled them on. The garment had been treated with a fluorocarbon polymer so that they could be folded without sticking. The anti-stick property might now come in handy as protection against the webbing. The pack had been likewise treated, so that he did not have to worry about losing it to the filaments.

He took a few steps inside, let the cape contact the wall of strands, and pulled it off again readily. There was no adhesion. He was not going to get stuck.

He opened his pack again, set the orientor, and pulled the bag back again on his shoulders. There might be many twists and turns and forks. He did not trust his memory to guide him back. If he ever came back.

He was a hundred meters into the tunnel, with the entrance-light a tiny disk behind him, when he made his second discovery. The tunnel was made of

finished stone, laid with mortar.

This place was not just a natural elongated cave in the side of a hill. Intelligent beings (the Araqnids?!) had made it. It led somewhere. And for the life of him, he did not know whether that was good or bad. It would delight Professor Speidel, of course. But just at this moment he felt no great urge to delight Professor Speidel.

As he trotted, he pulled a lead from the fuel cell in his pack and attached it to his handlight. It would save the batteries in the light, which would otherwise last only a few hours. The fuel cell was good for several days. It might be best not to think what would happen when the main cell failed. Even the orientor would go dead.

How far ahead was Coret? And why was she able to move without getting hung up in this ghastly mess? Undoubtedly, that creature on her back was doing it, doing something to the strands so that she could pass. What manner of creature could alter the laws of adhesive chemistry? And it was really worse than that. What was the nature of this monster who had made this web, and could cause it to synthesize and release complicated molecules identical to Coret's perfume?

He fought a sudden animal urge to turn and run out as fast as he could.

But he hitched the packstraps over his shoulders and pressed on.

9. THE SHAFT

THE NEXT FORK astonished him. It was not a right-and-left fork. The bifurcation was vertical. He could climb up or he could climb down. Either way he would have to grasp loose loops of webbing with his gloves.

Which way?

A quick survey with the handlight showed no disturbance in either branch, at least as far as he could see with the light.

Well, there was a thing he could try.

He got the polarizer from his pack. This little instrument gave out a pencil beam of light from an ordinary tungsten filament. The beam passed through a slice of calcite, which polarized it, and thence it could be sent through any semi-transparent body, where at least a portion of the beam would be reflected back from the far wall of the body. The reflected beam returned through a receiving lens in the polarimeter, which automatically rotated back and forth seeking a colored path in the object examined. The color would indicate recent stress.

He let the pencil beam dance along the strands of the upper branch. There was no color. Thorin sighed. The upward path might . . . just might . . . have led to some ancient rooftop and to free air. But of course it was too much to hope for. He shone the beam downward. Yes, there were several strands there, definitely stressed. Coret had leaped off the

edge of the tunnel lip with great confidence and had caught a strand a good two meters below. And the next stressed strand that he could detect was a good two meters below that one. The thing was barely braking its fall in its flight.

He returned the polarizer to the pack and shone the search beam downward again. All clear. He holstered the pistolet, and holding his light so that it would shine downward, began a slow and careful descent.

His thoughts kept returning to the basic mystery of these strange filaments. He had to assume that the creature was in some way able to protect Coret from getting stuck. But how? What was the creature doing that made the girl immune? He speculated that the immunity might well be local and transitory. Even so, it apparently sufficed. The creature was able to force Coret to move with astonishing speed, headlong, pell mell, whereas he had to feel his way along, meter by meter. And the very haste of Coret's flight was in itself interesting. Perhaps the creature did not wish to risk an encounter with the pistolet, even turned down simply to stun. And as he considered that one, the implications confirmed his earlier chilling suspicions. Except through Coret the creature had no way to know that he possessed a weapon, and certainly had no knowledge of its capabilities. Not only had it pierced her spinal

(cont. on page 94)

RUN TO STARLIGHT

GEORGE R. R. MARTIN

George Martin's last appearance here was "Night Shift" (January, 1973); since that time he has gone on to establish himself as a major new writer with appearances in most of the better-paying sf markets. He returns to our pages with a rarity—an innovative science-fictional sports *story . .*

Illustrated by RICHARD OLSEN

HILL STARED DOURLY at the latest free-fall football results from the Belt as they danced across the face of his desk console, but his mind was elsewhere. For the seventeenth time that week, he was silently cursing the stupidity and shortsightedness of the members of the Starport City Council.

The damn councilmen persisted in cutting the allocation for an artificial gravity grid out of the departmental budget every time Hill put it in. They had the nerve to tell him to stick to "traditional" sports in planning his recreational program for the year.

The old fools had no idea of the way free-fall football was catching on throughout the system, although he'd tried to explain it to them God knows how many times. The Belt sport should be an integral part of any self-respecting recreational program. And, on Earth, that meant you had to have a gravity grid. He'd planned on installing it beneath the stadium, but now—

The door to his office slid open with a soft hum. Hill looked up and frowned, snapping off the console. An agitated Jack De Angelis stepped through.

"What is it now?," Hill snapped.

"Uh, Rog, there's a guy here I think you better talk to," De Angelis replied. "He wants to enter a team in the City Football League."

"Registration closed on Tuesday," Hill said. "We've already got twelve teams. No room for any more. And why the hell can't you handle this? You're in charge of the football program."

"This is a special case," De Angelis said.

"Then make an exception and let the team in if you want to," Hill interrupted. "Or don't let them in. It's your program. It's your decision. Must I be bothered with every bit of trivia in this whole damned department?"

"Hey, take it easy, Rog," De Angelis protested. "I don't know what you're so steamed up about. Look, I—hell, I'll show you the

problem." He turned and went to the door. "Sir, would you step in here a minute," he said to someone outside.

Hill started to rise from his seat, but sunk slowly back into the chair when the visitor appeared in the doorway.

De Angelis was smiling. "This is Roger Hill, the director of the Starport Department of Recreation," he said smoothly. "Rog, let me introduce Remjhard-nei, the head of the Brish'diri trade mission to Earth."

Hill rose again, and offered his hand numbly to the visitor. The Brish'dir was squat and grotesquely broad. He was a good foot shorter than Hill, who stood six foot four, but still gave the impression of dwarfing the director somehow. A hairless, bullet shaped head was set squarely atop the alien's massive shoulders. His eyes were glittering green marbles sunk in the slick, leathery gray skin. There were no external ears, only small holes on either side of the skull. The mouth was a lipless slash.

Diplomaticly ignoring Hill's open-mouthed stare, Remjhard bared his teeth in a quick smile and crushed the director's hand in his own. "I am most pleased to meet you, sir," he said in fluent English, his voice a deep bass growl. "I have come to enter a football team in the fine league your city so graciously runs."

Hill gestured for the alien to take a seat, and sat down himself. De Angelis, still smiling at his

boss' stricken look, pulled another chair up to the desk for himself.

"Well, I—" Hill began uncertainly. "This team, is it a—a Brish'diri team?"

Remjhard smiled again. "Yes," he answered. "You football, it is a fine game. We of the mission have many times watched it being played on the 3v wallscreens your people were so kind as to install. It has fascinated us. And now some of the half-men of our mission desire to try to play it." He reached slowly into the pocket of the black and silver uniform he wore, and pulled out a folded sheet of paper.

"This is a roster of our players," he said, handing it to Hill. "I believe the newsfax said such a list is required to enter your league."

Hill took the paper and glanced down at it uncertainly. It was a list of some fifteen Brish'diri names, neatly typed out. Everything seemed to be in order, but still—

"You'll forgive me, I hope," Hill said, "but I'm somewhat unfamiliar with the expressions of your people. You said—half-men? Do you mean children?"

Remjhard nodded, a quick inclination of his bulletlike head. "Yes. Male children, the sons of mission personnel. All are aged either eight or nine Earth seasons."

Hill silently sighed with relief. "I'm afraid it's out of the question, then," he said. "Mr. De Angelis said you were interested in the City League, but that league is for boys aged eighteen and up. Occasionally we'll admit a younger boy with exceptional talent and experience, but never anyone this young." He paused briefly. "We do have several leagues for younger boys, but they've already begun play. It's much too late to add another team at this point."

"Pardon, Director Hill, but I think you misunderstand," Remjhard said. "A Brish'dir male is fully mature at fourteen Earth years. In our culture, such a person is regarded as a full adult. A nine-year-old Brish'dir is roughly equivilant to an eighteen-year-old Terrran male in terms of physical and intellectual development. That is why our half-men wish to register for this league and not one of the others, you see."

"He's correct, Rog," De-Angelis said. "I've read a little about the Brish'diri, and I'm sure of it. In terms of maturity, these youngsters are eligible for the City League."

Hill threw De Angelis a withering glance. If there was one thing he didn't need at the moment, it was a Brish'diri football team in one of his leagues, and Remjhard was arguing convincinly enough without Jack's help.

"Well, alright," Hill said. "Your team may well be of age, but there are still problems. The Rec Department sports program is for local residents only. We simply don't have room to accomodate everyone who wants to participate. And your home planet is, as

I understand, several hundred light years beyond the Starport city limits." He smiled.

"True," Remjhard said. "But our trade mission has been in Starport for six years. An ideal location due to your city's proximity to Grissom Interstellar Spaceport, from which most of the Brish'diri traders operate while on Earth. All of the current members of the mission have been here for two Earth years, at least. We are Starport residents, Director Hill. I fail to understand how the location of Brishun enters into the matter at hand."

Hill squirmed uncomfortably in his seat, and glared at De Angelis, who was grinning. "Yes, you're probably right again," he said. "But I'm still afraid we won't able to help you. Our junior leagues are touch football, but the City League, as you might know, is tackle. It can get quite rough at times. State safety regulations require the use of special equipment. To make sure no one is injured seriously. I'm sure you understand. And the Brish'diri—"

He groped for words, anxious not to offend. "The—uh—physical construction of the Brish'diri is so different from the Terran that our equipment couldn't possibly fit. Chances of injury would be too great, and the department would be liable. No. I'm sure it couldn't be allowed. Too much risk."

"We would provide special protective equipment," Remjhard said quietly. "We would never risk our own offspring if we did not feel it safe."

Hill started to say something, stopped, and looked to De Angelis for help. He had run out of good reasons why the Brish'diri couldn't enter the league.

Jack smiled. "One problem remains, however, " he said, coming to the director's rescue. "A bureaucratic snag, but a difficult one. Registration for the league closed on Tuesday. We've already had to turn away several teams, and if we make an exception in your case, well—" De Angelis shrugged. "Trouble. Complaints. I'm sorry, but we must apply the same rule to all."

Remjhard rose slowly from his seat, and picked up the roster from where it lay on the desk. "Of course," he said gravely. "All must follow the regulations. Perhaps next year we will be on time." He made a formal half-bow to Hill, turned, and walked from the office.

When he was sure the Brish'dir was out of earshot, Hill gave a heartfelt sigh and swiveled to face De Angelis. "That was close," he said. "Christ, a Baldy football team. Half the people in this town lost sons in the Brish'diri War, and they still hate them. I can imagine the complaints."

Hill frowned. "And you! Why couldn't you just get rid of him right away instead of putting me through that?"

De Angelis grinned. "Too much fun to pass up," he said. "I wondered if you'd figure out the right way to discourage him. The

Brish'diri have an almost religious respect for laws, rules, and regulations. They wouldn't think of doing anything that would force someone to break a rule. In their culture, that's just as bad as breaking a rule yourself."

Hill nodded. "I would have remembered that myself if I wasn't so paralyzed at the thought of a Brish'diri football team in one of our leagues," he said limply. "And now that that's over with, I want to talk to you about that gravity grid. Do you think there's any way we could rent one instead of buying it outright? The Council might go for that. And I was thinking—"

A LITTLE OVER THREE HOURS later, Hill was signing some equipment requisitions when the office door slid open to admit a brawny, dark-haired man in a nondescript gray suit.

'Yes?" the director said, a trifle impatiently. "Can I help you?"

The dark-haired man flashed a government ID as he took a seat. "Maybe you can. But you certainly haven't so far, I'll tell you that much. My name's Tomkins. Mac Tomkins. I'm from the Federal E.T. Relations Board."

Hill groaned. "I suppose it's about that Brish'diri mess this morning," he said, shaking his head in resignation.

"Yes," Tomkins cut in at once. "We understand that the Brish'diri wanted to register some of their youngsters for a local football league. You forbade it on a technicality. We want to know why."

"Why?," said Hill incredulously, staring at the government man. "*Why?* For God sakes, the Brish'diri War was only over seven years ago. Half of those boys on our football teams had brothers killed by the Bullet-brains. Now you want me to tell them to play football with the subhuman monsters of seven years back? They'd run me out of town."

Tomkins grimaced, and looked around the room. "Can that door be locked?" he asked, pointing to the door he had come in by.

"Of course," Hill replied, puzzled.

"Lock it then," Tomkins said. Hill adjusted the appropriate control on his desk.

"What I'm going to tell you should not go beyond this room," Tomkins began.

Hill cut him off with a snort. "Oh, come now, Mr. Tomkins. I may be only a small-time sports official, but I'm not stupid. You're hardly about to import some galaxy-shattering top secret to a man you met a few seconds ago."

Tomkins smiled. "True. The information's not secret, but it is a little ticklish. We would prefer that every Joe in the street doesn't know about it."

"Alright, I'll buy that for now. Now what's this all about? I'm sorry if I've got no patience with subtlety, but the most difficult problem I've handled in the last year was the protest in the

championship game in the Class B Soccer League. Diplomacy just isn't my forte."

"I'll be brief," Tomkins said. "We—E.T. Relations, that is—we want you to admit the Brish'diri team into your football league."

"You realize the furor it would cause?" Hill asked.

"We have some idea. In spite of that, we want them admitted."

"Why, may I ask?"

"Because of the furor if they aren't admitted." Tomkins paused to stare at Hill for a second, then apparently reached a decision of some sort and continued. "The Earth-Brishun War was a ghastly, bloody deadlock, although our propaganda men insist on pretending it was a great victory. No sane man on either side wants it resumed. But not everyone is sane."

The agent frowned in distaste. "There are elements among us who regard the Brish'diri—or the Bulletbrains, or Baldies, or whatever you want to call them—as monsters, even now, seven years after the killing has ended."

"And you think a Brish'diri football team would help to overcome the leftover hates?" Hill interrupted.

"Partially. But that's not the important part. You see, there is also an element among the Brish'diri that regards humans as sub-human—vermin to be wiped from the galaxy. They are a very virile, competitive race. Their whole culture stresses combat. The dissident element I mentioned will seize on your refusal to admit a Brish'diri team as a sign of fear, an admission of human inferiority. They'll use it to agitate for a resumption of the war. We don't want to risk giving them a propaganda victory like that. Relations are too strained as it is."

"But the Brish'dir I spoke to—" Hill objected. "I explained it all to him. A rule. Surely their respect for law—"

"Remjhard-nei is a leader of the Brish'diri peace faction. *He* personally will defend your position. But he and his son were disappointed by the refusal. They will talk. They already have been talking. And that means that eventually the war faction will get ahold of the story and turn it against us."

"I see. But what can I do at this point? I've already told Remjhard that registration closed Tuesday. If I understand correctly, his own morality would never permit him to take advantage of an exception now."

Tomkins nodded. "True. You can't make an exception. Just change the rule. Let in all the teams you refused. Expand the league."

Hill shook his head, wincing. "But our budget—it couldn't take it. We'd have more games. We'd more time, more referees, more equipment."

Tomkins dismissed the problem with a wave of his hand. "The government is already buying the Brish'diri special football uni-

forms. We'd be happy to cover all your extra costs. You'd get a better recreational program for all concerned."

Hill still looked doubtful. "Well—"

"Moreover," Tomkins said, "we might be able to arrange a government grant or two to bolster other improvements in your program. Now how about it?"

Hill's eyes sparkled with sudden interest. "A grant? How big a grant? Could you swing a gravity grid?"

"No problem," said Tomkins. A slow grin spread across his face.

Hill returned the grin. "Then, mister, Starport's got itself a Brish'diri football team. But, oh, are they going to scream!" He flicked on the desk intercom. "Get Jack De Angelis in here," he ordered. "I've got a little surprise for him."

THE SKY ABOVE Starport Municipal Stadium was bleak and dreary on a windy Saturday morning a week later, but Hill didn't mind it at all. The Stadium force bubble kept out the thin, wet drizzle that had soaked him to the bones on the way to the game, and the weather fitted his mood beautifully.

Normally, Hill was far too busy to attend any of his department's sporting events. Normally *everyone* was too busy to attend the department's sporting events. The Rec Department leagues got fairly good coverage in the local newspaper, but they seldom drew many spectators. The record was something like 400 people for a championship game a few years ago.

Or rather, that *was* the record, Hill reminded himself. No more. The Stadium was packed today, in spite of the hour, the rain, and everything else. Muncipal Stadium was *never* packed except for the traditional Thanksgiving Day football game between Starport High and its archrival Grissom City Prep. But today it was packed.

Hill knew why. It had been drilled into him the hard way after he had made the damn fool decision to let the Brish'diri into the league. The whole city was up in arms. Six local teams had withdrawn from the City League rather than play with the "inhuman monsters". The office switchboard had been flooded with calls daily, the vast majority of them angry denunciations of Hill. A city council member had called for his resignation.

And that, Hill reflected glumly, was probably what it would come to in the end. The local newspaper, which had always been hard-line conservative on foreign affairs, was backing the drive to force Hill out of office. One of its editorials had reminded him gleefully that Starport Muncipal Stadium was dedicated to those who had given their lives in the Brish'diri War, and had screamed about "desecration." Meanwhile, on its sports pages, the paper had taken to calling the

Brish'diri team "the Baldy Eagles."

Hill squirmed uncomfortably in his seat on the 50 yard line, and prayed silently that the game would begin. He could feel the angry stares on the back of his neck, and he had the uneasy impression that he was going to be hit with a rock any second now.

Across the field, he could see the camera installation of one of the big 3v networks. All five of them were here, of course; the game had gotten planetwide publicity. The newsfax wires had also sent reporters, although they had seemed a little confused about what kind of a story this was. One had sent a political reporter, the other a sportswriter.

Out on the Stadium's artificial grass, the human team was running through a few plays and warming up. Their bright red uniforms were emblazoned with KEN'S COMPUTER REPAIR in white lettering, and they wore matching white helmets. They looked pretty good, Hill decided from watching them practice. Although they were far from championship calibre. Still, against a team that had never played football before, they should mop up.

De Angelis, wearing a pained expression and a ref's striped shirt, was out on the field talking to his officials. Hill was taking no chances with bad calls in this game. He made sure the department's best men were on hand to officiate.

Tomkins was also there, sitting in the stands a few sections away from Hill. But the Brish'diri were not. Remjhard wanted to attend, but E.T. Relations, on Hill's advice, had told him to stay at the mission. Instead, the game was being piped to him over closed-circuit 3v.

Hill suddenly straightened in his seat. The Brish'diri team, which called itself the Kosg-Anjehn after a flying carnivore native to Brishun, had arrived, and the players were walking slowly out onto the field.

There was a brief instant of silence, and then someone in the crowd started booing. Others picked it up. Then others. The Stadium was filled with the boos. Although, Hill noted with relief, not everyone was joining in. Maybe there were some people who saw things his way.

The Brish'diri ignored the catcalls. Or seemed to, at any rate. Hill had never seen an angry Brish'dir, and was unsure how one would go about showing his anger.

The Kosg-Anjehn wore tight-fitting black uniforms, with odd-looking elongated silver helmets to cover their bullet-shaped heads. They looked like no football team Hill had ever seen. Only a handful of them stood over five feet, but they were all as squat and broad as a tackle for the Packers. Their arms and legs were thick and stumpy, but rippled with muscles that bulged in the wrong places. The helmeted heads, however, gave an impres-

sion of frailty, like eggshells ready to shatter at the slightest impact.

Two of the Brish'diri detached themselves from the group and walked over to De Angelis. Evidently they felt they didn't need a warm-up, and wanted to start immediately. De Angelis talked to them for an instant, then turned and beckoned to the captain of the human team.

"How do you think it'll go?"

Hill turned. It was Tomkins. The E.T. agent had struggled through the crowd to his side.

"Hard to say," the director replied. "The Brish'diri have never really played football before, so the odds are they'll lose. Being from a heavy-gravity planet, they'll be stronger than the humans, so that might give them an edge. But they're also a lot slower from what I hear."

"I'll have to root them home," Tomkins said with the smile. "Bolster the cause of interstellar relations and all that."

Hill scowled. "*You* root them home if you like. I'm pulling for the humans. Thanks to you, I'm in enough trouble already. If they catch me rooting for the Brish'diri they'll tear me to shreds."

He turned his attention back to the field. The Computermen had won the toss, and elected to receive. One of the taller Brish'diri was going back to kick off.

"Tuhgayh-dei," Tomkins provided helpfully. "The son of the mission's chief linguist." Hill nodded.

Tuhgayh-dei ran forward with a ponderous, lumbering gallop, nearly stopped when he finally reached the football, and slammed his foot into it awkwardly but hard. The ball landed in the upper tier of the stands, and a murmur went through the crowd.

"Pretty good," Tomkins said. "Don't you think?"

"Too good," replied Hill. He did not elaborate.

The humans took the ball on their twenty. The Computermen went into a huddle, broke it with a loud clap, and ran to their positions. A ragged cheer went up from the stands.

The humans went down into the three-point stance. Their Brish'diri opponents did not. The alien linemen just stood there, hands dangling at their sides, crouching a little.

"They don't know much about football," Hill said. "But after that kickoff, I wonder if they have to."

The ball was snapped, and the quarterback for Ken's Computer Repair, a rangy ex-high school star named Sullivan, faded back to pass. The Brish'diri rushed forward in a crude blitz, and crashed into the human linemen.

An instant later, Sullivan was laying face-down in the grass, buried under three Birsh'diri. The aliens had blown through the offensive line as if it didn't exist.

That made it second-and-fifteen. The humans huddled again, came out to another cheer, not quite so loud as the first one. The ball was snapped. Sullivan handed off to a beefy fullback,

who crashed straight ahead.

One of the Brish'diri brought him down before he went half a yard. It was a clumsy tackle, around the shoulders. But the force of the contact knocked the fullback several yards in the wrong direction.

When the humans broke from their huddle for the third time the cheer could scarcely be heard. Again Sullivan tried to pass. Again the Brish'diri blasted through the line en masse. Again Sullivan went down for a loss.

Hill groaned. "This looks worse every minute," he said.

Tomkins didn't agree. "I don't think so. They're doing fine. What difference does it make who wins?"

Hill didn't bother to answer that.

There was no cheering when the humans came out in punt formation. Once more the Brish'diri put on a strong rush, but the punter got the ball away before they reached him.

It was a good, deep kick. The Kosg-Anjehn took over on their own twenty-five yard line. Marhdaln-nei, Remjhard's son, was the Brish'diri quarterback. On the first play from scrimmage, he handed off to a halfback, a runt built like a tank.

The Brish'diri blockers flattened their human opponents almost effortlessly, and the runt ploughed through the gaping hole, ran over two would-be tacklers, and burst into the clear. He was horribly slow, however, and the defenders finally brought him down from behhind after a modest thirty-yard gain. But it took three people to stop him.

On the next play, Marhdaln tried to pass. He got excellent protection, but his receivers, trudging along at top speed, had defensemen all over them. And the ball, when thrown, went sizzling over the heads of Brish'diri and human alike.

Marhdaln returned to the ground again after that, and handed off to a runt halfback once more. This time he tried to sweep around end, but was hauled to the ground after a gain of only five yards by a quarter of human tacklers.

That made it third-and-five. Marhdaln kept to the ground. He gave the ball to his other halfback, and the brawny Brish'dir smashed up the middle. He was a little bit faster than the runt. When he got in the clear, only one man managed to catch him from behind. And one wasn't enough. The alien shrugged off the tackle and lumbered on across the goal line.

The extra point try went under the crossbar instead of over it. But it still nearly killed the poor guy in the stands who tried to catch the ball.

Tomkins was grinning. Hill shook his head in disgust. "This isn't the way it's supposed to go," he said. "They'll kill us if the Brish'diri win."

The kickoff went out of the stadium entirely this time. On the

first play from the twenty, a Brish'diri lineman roared through the line and hit Sullivan just as he was handing off. Sullivan fumbled.

Another Brish'dir picked up the loose ball and carried it into the end zone while most of the humans were still lying on the ground.

"My god," said Hill, feeling a bit numb. "They're too strong. They're too damn strong. The humans can't cope with their strength. Can't stop them."

"Cheer up," said Tomkins. "It can't get much worse for your side."

But it did. It got a lot worse.

On offense, the Brish'diri were well-nigh unstoppable. Their runners were all short on speed, but made up for it with muscle. On play after play, they smashed straight up the middle behind a wall of blockers, flicking tacklers aside like bothersome insects.

And then Marhdaln began to hit on his passes. Short passes, of course. The Brish'diri lacked the speed to cover much ground. But they could outjump any human, and they snared pass afrer pass in the air. There was no need to worry about interceptions. The humans simply couldn't hang on to Marhdaln's smoking pitches.

On defense, things were every bit as bad. The Computermen couldn't run against the Brish'diri line. And Sullivan seldom had time to complete a pass, for the alien rushers were unstoppable. The few passes he did hit on went for touchdowns; no Brish'diri could catch a human from behind. But those were few and far between.

When Hill fled the Stadium in despair at the half, the score was Kosg-Anjehn—37, Ken's Computer Repair—7.

The final score was 57-14. The Brish'diri had emptied their bench in the second half.

HILL DIDN'T have the courage to attend the next Brish'diri game later in the week. But nearly everyone else in the city showed up to see if the Kosg-Anjehn could do it again.

They did. In fact, they did even better. They beat Anderson's Drugs by a lop-sided 61-9 score.

After the Brish'diri won their third contest, 43-17, the huge crowds began tapering off. The Starport Municipal Stadium was only three-quarters full when the Kosg-Anjehn rolled over the Stardusters, 38-0, and a mere handful showed up on a rainy Thursday afternoon to see the aliens punish the United Veterans Association, 51-6. And no one came after that.

For Hill, the Brish'diri win over the U V A=sponsored team was the final straw. The local paper made a heyday out of that, going on and on about the "ironic injustice" of having the U V A slaughtered by the Brish'diri in a stadium dedicated to the dead veterans of the Brish'diri War. And Hill, of course, was the main villain in the piece.

The phone calls had finally let up by that point. But the mail had been flowing into his office steadily, and most of it was not very comforting. The harassed Rec director got a few letters of commendation and support, but the bulk of the flood speculated crudely about his ancestry or threatened his life and property.

Two more city councilmen had come out publicly in favor of Hill's dismissal after the Brish'diri defeated U V A. Several others on the council were wavering, while Hill's supporters, who backed him strongly in private, were afraid to say anything for the record. The municipal elections were simply too close, and none were willing to risk their political skins.

And of course the assistant director of recreation, next in line for Hill's job, had wasted no time in saying *he* would certainly never have done such an unpatriotic thing.

With disaster piling upon disaster, it was only natural that Hill reacted with something less than enthusiasm when he walked into his office a few days after the fifth Kosg-Anjehn victory and found Tomkins sitting at his desk waiting for him.

"And what in the hell do you want now?" Hill roared at the E.T. Relations man.

Tomkins looked slightly abashed, and got up from the director's chair. He had been watching the latest free-fall football results on the desk console while waiting for Hill to arrive.

"I've got to talk to you," Tomkins said. "We've got a problem."

"We've got lots of problems," Hill replied. He strode angrily to his desk, sat down, flicked off the console, and pulled a sheaf of papers from a drawer.

"This is the latest of them," he continued, waving the papers at Tomkins. "One of the kids broke his leg in the Starduster game. It happens all the time. Football's a rough game. You can't do anything to prevent it. On a normal case, the department would send a letter of apology to the parents, our insurance would pay for it, and everything would be forgotten.

"But not in this case. Oh, no. This injury was inflicted while the kid was playing against the Brish'diri. So his parents are charging negligence on our part and suing the city. So our insurance company refuses to pay up. It claims the policy doesn't cover damage by inhuman, superstrong, alien monsters. Bah! How's that for a problem, Mr. Tomkins? Plenty more where that came from."

Tomkins frowned. "Very unfortunate. But my problem is a lot more serious than that." Hill started to interrupt, but the E.T. Relations man waved him down. "No, please, hear me out. This is very important."

He looked around for a seat, grabbed the nearest chair, and pulled it up to the desk. "Our plans have backfired badly," he began. "There has been a serious

miscalculation—our fault entirely, I'm afraid. E.T. Relations failed to consider *all* the ramifications of this Brish'diri football team."

Hill fixed him with an iron stare. "What's wrong now?"

"Well," Tomkins said awkwardly, "we knew that refusal to admit the Kosg-Anjehn into your league would be a sign of human weakness and fear to the Brish'diri war faction. But once you admitted them, we thought the problem was solved.

"It wasn't. We went wrong when we assumed that winning or losing would make no difference to the Brish'diri. To us, it was just a game. Didn't matter who won. After all, Brish'diri and Terrans would be getting to know each other, competing harmlessly on even terms. Nothing but good could come from it, we felt."

"So?" Hill interrupted. "Get to the point."

Tomkins shook his head sadly. "The point is, we didn't know the Brish'diri would win so *big*. And so *regularly*." He paused. "We —uh—we got a transmission late last night from one of our men on Brishun. It seems the Brish'diri war faction is using the one-sided football scores as propaganda to prove the racial inferiority of humans. They seem to be getting a lot of mileage out of it."

Hill winced. "So it was all for nothing. So I've subjected myself to all this abuse and endangered my career for absolutely nothing. Great! That was all I needed, I tell you."

"We still might be able to salvage something," Tomkins said. "That's why I came to see you. If you can arrange it for the Brish'diri to *lose*, it would knock holes in that superiority yarn and make the war faction look like fools. It would discredit them for quite awhile."

"And just how am I supposed to *arrange* for them to lose, as you so nicely put it? What do you think I'm running here anyway, professional wrestling?"

Tomkins just shrugged lamely. "I was hoping you'd have some ideas," he said.

Hill leaned forward, and flicked on his intercom. "Is Jack out there?" he asked. "Good. Send him in."

The lanky sports official appeared less than a minute later. "You're on top of this City football mess," Hill said. "What's the chances the Kosg-Anjehn will lose?"

De Angelis looked puzzled. "Not all that good, offhand," he replied. "They've got a damn fine team."

He reached into his back pocket and pulled out a notebook. "Let me check their schedule," he continued, thumbing through the pages. He stopped when he found the place.

"Well, the league's got a round-robin schedule, as you know. Every team plays every other team once, best record is champion. Now the Brish'diri are currently 5-0, and they've beaten a few of the better teams. We've

got ten teams left in the league, so they've got four games left to play. Only two of those are with the weakest teams in the league, and the third opponent is only mediocre."

"And the fourth?," Hill said hopefully.

"That's your only chance. An outfit sponsored by a local tavern, the Blastoff Inn. Good team. Fast, strong. Plenty of talent. They're also 5-0, and should give the Brish'diri some trouble." De Angelis frowned. "But, to be frank, I've seen both teams, and I'd still pick the Brish'diri. That ground game of theirs is just too much." He snapped the notebook shut and pocketed it again.

"Would a close game be enough?" Hill said, turning to Tomkins again.

The E.T. Relations man shook his head. "No. They have to be beaten. If they lose, the whole season's meaningless. Proves nothing but that the two races can compete on roughly equal terms. But if they win, it looks like they're invincible, and our stature in Brish'diri eyes takes a nose-dive."

"Then they'll have to lose, I guess," Hill said. His gave shifted back to De Angelis. "Jack, you and me are going to have to do some hard thinking about how the Kosg-Anjehn can be beaten. And then we're going to call up the manager of the Blastoff Inn team and give him a few tips. You have any ideas?"

De Angelis scratched his head thoughtfully. "Well—" he began. "Maybe we—"

DURING the two weeks that followed, De Angelis met with the Blastoff Inn coach regularly to discuss plans and strategy, and supervised a few practice sessions. Hill, meanwhile, was fighting desperately to keep his job, and jotting down ideas on how to beat the Brish'diri during every spare moment.

Untouched by the furor, the Kosg-Anjehn won its sixth game handily, 40-7, and then rolled to devastating victories over the circuit's two cellar-dwellers. The margins were 73-0 and 62-7. That gave them an unblemished 8-0 ledger with one game left to play.

But the Blastoff Inn team was also winning regularly, although never as decisively. It too would enter the last game of the season undefeated.

The local paper heralded the showdown with a sports page streamer on the day before the game. The lead opened, "The stakes will be high for the entire human race tomorrow at Municipal Stadium, when Blastoff Inn meets the Brish'diri Baldy Eagles for the championship of the Department of Recreation City Football League."

The reporter who wrote the story never dreamed how close to the truth he actually was.

THE CROWDS returned to the Stadium for the championship game, although they fell far short

of a packed house. The local paper was there too. But the 3v networks and the newsfax wires were long gone. The novelty of the story had worn off quickly.

Hill arrived late, just before game time, and joined Tomkins on the 50-yard line. The E.T. agent seemed to have cheered up somewhat. "Our guys looked pretty good during the warm-up," he told the director. "I think we've got a chance."

His enthusiasm was not catching, however. "Blastoff Inn might have a chance, but I sure don't," Hill said glumly. "The city council is meeting tonight to consider a motion calling for my dismissal. I have a strong suspicion that it's going to pass, no matter who wins this afternoon."

"Hmmmm," said Tomkins, for want of anything better to say. "Just ignore the old fools. Look, the game's starting."

Hill muttered something under his breath and turned his attention back to the field. The Brish'diri had lost the toss once more, and the kickoff had once again soared out of the stadium. It was first-and-ten for Blastoff Inn on its own twenty.

And at that point the script suddenly changed.

The humans lined up for their first play of the game but with a difference. Instead of playing immediately in back of the center, the Blastoff quarterback was several yards deep, in a shotgun formation.

The idea, Hill recalled, was to take maximum advantage of human speed, and mount a strong passing offense. Running against the Brish'diri was all but impossible, he and De Angelis had concluded after careful consideration. That meant an aerial attack, and the only way to provide that was to give the Blastoff quarterback time to pass. Ergo, the shotgun formation.

The hike from center was dead on target and the Blastoff receivers shot off downfield, easily outpacing the ponderous Brish'diri defensemen. As usual, the Kosg-Anjehn crashed through the line en masse, but they had covered only half the distance to the quarterback before he got off the pass.

It was a long bomb, a psychological gambit to shake up the Brish'diri by scoring on the first play of the game. Unfortunately, the pass was slightly overthrown.

Hill swore.

It was now second-and-ten. Again the humans lined up in a shortgun offense, and again the Blastoff quarterback got off the pass in time. It was a short, quick pitch to the sideline, complete for a nine yard gain. The crowd cheered lustily.

Hill wasn't sure what the Brish'diri would expect on third-and-one. But whatever it was, they didn't get it. With the aliens still slightly off balance, Blastoff went for the bomb again.

This time it was complete. All alone in the open, the fleet human receiver snagged the pass

neatly and went all the way in for the score. The Brish'diri never laid a hand on him.

The crowd sat in stunned silence for a moment when the pass was caught. Then, when it became clear that there was no way to prevent the score, the cheering began, and peaked slowly to an ear-splitting roar. The stadium rose to its feet as one, screaming wildly.

For the first time all season, the Kosg-Anjehn trailed. A picture perfect place kick made the score 7-0 in favor of Blastoff Inn.

Tomkins was on his feet, cheering loudly. Hill, who had remained seated, regarded him dourly. "Sit down," he said. "The games not over yet."

The Brish'diri soon underlined that point. No sooner did they take over the ball then they came pounding back upfield, smashing into the line again and again. The humans alternated between a dozen different defensive formations. None of them seemed to do any good. The Brish'diri steamroller ground ahead inexorably.

The touchdown was an anticlimax. Luckily, however, the extra point try failed. Tuhgayh-dei lost a lot of footballs, but he had still not developed a knack for putting his kicks between the crossbars.

The Blastoff offense took the field again. They looked determined. The first play from scrimmage was a short pass over the middle, complete for fifteen yeards. Next came a tricky double pass. Complete for twelve yards.

On the following play, the Blastoff fullback tried to go up the middle. He got creamed for a five yard loss.

"If they stop our passing, we're dead," Hill said to Tomkins, without taking his eyes off the field.

Luckily, the Blastoff quarterback quickly gave up on the idea on establishing a running game. A prompt return to the air gave the humans another first down. Three plays later, they scored. Again the crowd roared.

Trailing now 14-6, the Brish'diri once more began to pound their way upfield. But the humans, elated by their lead, were a little tougher now. Reading the Brish'diri offense with confident precision, the defensement began gang-tackling the alien runners.

The Kosg-Anjehn drive slowed down, then stalled. They were forced to surrender the ball near the 50-yard line.

Tomkins started pounding Hill on the back. "You did it," he said. "We stopped them on offense too. We're going to win."

"Take it easy," Hill replied. "That was a fluke. Several of our men just happened to be in the right place at the right time. It's happened before. No one ever said the Brish'diri scored every time they got the ball. Only most of the time."

Back on the field, the Blastoff passing attack was still humming smoothly. A few accurate throws put the humans on the Kosg-Anjehn's thirty.

And then the aliens changed formations. They took several men off the rush, and put them on pass defense. They started double-teaming the Blastoff receivers. Except it wasn't normal double-teaming. The second defender was playing far back of the line of scrimmage. By the time the human had outrun the first Birsh'dir, the second would be right on top of him.

"I was afraid of something like this," Hill said. "We're not the only ones who can react to circumstances."

The Blastoff quarterback ignored the shift in the alien defense, and stuck to his aerial game plan. But his first pass from the thirty, dead on target, was batted away by a Brish'dir defender who happened to be right on top of the play.

The same thing happened on second down. That made it third-and-ten. The humans called time out. There was a hurried conference on the sidelines.

When action resumed, the Blastoff offense abandoned the shotgun formation. Without the awesome Brish'diri blitz to worry about, the quarterback was relatively safe in his usual position.

There was a quick snap, and the quarterback got rid of the ball equally quickly, an instant before a charging Brish'dir bore him to the ground. The halfback who got the handoff streaked to the left in an end run.

The other Brish'diri defenders lumbered towards him en masse to seal shut the sideline. But just as he reached the sideline, still behind the line of scrimmage, the Blastoff halfback handed off to a teammate streaking right.

A wide grin spread across Hill's face. A reverse!

The Brish'diri were painfully slow to change directions. The human swept around right end with ridiculous ease and shot upfield, surrounded by blockers. The remaining Brish'diri closed in. One or two were taken out by team blocks. The rest found it impossible to lay their hands on the swift, darting runner. Dodging this way and that, he wove a path neatly between them and loped into the endzone.

Once more the stadium rose to its feet. This time Hill stood up too.

Tomkins was beaming again. "Ha!" he said. "I thought you were the one who said we couldn't run against them."

"Normally we can't," the director replied. "There's no way to run over or through them, so runs up the middle are out. End runs are better, but if they're in their normal formation, that too is a dreary prospect. There is no way a human runner can get past a wall of charging Brish'diri.

"However, when they spread out like they just did, they give us an open field to work with. We can't go over or through them, no, but we sure as hell can go *between* them when they're scattered all over the field. And Blastoff Inn has several excellent open-

field runners."

The crowd interrupted him with another roar to herald a successful extra-point conversion. It was now 21-6.

THE GAME was far from over, however. The human defense was not nearly as successful on the next series of downs. Instead of relying exclusively on the running game, Marhdaln-nei kept his opponents guessing with some of his patented short, hard pop passes.

To put on a more effective rush, the Blastoff defense spread out at wide intervals. The offensive line thus opened up, and several humans managed to fake out slower Brish'diri blockers and get past them to the quarterback. Marhdaln was even thrown for a loss once.

But the Blastoff success was short-lived. Marhdaln adjusted quickly. The widely-spread human defense, highly effective against the pass, was a total failure against the run. The humans were too far apart to gang-tackle. And there was no way short of mass assault to stop a Brish'dir in full stride.

After that there was no stopping the Kosg-Anjehn, as Marhdaln alternated between the pass and the run according to the human defensive formation. The aliens marched upfield quickly for their second touchdown.

This time, even the extra point was on target.

The Brish'diri score had taken some of the steam out of the crowd, but the Blastoff Inn offense showed no signs of being disheartened when they took the field again. With the aliens back in their original blitz defense, the human quarterback fell back on the shotgun once more.

His first pass was overthrown, but the next three in a row were dead on target and moved Blastoff to the Kosg-Anjehn forty. A running play, inserted to break the monotony, ended in a six yard loss. Then came another incomplete pass. The toss was perfect, but the receiver dropped the ball.

That made it third-and-ten, and a tremor of apprehension went through the crowd. Nearly everyone in the stadium realized that the humans had to keep scoring to stay in the game.

The snap from center was quick and clean. The Blastoff quarterback snagged the ball, took a few unhurried steps backward to keep at a safe distances from the oncoming Brish'diri rushers, and tried to pick out a receiver. He scanned the field carefully. Then he reared back and unleashed a bomb.

It looked like another touchdown. The human had his alien defender beaten by a good five yards and was still gaining ground. The pass was a beauty.

But then, as the ball began to spiral downward, the Brish'diri defender stopped suddenly in mid-stride. Giving up his hopeless chase, he craned his head around to look for the ball, spotted it, braced himself—

—and jumped.

Brish'diri leg muscles, evolved for the heavy gravity of Brishun, were far more powerful than their human counterparts. Despite their heavier bodies, the Brish'diri could easily outjump any human. But so far they had only taken advantage of that fact to snare Marhdaln's pop passes.

But not, as Hill blinked in disbelief, the Kosg-Anjehn defenseman leaped at least five feet into the air to meet the descending ball in mid-air and knock it aside with a vicious backhand slap.

The stadium moaned.

Forced into a punting situation, Blastoff Inn suddenly seemed to go limp. The punter fumbled the snap from center, and kicked the ball away when he tried to pick it up. The Brish'dir who picked it up got twenty yards before he was brought down.

The human defense this time put up only token resistence as Marhdaln led his team downfield on a series of short passes and devastating runs.

It took the Brish'diri exactly six plays to narrow the gap to 21-19. Luckily, Tuhgayh missed another extra point.

There was a loud cheer when the Blastoff offense took the field again. But right from the first play oafter the kickoff, it was obvious that something had gone out of them.

The human quarterback, who had been giving a brilliant performance, suddenly became erratic. To add to his problems, the Brish'diri were suddenly jumping all over the field.

The alien kangaroo pass defense had several severe limitations. It demanded precise timing and excellent reflexes on the part of the jumpers, neither of which was a Brish'diri forte. But it was a disconcerting tactic that the Blastoff quarterback had never come up against before. He didn't know quite how to cope with it.

The humans drove to their own forty, bogged down, and were forced to punt. The Kosg-Anjehn promptly marched the ball back the other way and scored. For the first time in the game, they led.

The next Blastoff drive was a bit more successful, and reached the Brish'diri twenty before it ground to a halt. The humans salvaged the situation with a field goal.

The Kosg-Anjehn rolled up another score, driving over the goal line just seconds before the half ended.

The score stood at 31-24 in favor of the Brish'diri.

And there was no secret about the way the tide was running.

IT HAD GROWN very quiet in the stands.

Tomkins, wearing a worried expression, turned to Hill with a sigh. "Well, maybe we'll make a comeback in the second half. We're only down seven. That's not so bad."

"Maybe," Hill said doubtfully. "But I don't think so. They've got all the momentum. I hate to say

so, but I think we're going to get run out of the stadium in the second half."

Tomkins frowned. "I certainly hope not. I'd hate to see what the Brish'diri war faction would do with a really lopsided score. Why, they'd—" He stopped, suddenly aware that Hill wasn't paying the slightest bit of attention. The director's eyes had wandered back to the field.

"Look," Hill said, pointing. "By the gate. Do you see what I see?"

"It looks like a car from the trade mission," the E-T agent said, squinting to make it out.

"And who's that getting out?"

Tomkins hesitated. "Remjhardnei, he said at last.

The Brish'dir climbed smoothly from the low-slung black vehicle, walked a short distance across the stadium grass, and vanished through the door leading to one of the dressing rooms.

"What's he doing here?', Hill asked. "Wasn't he supposed to stay away from the games?"

Tomkins scratched his head uneasily. "Well, that's what we advised. Especially at first, when hostility was at its highest. But he's not a *prisoner*, you know. There's no way we could force him to stay away from the games if he wants to attend."

Hill was frowning. "Why should he take your advice all season and suddenly disregard it now?"

Tomkins shrugged. "Maybe he wanted to see his son win a championship."

"Maybe. But I don't think so. There's something funny going on here."

BY THE TIME the second half was ready to begin, Hill was feeling even more apprehensive. The Kosg-Anjehn had taken the fields a few minutes earlier, but Remjhard had not reappeared. He was still down in the alien locker room.

Moreover, there was something subtly different about the Brish'diri as they lined up to receive the kickoff. Nothing drastic. Nothing obvious. But somehow the atmosphere was changed. The aliens appeared more carefree, more relaxed. Almost as if they had stopped taking their opponents seriously.

Hill couild sense the difference. He'd seen other teams with the same sort of attitude before, in dozens of other contests. It was the attitude of a team that already knows how the game is going to come out. The attitude of a team that knows it is sure to win—or doomed to lose.

The kickoff was poor and wobbly. A squat Brish'dir took it near the thirty and headed upfield. Two Blastoff tacklers met him at the thirty-five.

He fumbled.

The crowd roared. For a second the ball rolled loose on the stadium grass. A dozen hands reached for it, knocking it this way and that. Finally, a brawny Blastoff lineman landed squarely on top of it and trapped it beneath him.

And suddenly the game turned around again.

"I don't believe it," Hill said. "That was it. The break we needed. After that touchdown pass was knocked aside, our team just lost heart. But now, after this, look at them. We're back in this game."

The Blastoff offense raced onto the field, broke their huddle with an enthusiastic shout, and lined up. It was first-and-ten from the Brish'diri twenty-eight.

The first pass was deflected off a bounding Brish'dir. The second, however, went for a touchdown.

The score was tied.

The Kosg-Anjehn held onto the kickoff this time. They put the ball in play near the twenty-five.

Marhdaln opened the series of downs with a pass. No one, human or Brish'diri, was within ten yards of where it came down. The next play was a run. But the Kosg-Anjehn halfback hesitated oddly after he took the handoff. Given time to react, four humans smashed into him at the line of scrimmage. Marhdaln went back to the air. The pass was incomplete again.

The Brish'diri were forced to punt.

Up in the stands, Tomkins was laughing wildly. He began slapping Hill on the back again. "Look at that! Not even a first down. We held them. And you said they were going to run us out of the stadium."

A strange half-smile danced across the director's face. "Ummm," he said. "So I did." The smiled faded.

It was a good, solid punt, but Blastoff's deep man fielded it superbly and ran it back to the fifty. From there, it took only seven plays for the human quarterback, suddenly looking cool and confident again, to put the ball in the end zone.

Bouncing Brish'diri had evidently ceased to disturb him. He simply threw the ball through spots where they did not happen to be bouncing.

This time the humans missed the extra point. But no one cared. The score was 37-31. Blastoff Inn was ahead again.

And they were ahead to stay. No sooner had the Kosg-Anjehn taken over again then Marhdaln threw an interception. It was the first interception he had thrown all season.

Naturally, it was run back for a touchdown.

After that, the Brish'diri seemed to revive a little. They drove three-quarters of the way down the field, but then they bogged down as soon as they got within the shadow of the goalposts. On fourth-and-one from the twelve yard line, the top Brish'dir runner slipped and fell behind the line of scrimmage.

Blastoff took over. And scored.

From then on, it was more of the same.

The final score was 56-31. The wrong team had been run out of the stadium.

TOMKINS, of course, was in ecstacy. "We did it. I knew we could do it. This is perfect, just perfect. We humiliated them. The war faction will be totally discredited now. They'll never be able to stand up under the ridicule." He grinned and slapped Hill soundly on the back once again.

Hill winced under the blow, and eyes the E-T man dourly. "There's something funny going on here. If the Brish'diri had played all season the way they played in the second half, they never would have gotten this far. Something happened in that locker room during the halftime."

Nothing could dent Tomkins' grin, however. "No, no," he said. "It was the fumble. That was what did it. It demoralized them, and they fell apart. They just clutched, that's all. It happens all the time."

"Not to teams this good it doesn't," Hill replied. But Tomkins wasn't around to hear. The E-T agent had turned abruptly and was weaving his way through the crowd, shouting something about being right back.

Hill frowned and turned back to the field. The stadium was emptying quickly. The Rec director stood there for a second, still looking puzzled. Then suddenly he vaulted the low fence around the field, and set off across the grass.

He walked briskly across the stadium and down into the visitor's locker room. The Brish'diri were changing clothes in sullen silence, and filing out of the room slowly to the airbus that would carry them back to the trade mission.

Remjhard-nei was sitting in a corner of the room.

The Brish'dir greeted him with a slight nod. "Director Hill. Did you enjoy the game? It was a pity our half-men failed in their final test. But they still performed creditably, do you not think?

Hill ignored the question. "Don't give me the bit about failing, Remjhard. I'm not as stupid as I look. Maybe no one else in the stadium realized what was going on out there this afternoon, but I did. You didn't lose that game. You threw it. Deliberately. And I want to know why!"

Remjhard stared at Hill for a long minute. Then, very slowly, he rose from the bench on which he was seated. His face was blank and expressionless, but his eyes glittered in the dim light.

Hill suddenly realized that they were alone in the locker room. Then he remembered the awesome Brish'diri strength, and took a hasty step backwards away from the alien.

"You realize, " Remjhard said gravely, "that it is a grave insult to accuse a Brish'dir of dishonorable conduct?"

The emissary took another careful look around the locker room to make sure the two of them were alone. Then he took another step towards Hill.

And broke into a wide smile when the director, edging back-

wards, almost tripped over a locker.

"But, of course, there is no question of dishonor here," the alien continued. "Honor is too big for a half-man's play. And, to be sure, in the rules that you furnished us, there was no provision requiring participants to—" He paused. "—to play at their best, shall we say?"

Hill, untangling himself from the locker, sputtered. "But there are unwritten rules, traditions. This sort of thing simply is not sporting."

Remjhard was still smiling. "To a Brish'dir, there is nothing as meaningless as an unwritten rule. It is a contradiction in terms, as you say."

"But *why*?," said Hill. "That's what I can't understand. Everyone keeps telling me that your culture is virile, competitive, proud. Why should you throw the game? Why should you make yourself look bad? *Why*?"

Remjhard made an odd gurgling noise. Had he been a human, Hill would have thought he was choking. Instead, he assumed he was laughing.

"Humans amuse me," the Brish'dir said at last. "You attach a few catch phrases to a culture, and you think you understand it. And, if something disagrees with your picture, you are shocked.

"I am sorry, Director Hill. Cultures are not that simple. They are very complex mechanisms. A word like pride does not describe everything about the Brish'diri.

"Oh, we are proud. Yes. And competitive. Yes. But we are also intelligent. And our values are flexible enough to adjust to the situation at hand."

Remjhard paused again, and looked Hill over carefully. Then he decided to continue. "This football of yours is a fine game, Director Hill. I told you that once before. I mean it. It is very enjoyable, a good exercise of mind and body.

"But it is only a game. Competing in games is important, of course. But there are larger competitions. More important ones. And I am intelligent enough to know which one gets our first priority.

"I received word from Brishun this afternoon about the use to which the Kosg-Anjehn victories were being put. Your friend from Extraterrestial Relations must have told you that I rank among the leaders of the Brish'diri Peace Party. I would not be here on Earth otherwise. None of our opponents are willing to work with humans, whom they consider animals.

"Naturally I came at once to the stadium and informed our half-men that they must lose. And they, of course, complied. They too realize that some competitions are more important than others.

"For in losing, we have won. Our opponents on Brishun will not survive this humiliation. In the next Great Choosing many will turn against them. And I, and others at the mission, will profit.

And the Brish'diri will profit.

"Yes, Director Hill," Remjhard concluded, still smiling. "We are a competitive race. But competition for control of a world takes precedence over a football game."

Hill was smiling himself by now. Then he began to laugh. "Of course," he said. "And when I think of the ways we pounded our heads out to think of strategies to beat you. When all we had to do was tell you what was going on." He laughed again.

Remjhard was about to add something when suddenly the locker room door swung open and Tomkins stalked in. The E-T agent was still beaming.

"Thought I'd find you here, Hill," he began. "Still trying to investigate those conspiracy theories of yours, eh?" He chuckled and winked at Remjhard.

"Not really," Hill replied. "It was a harebrained theory. Obviously it was the fumble that did it."

"Of course," Tomkins said. "Glad to hear it. Anyway, I've got good news for you."

"Oh? What's that? That the world is saved? Fine. But I'm still out of job come tonight."

"Not at all," Tomkins replied. "That's what my call was about. We've got a job for you. We want you to join E.T. Relations."

Hill looked dubious. "Come now," he said. "Me? An E-T agent? I don't know the first thing about it. I'm a small-time local bureaucrat and sports official. How am I supposed to fit into E.T. Relations?"

"As a sports director," Tomkins replied. "Ever since this Brish'diri thing broke, we've been getting dozens of requests from other alien trade missions and diplomatic stations on Earth. They all want a crack at it too. So, to promote good will and all that, we're going to set up a program. And we want you to run it. At double your present salary, of course."

Hill thought about the difficulties of running a sports program for two dozen wildly different types of extraterrestials.

Then he thought about the money he'd get for doing it.

Then he thought about the Starport City Council.

"Sounds like a fine idea," he said. "But tell me. That gravity grid you were going to give to Starport—is that transferable too?"

"Of course," Tomkins said.

"Then I accept." He glanced over at Remjhard. "Although I may live to regret it when I see what the Brish'diri can do on a basketball court."

—GEORGE R. R. MARTIN

In recent months Phyllis Eisenstein, for years well known among sf fans, has become known to a much wider audience through appearances in such magazines as Fantasy & Science Fiction. *Now she makes her debut in these pages with a moving and vividly real story about two women who lived thousands of miles apart, never met, and who yet shared a unique–*

ATTACHMENT

PHYLLIS EISENSTEIN

Illustrated by Jeff Jones

IT ROSE FROM NOTHINGNESS—a creature of nightmare, black as a stormwave, mountainous, inexorable. Ellie struggled, gasping beneath its Leviathan weight, striking out at velvet folds now solid, now fluid, now impalpable vapor; she twisted, turned, thrashed, seeking air where there was none.

She woke, eyes wide to the soft glow of the nightlight, but in her mind the monster roiled still, and clutched. Her fingers tightened on rosary beads five thousand miles away.

Johanna! Ellie's scream was silent, but loud as a clap of thunder to one too distant to hear a voice.

The great black evil drew back, dwindled to a small, eight-legged ball of fur, and vanished. In a small German town, Johanna Peters escaped from sleep.

I'm sorry, Ellie.

It's all right. Ellie Greenfield peered at the bedside clock. *It's your morning. The doctor should come by to see you soon.*

Go back to sleep, child. You need your rest.

I think I'll have a cup of tea.

Forgive me. It won't be much longer.

Ellie donned robe and slippers and moved out into the hall. Her parents' bedroom door was closed, and no light showed beneath; she tiptoed past and descended to the ground floor.

You don't think about it, Ellie, but we both know . . .

I don't know anything.

Here is Marta with the breakfast I can't eat.

Eat it anyway. She turned on the kitchen light, filled the kettle and put it on to boil. Her father had left the newspaper on the table—she opened it at random and began to read.

"Is something wrong, Ellie?" Her mother, Sally Greenfield, stood in the doorway in a frilly blue robe.

Ellie shook her head. "I just couldn't sleep, Mom. I'm making

some tea."

Mrs. Greenfield sat down beside her daughter. "You haven't been sleeping well for weeks, and you've lost weight. Is something bothering you?"

Ellie shrugged. "Exams are coming up."

"You always say that. You can't possibly have that many exams."

Ellie smiled. "You never went to the University of Chicago."

Mrs. Greenfield touched her arm. "Is it too rough for you, honey? Your father and I were wondering . . . do you want to transfer to some other school?"

"No, Mom. I love U of C."

"But are you sure it isn't too rough?"

"I'm sure."

"Then what is it, sweetheart? What's bothering you?"

"Nothing, Mom. Don't worry about me."

"Is it . . . Bob? Are you and he having some kind of problem?"

The kettle began to whistle, and Ellie turned the burner off. "Bob and I are fine," she said, selecting a bag of jasmine from the tea canister.

"Are you pregnant?"

Ellie splashed water into her cup. "You've been watching too many soap operas, Mom. Strage as it may seem, I'm still a virgin."

Mrs. Greenfield leaned back in her chair. "Maybe you have mono. I'll make an appointment with Dr. Levin."

"If you want." Ellie sipped her tea. "I don't think he'll find anything in particular. It's just

nerves. I'll be okay after exams."

Sooner than that.

Eat your breakfast, Johanna.

I have pain, Ellie. I cannot eat.

Again, Ellie felt the beads of the rosary passing through her fingers, and she glanced at her empty hand, curled it into a fist. Johanna's voice might be reciting the Ave Marias and the Pater Nosters, but her mind was crying out to God for release. Ellie concentrated on the cup of tea, the heat flowing down her throat, the sweetness of sugar, and the sound of her mother's questions.

"Why don't we take a week off in Florida, sweetheart? Just the two of us?"

"I can't leave school, Mom."

"We did it when you were in high school."

"College is different. I can't afford to lose a single day. Things move too fast."

"We could even take Bob along if you want."

Ellie shook her head. "He couldn't go either. Please, Mom—there's nothing to worry about. You'll realize that when you see my grades."

"Grades don't mean a thing if you're a physical wreck."

"I'll make it." She yawned elaborately, stretching her arms above her head. "I think I'll go back to bed.

Here is Paula with the needle.

Ellie looked at the kitchen clock. *Isn't it a little early?*

I have pain.

"Good night, Mom."

"Good night, honey. Sleep well."

You must sleep, Ellie.

If you promise no more nightmares.

I don't think I will sleep any more today.

The shot will make you tired.

I don't think so. I hope the priest comes again this afternoon. I would like to talk to him.

As Ellie climbed the stairs to her room, Johanna fancied she was climbing the hill to the cemetery. The headstones bore familiar names, the names of her kin and her neighbors, Peters, Koos, Sonnen—inhabitants of the village of Erdorf since time immemorial. There, beside her beloved Georg, under the sign of peace, she would lie.

You're still young. You should remarry. Ellie closed her eyes and curled into fetal position beneath her electric blanket.

I wish the pain would go.

Try to relax. The shot will help.

Sleep, child.

Sleep, Johanna.

Five uneventful hours later, Ellie gobbled a bagel with cream cheese as she ran to her car. She found a parking space a block from class, rushed into the exam only two minutes late. *Wish me luck.*

You never need it.

Spasibo. Russian exam: Ellie translated as fast as she could write, finished before any of her classmates, then went back to the beginning and checked the whole paper through.

I'm proud of you, child; you are

a true linguist.

That comes of early practice.

You learn Russian as easily as you learned German.

I hardly think so, but thank you for the compliment. You're not bad yourself.

After so many years of constant practice, I know English well enough, but you have left me far behind in Russian.

We'll speak it together more often.

There won't be time, Ellie.

Johanna, I must study. On the second floor of the library, she found an empty armchair, opened a book, and examined the chemical transformations she would have to perform later in the day.

In Germany, a woman dozed, reliving wordless memories twenty years old: a soft humming in the ears, a feeling of warmth, as if she were immersed in a freshly-drawn bath—Johanna had lain down and waited for the sensations to pass. She considered seeing a doctor, but there was little money in the bag tucked under the mattress. Paula looked in to ask why she was resting in the middle of the day. "Just a little tired, dear," Johanna said, and she rose and went back to scrubbing the floor.

Weeks later, the humming and the warmth were still with her, though she had pushed them to the back of her mind and no longer consciously recognized them. She was asleep between a thick pair of featherbeds when her dreams of Georg and the old good days before the war were interrupted by a sudden pressure enveloping her whole body, squeezing the breath from her lungs. She woke, clawing at air, tossing off the light covers, jumping out of bed to stand, shivering in the darkness of the room she shared with Marie. Beneath her bare feet, the floor was cold. Through the windows, pale moonlight splashed the room. The pressure was gone.

Johanna dressed quietly and went to the kitchen for a cup of tea. She checked the stove for coal embers, added a few sticks of wood to build a blaze for the kettle. She was stirring a bit of honey into her tea when the pressure returned.

It was a tenuous thing this time, a distant echo of the first—a ghostly cocoon, contracting and expanding in slowly accelerating rhythm. Awake, breathing with conscious regularity, she could almost push it away, as if it were a spiderweb in the garden, momentarily blocking her path. But at the limits of her perception, it remained, a mere shadow, but undeniably present. She was frightened and intrigued; there was no pain, no dizziness, no physical impairment of any sort. There was only a shadow.

Johanna prayed silently till Paula woke up at six.

"Good morning, Mama."

"I am ill, Paula. You must go down to the train station and call a taxi."

But by the time she saw a doctor, the sensations had ended in a final more powerful pulse and a brief feeling of intense cold that made her want to cry out. The doctor found no physical malady but prescribed a few days of bed rest.

Later I realized that was the night you were born.

You're giving me a taste of my own medicine these days. That big black monster–ugh.

We are most vulnerable when we sleep. Do you ever feel the pain in your dreams?

Sometimes, a little.

You wake from it.

Yes, and then it fades quickly.

You need more sleep.

Not you, too!

You're losing weight, Ellie.

Stop it, Johanna. I can barely take it from my mother.

It's my fault.

Don't be silly.

I will kill myself, and then you won't suffer from my nightmares and my pains any more.

Johanna!

I know it's a terrible thing, but our case is special–surely God will forgive me for ending your suffering.

I'm not suffering, Johanna.

You can't lie to me.

There's no point in discussing this any further. I have to meet Bob for lunch.

I am ruining your studies as well.

You're drowning in self-pity, that's what you're doing. My studies are fine; I aced that exam and I'm going to make the Dean's list.

You have the endurance of youth. My sister Marta is almost ill herself from the strain of looking after me . . . and knowing. But Paula is young and taking it well. Oh, why is God testing us all like this?

Ellie sighed. Rapport with Johanna had early imbued her with a Catholic belief in God, but later training and thinking had weaned her away, first to the nebulous Judaism of her family and then to atheism. She loved Johanna, but they could no longer discuss religion in a rational manner, and Ellie shied away when the subject came up.

Bob was waiting in the Coffee Shop, and he hugged her. "I thought you'd be later."

"I got tired of studying. I know it as well as I ever will."

"Doesn't look too hard. Sugarman going to use you as the class example like he promised?"

"I haven't heard a word since Wednesday. He's probably forgotten."

"Not him." He took a large bite out of his sandwich and talked around it. "Say, they're showing *War of the Worlds* at B-J Friday night. Want to see it?"

"I hear it's pretty scratched."

"Just the first reel, according to Jerry."

"Okay then."

"And we're having a party afterwards."

"At the house?"

He nodded.

Don't go, Ellie.

You're too conservative. Of course I'll go.

You're alone with him too often.

I'm never alone, Johanna.

You want to wear white at your wedding.

I haven't decided yet.

Ellie, I love you like my own Paula.

Johanna, stop worrying about me! With you around I could never do anything without thinking three times about it first!

Don't be angry, Ellie.

I'm not angry. Yes, I am angry, but not very much. Let me run my own life. "What time does the movie start?"

"I'll pick you up at seven."

Ellie glanced at her watch. "I'd better get going."

"I'll walk with you."

They linked hands and strolled out to the quadrangle.

He only wants one thing, child.

I think I'll get birth control pills next week.

I know God will forgive you these thoughts.

Johanna, sometimes you wear my patience very thin.

Ellie kissed Bob goodbye in front of Rosenwald Hall and ran up the steps to her history class. She sat in the back of the room, as usual, looking down on the instructor who stood in the well at the blackboard. Her pen worked almost automatically as her mind roamed. Johanna was looking into the past again at a kaleidescope of disjointed memories that Ellie readily recognized: Georg's farewell hug as he boarded the train that carried him to the Eastern Front and death; the tolling of church bells on the Sunday after surrender; the smell of ripening strawberries from the garden, purchased by the kilogram by G. I. wives from the nearby airbase; the taste of hamburger, spiced and savory, reserved for special meals. To Ellie, Johanna's memories and experiences both waking and sleeping existed as a constant hum in the back of her mind, just below the threshold of consciousness; like the television set that her parents left on all day and deep into the night, they were there if she cared to concentrate on them, but they were easy to ignore.

Except during sleep.

They shared dreams in their overlapping periods of slumber—especially when Ellie was very young and napped during her daytime. Later, if one slept while the other went about her daily routine, the dreamer's imaginary experiences were influenced by the waker's real ones. Ellie's parents had often remarked on the ease of her sleep and the rarity of her nightmares; only once, when Johanna's placid life was interrupted by a narrow miss by a speeding Volkswagen, did Ellie—then six years old—wake screaming. Sally Greenfield was disturbed enough to mention the unusual event to her daughter's psychiatrist.

Dr. Berger had been called upon for help when Ellie's par-

ents noticed that she had an imaginary playmate named Johanna, a lady who lived in an old house with a vast garden and a backyard full of cows. At an early age, Ellie had insisted that her own name was Johanna, and the Greenfields, amused at first, sometimes called her that. By the time she was five, she had differentiated Johanna from herself, spoke to her almost constantly and seemed not to understand that her parents could not perceive the woman.

Dr. Berger had a number of long talks with Ellie, none of which uncovered any deep-rooted problems. Eventually, Ellie realized that Johanna's existence was the source of his concern and that he would never stop badgering her—and her parents would never be satisfied—until she admitted that Johanna did not exist. To bring peace to the Greenfield home, she admitted it.

How can you blame them, Ellie? I heard your silent voice, and I could not believe, either. I thought I was losing my mind. I prayed, how I prayed! And you were always there, listening to my prayers. For a time I thought you were an angel. I was hearing voices, like Joan of Arc. Me, Johanna Peters. It was absurd. I confessed to the priest, and he suggested I see a psychiatrist. But there was no money, and the psychiatrist was far away. I resolved to ignore you. As if that were possible!

When did you decide I was another human being?

When I received your letter.

Not till then?

Not till then.

Ellie had learned how to act, and she had also learned that other people did not share dreams, hear voices, see, smell, and feel the shadows of sights, odors, and touches. She was a solitary child out of choice, preferring books to games and Johanna's friendship to that of children of her own age. Johanna's life was different from hers, and fascinating: milking cows, picking beans and berries, building a coal and wood fire beneath a copper cauldron of bath water, riding trains and buses through farmland and woodland—these were not activities that her parents offered. Ellie could sit in a quiet corner of her room and follow Johanna's life as if she were watching television: the reception was dim and fuzzy, but it was there whenever she wanted it and could be tuned a trifle sharper with concentration.

I don't think I would recognize your mother on the street, Ellie.

I don't think I would recognize you, Johanna, if it weren't for the photo you sent me. Your self-image is dim. But I would know Georg.

A few strong things are clear . . . my love for Georg. Your birth. My death.

Johanna, no!

We won't meet, Ellie.

Just another year, Johanna. Most of the money for the trip is already in my bank account.

I wish it could be. But you won't even be able to attend my

funeral. Lay a wreath, Ellie, when you come to Erdorf. A wreath for me and Georg. I wish you could have known him.

In the fourth grade, Ellie had found Germany in the atlas of the Encyclopedia Britannica, but Erdorf, a hamlet of a hundred and fifty houses, was not marked. Bitburg, where Johanna shopped, was there—not far from the Luxembourg border. The distance from Chicago was great—five thousand miles, seven time zones. In the fourth grade, Ellie could not conceive of such spaces, but she estimated that at her best speed, she could walk to Johanna's house in fifty-two days if she didn't stop to eat or sleep.

Even at the age of nine, that seemed excessive, especially since part of the route would be over water.

She was irked by Johanna's disbelief. On the surface, Johanna readily agreed that Ellie was real, but underneath, doubt was a bottomless pit, and only her rosary could keep her safely on the brink. On her side, Ellie never had any doubts about Johanna's reality.

That was because you were born in rapport with me, but I lived the first thirty years of my life without you.

I should have sent the letter air mail. You were so nervous during those six weeks it was at sea . . .

I was afraid to greet the postman as he walked up the hill. I was afraid he would have a letter from America, and I was afraid he would not have a letter from America.

Ellie had executed the message in her childish script, just a few words: "I am real. I love you. Love, Eleanor Greenfield." She copied the address from Johanna's dictation, carefully printing both "Germany" and "Deutschland" on the bottom of the envelope. Then she went to the post office and paid for the postage in pennies that would otherwise be spent on comic books or candy.

I have the letter still. I tore it trying to open the envelope. My hands were shaking.

History class broke, and Ellie gathered up her books and papers slowly. The instructor was German—she wondered how he would react if she went up to him and began to speak in Johanna's native tongue. He was from Bremen, in the north, where they spoke a staccato sort of High German, very hard and precise, much the same language textbooks offered. Johanna, from a more southern, rural community, usually spoke a variety of Low German, an easy, slurring language denigrated by teachers and educated speakers, as well as by Johanna's daughter Paula, who had finished high school. Ellie's parents had mistaken her fluent Low German for Yiddish—a closely related tongue—when she was a small child, assuming that she had picked it up from her grandparents during Sunday afternoon visiting.

Later, when Johanna made an

effort to speak—and think—only the High German her daughter was learning in school, Ellie discovered the difference between the two; she sorted them out more easily than did Johanna herself, and she found library books to read in High German—there were none in Low.

German, now Russian . . . when you come to Europe, you'll be mistaken for a native.

Better that than for an American.

You'll say you're from Erdorf.

You bet I will. Ellie glanced at her watch. She was running late again, due in the laboratory in less than a minute.

My fault, dear. I'm distracting you.

Never mind.

You've been a great comfort to me, Ellie, in these latter years. I wish we could have met.

Ellie sprinted across the quadrangle. The wind was cold, off the lake, and the sky promised rain. A few students hurried past her. *Is there anyone else like us in the world, Johanna? Maybe on this very campus, hiding. . . ?*

God has singled us out for a miracle. I often wonder why.

The laws of chance . . .

To compensate me for the loss of Georg . . .

I'll run another ad in the Tribune next week. Maybe this time someone sane will answer. She levered open the heavy door of the Chemistry Building and dashed up the stairs three at a time. Bob was waiting by her locker, holding out her lab coat. She handed him her books to be locked away.

"You're it," he said. "I just got the sign from the boss."

"The boss is going to find out just what kind of a slob I am."

The priest is here, Ellie.

"You're limping. Did you hurt your leg? You shouldn't rush up the stairs like that; Al Harris broke his leg that way."

"No, it's just a stitch in my side." Ellie prodded her waist with stiff fingers. The pain was Johanna's, she knew it from her dreams, but it had never before struck during her waking hours.

Johanna?

Father forgive me, for I have sinned.

It was a ghost pain that did not respond to kneading or exercise. Ellie willed it away, focussing her attention on setting up the apparatus for the demonstration. Johanna had confessed her sins almost every day for the past three weeks, and Ellie tried not to bother her at those times.

I have associated with an atheist, loved her as my own child and accepted her denial of God without argument.

Ellie felt indignant. *Johanna, there's no need to confess that.*

I have prayed for death and considered suicide.

Ellie picked up a thistle tube but felt the rosary beads. The pain in her side seemed to obstruct her breathing, and she began to pant. She worked the end of the tube into a two-holed

rubber stopper, focussing her whole attention on that one procedure.

"Hey, you're going to break it if you keep up like that," said Bob.

"Huh?"

He took the thistle tube from her hands. "This stopper's too small." He looked into her face, his eyebrows pinching together. "Are you feeling all right? You're pale . . ."

And I have accepted gifts of powdered coffee from the American soldiers, though I knew it was against the law.

Ellie leaned on the lab bench, gasping and clutching at the deep, all-pervading ache that spread from her side. She smiled wanly, for Bob and for the woman in Germany. *Johanna, that's such a petty thing to confess.*

Bob held her arm. "Ellie, sit down somewhere."

She felt rather than saw it, black as a stormwave, mountainous, inexorable. It blanked her eyes, crushed her body, thundered in her ears. She screamed Johanna's name aloud and sank to the hard laboratory floor. The Leviathan flowed over her, and she twisted and turned and thrashed, seeking air. *Johanna, Johanna!*

A wordless shriek answered her cry. And then the great black evil melted to mist and vanished.

Ellie lay limp and exhausted, her mouth sagging open, her eyes unfocussed in the bright fluorescent light. Someone covered her with a lab coat. Someone raised her feet, propping them up with a stack of books. Someone chafed her wrists and touched her forehead and cheeks in search of fever. Someone spoke to her in a low voice, calling her name over and over again.

Johanna, what was it? You were wide awake.

On every side, classmates babbled excitedly, unintelligibly. But that one silent voice made no reply.

She covered her ears with her hands, closed her eyes, shut out the palpable world of noise and brightness and delved for the echoes of five thousand miles away. She found nothing, not a rosary bead, not a misty view of the autumn-colored leaves that enfolded Erdorf, not a whisper of the soundless sound of sleep. Her mind, save for her own hollow thoughts, was empty.

Johanna!

She opened her eyes and stared up into an anxious face: Bob.

"They've sent for an ambulance, Ellie. We'll take you over to Billings, and I'll call your folks from there. You'll be all right."

She hardly heard him. She closed her eyes and ears again, searching, searching . . But the echoes and the shadows that had been with her since before birth were gone. For the first time in memory, Ellie Greenfield was alone.

She began to tremble.

—PHYLLIS EISENSTEIN

ROBERT F. YOUNG

*Robert Young's most recent stories here ("No Deposit*No Refill," February; "New Route to the Indies," August) dealt with the lighter sides of life but this time Young tackles a more somber theme, symbolized by Owen Spring as—*

THE DECAYED LEG BONE

Illustrated by DAN STEFFAN

THE "AWOL Amerind" awed the plenipotentiary from Earth, even though Marque knew perfectly well that the huge figure that had suddenly appeared on the main deck of the ESS *Landfall* wasn't Owen Spring in the flesh but a greatly magnified three-dimensional projection. Nevertheless, the image was so realistic that only by rising from his seat, walking around the rectangular negotiating table and thrusting his hand through the figure's "body"—a course of action Marque's diplomatic dignity strictly forbade—could the plenipotentiary have wholly convinced himself of the projection's insubstantiality.

The flesh-and-blood Owen Spring, presumably at least, was standing somewhere on Heaven World's major continent, thousands of miles "below," a homemade audio-visual projector-receiver positioned somewhere behind him. The dossier that the ESNavy had supplied Marque and that lay before him on the negotiating table gave the Amerind's height as a mere 5'9½", indicating that in projecting his image on board the *Landfall* Spring had blown it up to at least twice his normal size, and strongly suggesting that he might not be quite as psychologically inept as the plenipotentiary had thought.

However, there was no alternative but to accept the projection as the real thing. Spring was wearing a beaver-skin (or its Heaven-World equivalent) weskit, deerskin-like leggings, and moccasins made of the same material. His black hair fell all the way to his shoulders and at first glance appeared umkempt; his narrow beardless face made the plenipotentiary think of the prow of a Great Lakes icebreaker.

Seated at Marque's left was Ms. Kleist, His Monroesque aide; to his right sat Captain Gerhard, the commander of the *Landfall*. Ranged along the same side of the negotiating table were additional dignitaries, but their passive role

in this history obviates any need to enumerate them. Also present on the *Landfall's* main deck, raze rifles at port, were six white-uniformed Space Marines. The significance of Spring's insistence on a fixed orbital position had escaped the captain as completely as it had escaped the plenipotentiary, and the former had acted on the assumption that the Amerind would be dumb enough to come on board bodily.

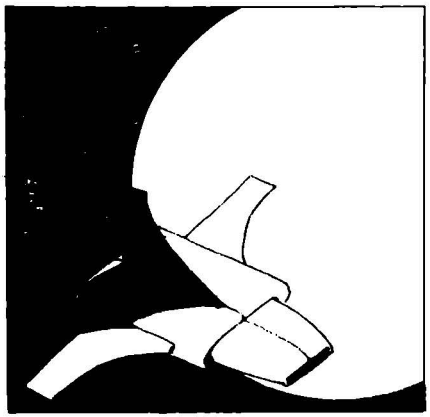
"I take it," Marque said, addressing the Amerind and bringing to an end the stunned silence occasioned by the projection's sudden appearance, "that you're using equipment sufficiently sophisticated to enable you to see us as well as hear and talk to us."

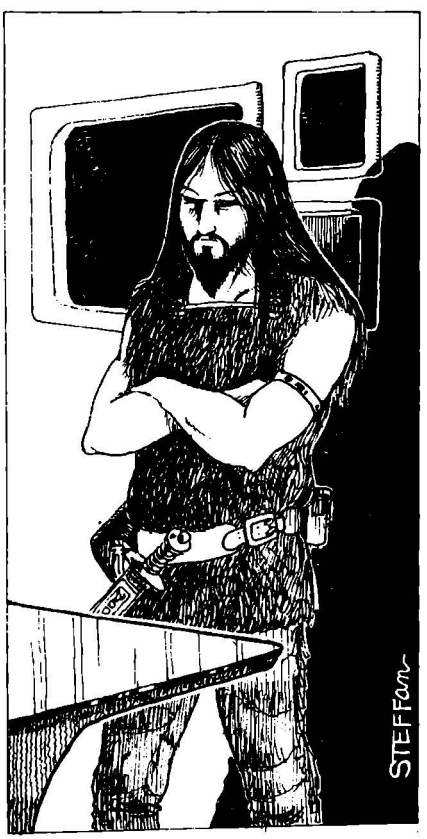
Owen Spring nodded.

"Good." Marque introduced the others and himself. Then he said, "The official photo contained in the dossier before me is prima facie evidence of your identity. However, for the benefit of the tape Ms. Kleist is making of this meeting, would you be kind enough to state your name?"

"Owen Spring." Not only were the words perfectly modulated, they emanated, to all intents and purposes, from the projection's mouth.

"Thank you." Most of the plenipotentiary's awe had departed; the little that remained would soon follow. "We are gratified," he continued, "that you have so graciously and promptly responded to our radioed request to negotiate."





"I've been expecting you for months," Spring said. "What took you so long to get off the ground?"

Of all those present at the table, only Marque knew the real answer to that one, and he wasn't about to tip the PanNatGov's hand. "The usual red tape, " he lied. Then, "May we assume from the fact that you didn't board us in the flesh that the STPTS you stole two years ago is no longer operable? Or was it because when you girdled Heaven World with a zeta-xi-field fence you not only shut the rest of humankind out but yourself in?"

"You can assume whatever you want, " Owen Spring said. He glanced to his left, then to his right, taking in the pigmy-like Space Marines ranged on either side of him. He grinned. "Fine Honor Guard."

One of the main-deck's miniviewscreens, all of which were focused on Heaven World, was located just to the left of the visitor's huge head, and from where Marque sat the little blue planet had the aspect of an earring suspended from the Amerind's left ear. For some reason, this annoyed the plenipotentiary even more than the man's obvious irony.

Forgoing further preamble, Marque got down to business: "Lieutenant Spring, The All-Nations Government has authorized me to offer you virtually anything within reason if you will agree to deactivate your zeta-xi-field fence at once and to cooperate with us in the development and colonization of those territories to which we already hold legal title but which, through some remarkable feat of mental legerdemain, you apparently regard as your own. Even you must admit that such a proposition is a magnaminous gesture indeed on the part of the PanNatGov in view of the fact that you stand charged *in absentia* by the ESN both with desertion and the theft of PanNatGov property. I might add that pending the outcome of this hearing yet a third charge may be leveled against you—that of treason."

Again, Owen Spring grinned. Then, in what appeared to be an aside but what was probably intended for an audience invisible to the negotiating committee, he said: "And now another message for the people: sometime you may be called into a big building or aboard a big ship to attend a meeting: Be careful, for before you know it, the meeting will change its name to 'hearing', and then to 'trial', and you will discover all of a sudden that everybody there is pointing his finger at you."

A PAIR OF pink waves broke over the plenipotentiary's plump cheeks and washed against the bushy peninsulas of his sideburns. He decided on a less direct approach. "I think," he said to the assemblage as a whole, "that it will be of benefit to all concerned

if we review briefly the events leading up to Lieutenant Spring's decision to remain on Heaven World and his subsequent decision to build a fence around it.

"You will recall that after its fortuitous discovery of the new New World the ESS *Hunter* proceeded to photomap the entire planet and to analyze both its atmosphere and surface features. This done, it then sent down the little ship-to-planet-to-ship vehicle it carried—the only vehicle it carried larger than a spaceraft—for a more intimate look at the three land masses. The craft's pilot and sole occupant was a ESNaval officer named Owen Spring."

AFTER PILOTING the STPTS on a number of crisscross courses over the planet's two minor continents, one of which consisted wholly of rocks and sand and the other of which brought Antarctica to mind, Spring had gone on to the major land mass. Silent up till then, he had suddenly begun augmenting the data being relayed back to the *Hunter* by the vehicle's sensors with emotion-charged descriptions of wooded hills and valleys, of great green plateaus; of myriad cataracts showing like dazzling sequins on the mauve bodices of cloud-bonneted mountains. Of vast tracts covered with what appeared to be wild berry bushes; of rivers, streams, lakes and brooks. "Just the way *Ganiodaivo* said," he was heard to murmur in an awed voice. And then, a moment later, "Heaven World". Not long afterward he sent back word that the paradisiacal planet he had just christened was inhabited. The captain of the *Hunter,* no friend of Spring's and contemptuous of his ancestry, asked sarcastically, "By Injuns?" No, Spring said. Not exactly. But they brought Indians to mind. Stone-Age Indians. He'd obtained only a glimpse of them through the treetops, a glimpse so fleeting it had failed to register on the *Hunter's* receptor screens, but he'd received the distinct impression of two opposing groups of humanoids trying to exterminate each other. A little while later he passed over a meadow-like plain spangled with blue and yellow flowers where a second intertribal battle was in progress. "They're carving each other up like crazy," was the way he described it. The *Hunter's* screens bore him out. After that, he was silent for a long time. Then he said, "I'm on low-altitude hover now. Above one of their villages." He went on to describe it in detail, despite the fact that the STPTS' sensors were relaying it photo-visually to the *Hunter*: Primitive dugouts with bark roofs; a larger dugout, centrally located, presumably a community center; an outlying acre of what appeared to be emaciated corn stalks; men and women wielding Stone-Age implements; skinny children running about; evidence everywhere of ignorance, inanition, disorganization, frequent raids. Then Spring was silent for an even longer time. Finally he had said, "Coming in

low toward a range of hills. Fires burning on their slopes —cook-fires. It's dusk. 'Injuns' sitting round the fires. Lookouts posted on the hilltops. Looking the wrong way. Down instead of up . . . Naked in the night, all of them. Fair game for the first *Santa Maria* to drop anchor in their skies . . . It's time a prophet appeared in their land. Yes. Time. High time—"

At this point, the *Hunter's* receptor screens went blank and Owen Spring's voice was heard no more. Repeated attempts to reestablish contact had failed and subsequent blown-up orbital photos of the area had revealed no sign of vehicle or pilot. Despite its three billion-dollar price tag and despite the tens of thousands of dollars the ESN had spent transforming Spring from a fledgling scientific genius into a full-fledged one, both vehicle and pilot were adjudged dispensable, and after taking possession of Heaven World (the name Spring had given the planet was to become official) in accordance with Article 9, Paragraph E of the New Revised Space Law, the *Hunter* had returned to Earth.

Six months later, the advance contingent of the reactivated Planet Preparatory Corps had showed up. But they might as well have stayed home: during the interval between the *Hunter's* departure and their arrival, someone (guess who!) had encompassed the new New World, atmosphere and all, with an impenetrable zeta-xi-field fence.

CAPTAIN GERHARD said, "Lieutenant, when the PPTeam finally made contact with you via the STPTS' radio, you told them according to their report—and I quote—'Get the hell away from my Reservation!' Is that correct?"

Spring frowned. "Seems like I used stronger language than that."

"No matter. Will you tell us what prompted you to steal an entire planet?"

"I didn't steal it. I only fixed things so you couldn't."

"You're not the simpleton you let on to be, Lieutenant," Marque broke in. "You know perfectly well that we merely intend to take over from the indigenes in a purely supervisory capacity that will be of eventual benefit to them as well as to us. And you know equally as well that a consolidation of nations like the PanNatGov couldn't possibly be motivated by mere territorial acquisitiveness—that Earth's response to the discovery of Heaven World was and is a manifestation not of avidity but of Lebensraum."

Tiny splinters of light appeared briefly in the Amerind's dark-brown eyes. "No, I'm not a simpleton—and I'm not a fool either. Calling a bunch of trees a forest doesn't change the nature of the trees, and using a word like 'Lebensraum' doesn't change the nature of planetary rape!"

"May I ask him a question, Paul?" Ms. Kelist interjected.

Marque needed a moment's respite. "Of course, Gert—go ahead."

Ms. Kleist's blue gaze bathed the projection's larger-than-life face. "Lieutenant Spring, just before severing contact with the *Hunter*, you said, 'It's time a prophet appeared in their land'. Were you perhaps thinking of a Christ?"

Owen Spring smiled. "I was thinking of *Ganiodaivo*. The Injun Christ."

Ms. Kleist, Marque, Captain Gerhard and the others looked at him blankly.

Spring continued to smile. It was an unorthodox smile. There was sadness in it, and a strange softness; yet it did not in the least allay the ice-breaker aspect of his face. "You didn't know the Injuns had a Christ, did you? The Iroquois Injuns, that is.

"*Ganiodaivo*—'Handsome Lake'—" Spring went on when it became evident no comments were forthcoming, "never presumed to be a Christ, and strictly speaking, he wasn't one. He was a prophet. But even as a prophet, most of the Iroquois didn't take him seriously for centuries. Now they do. I know all about such things. My grandfather was a Code of Handsome Lake preacher.

"Handsome Lake was born some time before the American Revolution in a little Seneca village on the Genesee River. He didn't look like much, and he never amounted to much either till he reached his 60's. As a matter of fact, up till then he was a drunk. Then, after a long illness, he had a series of visions in which he saw three messengers (a fourth showed up later) sent to him by the Great Spirit. They gave him *Gaiwiive*—the good word'— and told him to go forth and preach it to his people. Which he did, and it became known as the 'Code of Handsome Lake'. Some say he didn't get it that way at all—that he got it from the Quaker missionaries. Maybe so. The point is, even in its original form it's a good code—even a noble one. His preaching it to his people gave them back their identity and saved them from complete whitemanization. He died in the early 1800's. His ministry lasted sixteen years."

THROUGHOUT Spring's biographical sketch part of Marque's mind had been sojourning in the Mare Imbrium region of Earth's moon where the "Auntie" missile stood waiting on her launching pad in the midst of the fleet of refurbished "sardine-ships" the Pan-NatGov had originally built to effect the colonization of Mars and had later abandoned when the planet's periodic dust storms had proved unconquerable. The Auntie missile was the result of the crash-program Spring had unwittingly and unknowingly initiated when he'd told the PPTeam to get the hell away from his Reservation. Her warhead comprised pure anti-zeta-xi matter that at

the time of the Amerind's edict hadn't even existed on paper. It was a concrete testimonial to man's resourcefulness and all-around ingenuity when confronted with the seemingly insurmountable (in this case, impenetrable), and would when brought into contact with a zeta-xi field such as the one girdling Heaven World anninilate both the field and itself without permanently affecting the planet's atmosphere. Auntie, as both missile and warhead had come to be called, was the ace in the PanNatGov's sleeve, to be played only when the diplomatic deck ran out.

At length, noting the continued silence and realizing that the others at the table were waiting for him to resume command, the plenipotentiary said, "So you landed the STPTS and went AWOL because you thought you were a second Handsome Lake—is that it, Lieutenant?"

"Something like that," Spring said. "I thought of myself as a sort of second *Deganawida* too. *Deganawida*, way back in the sixteenth century, founded the League of Five Nations and established the 'Great Peace'. The 'Injuns' of Heaven World regard me as a god. I let them. As a god, they listen to what I have to say. But all I am really is a self-ordained Modern Code of Handsome Lake preacher."

"A missionary!" Marque almost gagged on the word. Then, "You must have had other thoughts during your moment of truth, Lieutenant."

"I did. I thought of Sullivan's raid on the Senecas in 1779. I thought of the Buffalo Treaty of 1838. I thought of the Kinzua Dam. I thought of the Trail of Tears the Cherokee left on their forced march west. I thought of the bulldozers chewing up the hills of twentieth-century California. I thought of the sardine-ships on the moon. Waiting. I thought of a lot of things. But most of all, I thought of the *Five* Things."

The plenipotentiary sighed. "Go on, Lieutenant."

"According to one of *Ganiodaivo's* visions, when the white man came to America he brought with him Five Things —Five Evils. A handful of coins, a pack of playing cards, a violin, a flask of rum and a decayed leg bone."

Oh boy! Marque thought. Aloud, he said, "I see. Well, I suppose there's no harm in reducing the whitemanization of the Amerinds to five simplistic symbols, although I might point out that the analogy you obviously have in mind contains an element of irony, since the 'white' man who will eventually be emigrating to Heaven World will be, among a host of other hues, partly red. But at least," Marque continued, "your motive for fencing in PanNatGov property is no longer obscure. Now, at least, we have a concrete base on which to negotiate. Suppose I were to guarantee in writing to set up a sort of Ellis Island space-station in

Heaven World's skies that would make it impossible for any of these Five Things you object to to get through—would you then agree to deactivate your fence?"

"It wouldn't work," Spring said.

"Let me interpose a question, Paul," Captain Gerhard interrupted. To Spring: "These Five Things the white man brought to America. Obviously the first four stand for corrupting influences. But what the devil does the fifth—the decayed leg bone—stand for?"

"It's come to have two meanings. At first it meant only a poison, or disease, that rots a man's bones.

"I didn't put up the fence because I'm a dreamer any more than I put it up to get even," Spring went on. "I'd deactivate it tomorrow if I thought that all the colonists would bring to Heaven World were the first four Things. I don't even consider the first three to *be* corrupting influences, and as for the fourth—booze—if the Heaven-World 'Injuns' drank so much as one drop of it, they'd vomit, because their biochemistry's different from humans'. But the fifth Thing—that's another matter. I can't—I won't allow the decayed leg bone to be brought here. Not yet."

"You said it had two meanings," Marque said. "We've yet to hear the second."

"The second is that it's a poison, or disease, too. Only it doesn't rot away a man's bones—it rots away his morals. In its final stage it causes him to do wrong selfrighteously."

The plenipotentiary from Earth was renowned for being able to keep his cool under the most trying of circumstances. Nevertheless, he came close to losing it now. "Lieutenant Spring," he said, "I traveled all the way from Earth at God knows how much expense to the poor taxpayer to talk to you as one intelligent human being to another. I've tried earnestly to do so, but all I've got for my pains is an old wives' tale artfully camouflaged as an argument against colonization! Surely you don't expect me to take this decayed leg bone of yours seriously!"

Spring said, "One of the peculiar properties of the disease is the victim's inability to realize he has it . . . I'll need ten more years."

"*Ten more years for what*?"

"To finish teaching the 'Injuns' of Heaven World how to manufacture moral antibodies so they'll be immune to the decayed leg bone when the 'white man' brings it. Then I'll take down the fence. The way I see it, you'll have figured out a means to knock it down by then anyway."

"*But there's no such thing as a decayed leg bone*!" Marque shouted. Then he paused. For Spring, or rather his image, was becoming transparent. The Amerind, clearly, had said his say and was about to "depart".

The projection faded rapidly. "Wait!" Marque cried. "Before you break contact, listen to what I

have to offer. First, amnesty for you; second, nationhood for Heaven World; third, PanNatGov's solemn pledge that if relocation becomes necessary the indigenes will be allocated the best lands available; fourth—"

Again the plenipotentiary paused. This time for good. For the "Awol Amerind" had gone. He'd left his "earring" behind, though. It hung in the blackness of space like a bright blue diamond, shards of sunlight ricocheting from the spherical zeta-xi display case that shut it out from the grubby grasp of man.

MARQUE SIGHED. Then he shrugged. He'd done his best. History would never be able to say the PanNatGov hadn't adhered to the fullest extent practicable to the laws of humanity.

He stood up and dismissed the negotiating committee. Captain Gerhard dismissed the Space Marines. The captain retired to his quarters, the plenipotentiary to the *Landfall's* lounge.

It was far too early to transradio the PanNatGovernor. Afternoon reigned on board the *Landfall*, but over PanNatDistrict (former Tanzania) day had just begun to break. So Marque waited till after evening mess. He and the PanNatGovernor were old friends. First-name friends. "Paul and Myles". Marque briefed his old friend on the minutes of the meeting with the Amerind. The Governor got a real charge out of the Five Things. Especially the decayed leg bone. "Did he really say that was why, Paul? Honest?"

"So help me, Myles."

"He must be some kind of a nut."

"No doubt about it."

"Well anyway, we tried, Paul. Thank God for that."

"Amen," Marque said.

"So now it's up to Auntie. I knew it would be all along. There'll have to be a vote, of course: I'll call an emergency session of the PanNatCouncil this afternoon. But there'll be no nays. Auntie will be on her way no later than tomorrow morning and the first wave of Space Marines will be right on her heels."

"Pow!" Marque said.

"Right. Pow! No other way *but* Pow! We simply couldn't have risked using her as a lever. Spring is a nut all right, but he's also a brilliant and resourceful scientist. No one *but* a brilliant and resourceful scientist could have harnessed enough natural energy in a Stone-Age technology, even with STPTS equipment to work with, to project a zeta-xi field around a whole planet. If you'd threatened him with Auntie he'd already have found a way to deflect her, and our whole crash-program would have gone for nothing!"

"I know," Marque said.

"It'd be different if we were using a nuclear missile," the PanNatGovernor went on. "But we aren't. Heaven World's atmosphere will be back to normal in less than six months' time. Oh,

there'll be a few cases of sterilization of course, and a certain amount of mutation's inevitable. And there're bound to be *some* casualties. For his own good, let's hope Spring's one of them. That way, he won't have to suffer the humiliation of being tried and executed for treason . . . Got to run now, Paul. Million things to do. Take care, old buddy."

"You too, old buddy."

AFTER LEAVING the radio room, the plenipotentiary from Earth descended to the lounge where he had after-dinner brandy with Captain Gerhard and several of the off-duty officers. The *Landfall* had de-orbited and was well on its way Earthward. Approximately halfway there, it would pass Auntie. Not long afterward it would pass the ESN ship carrying the first wave of specially trained, specially equipped Space Marines.

The "AWOL Amerind" was in for a big surprise—no doubt about it. He'd been away from home too long: he'd forgot how effective crash programs could sometimes be.

Even Marque himself hadn't believed anti-zeta-xi matter could be developed in less than twelve years' time.

After a desultory round of Zipbridge, the plenipotentiary from Earth said good night, left the lounge and retired to his stateroom. Next to the head of his bunk was a little illuminated button that when depressed activated a hidden buzzer in Ms. Kleist's room. Out of force of habit Marque raised his hand, forefinger extended. Then his hand dropped to his side. The meeting with the Amerind had taken more out of him than he had thought: he did not quite feel up to calling Ms. Kleist tonight.

He undressed, got into bed and turned off the light. The temperature was 65°—ideal for sleeping. The soporific murmur of the inbuilt a-c unit filled the room; cool antiseptic air washed over him in lulling waves. Abruptly he experienced a sharp pain in his left leg. From the knee down to the ankle. He was puzzled rather than frightened. His last physical had showed him to be in excellent health: no cardiac irregularities, no vascular disorders; nothing. As he lay there, he became aware of a sickish-sweet odor; simultaneously the pain in his leg intensified. He turned the light back on, kicked back the sheet and looked, just to make sure. Naturally the leg was all right: healthily pink, unblemished in any way; veins and arteries doing their usual efficient job. He turned the light back off and lay back on the bunk, sinking pleasantly into its downy softness. But the sickish-sweet odor persisted, grew more and more offensive. Suddenly he realized what it was and where it was coming from. Nothing had showed on the outside of the leg because it was the bone, not the flesh, that was rotting. At this point, he awoke and realized he

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BRIAN M. STABLEFORD

Brian Stableford's recent article, "S.F.: The Nature of the Medium" (August), provokes comment in our letters column this issue but his latest appearance in these pages is with a story which follows in the footsteps of his "The Sun's Tears" (last issue)–a fable about the far future and the Starman's Quest for–

AN OFFER OF OBLIVION

Illustrated by STEPHEN F. FABIAN

OF ALL THE ADVENTURES which a man may choose to undertake during a lifetime, the loneliest and most futile is surely the Starman's Quest—the search for the perfect world. The wanderer must go on and on, from star to star, with no home to which he can ever return. In order to become a Starman he has had to abandon his origins—cut them right out of his soul. A Starman has no birth, no past, no race. His only alternative to the terminal Quest is to be claimed—adopted and consumed by alien ways. There are worlds which can make such demands on a man that they simply swallow him up—take him away from the stars and digest him. But they cannot give him back his birth, his past and his race. They can only make him an offer of oblivion.

This is the story of Simeon and Lazaro Ferrara, who were remarkable in that they started the Quest *together*. The Starman's Quest is essentially a one-man affair, but Simeon and Lazaro were brothers who had lived so close throughout their lives that they considered themselves to be more one man than two.

They were twins, but they were by no means identical. They were sons of different eggs, and some had been known to say that they were sons of different fathers. They did not question their mother. It was not important. They were all the closer bound together by their dissimilarities.

Simeon was short and slim and dark, and very fierce. His intensity of manner and the power of his will were very pronounced. Nobody is born a Starman, but it seemed that if there was ever a child who would be forced by circumstance to reach out and grasp the stars, then it was Simeon Ferrara.

Lazaro was massive and ruddy and very strong. He was full of force but it was all buried somewhere inside his bulk, and the only one who knew how to unlock it was Simeon.

The people of their home always used to say that Lazaro was the real man and that Simeon was his shadow. In the star-worlds, where people thought differently, they laughed and said that Lazaro was an empty fat man and that Simeon was the thin man who should have been inside him. Lazaro and Simeon were more inclined to class themselves as the immovable object and the irresistible force, in that order, but it was a mere affectation—a private joke. None of these descriptions, of course, was in any way adequate to identify the very special bond that was between them, but their glibness and their simplicity can offer some hint as to the depth and richness of that bond.

They lifted from their homeworld during their nineteenth year. They competed for the honour of being the first to forget its name. Their ship was a glorified rowboat named the *Smiling Sphinx*. It leaked. They were lucky to survive their first few trips. But they were usually lucky. The Cosmic Whim was a fan of brotherly love that year.

The last of their seven ships was called the *Nightingale*. It was the ship in which they began the Starman's Quest. The ship in which you begin the Starman's Quest is invariably your last ship, because your ship is an integral part of the Quest. It is your silent partner. If the ship goes down, so do you. They were seventeen years older than the day they had gone out to the stars. Seven ships

in seventeen years hints at a good deal of prosperity, and they had, in fact, been favoured by the currents of trade. They were never single-minded and occasionally serendipitous. Starlife never does run smoothly, but Lazaro and Simeon achieved a comfortable metastability. Lazaro's strength and Simeon's drive were equal to almost all situations.

All in all, they were a good combination, and both true servants of the stars. (You must remember, if you are to understand, that there may be *sons* of the soil, but only *servants* of the stars. That is the Cosmic Perspective.)

At thrity-six years of age, Lazaro had a receding hairline, and the floridness of his complexion had been exaggerated by the caresses of a thousand suns. His immense strength was undiminished, and his excess weight had not caused him to become lethargic. Simeon, though, looked five or six years younger than his brother. He was still wiry and dark, full of fire and with an added artistry of thought and movement which suggested that the years had been generous to him, while they had only been kind to Lazaro. They had not quarreled in a very long time—they had put childhood behind them when they lifted the *Smiling Sphinx*. Their closeness had fulfilled them both.

They accepted the Starman's Quest with the absolute assurance that a perfect world for the one could not help but be a perfect world for the other. There can be no doubt that they were right. Had they been numbered among those few who are rumoured to have found perfection, then it would have been—for them—a shared perfection. It is impossible to imagine it any other way.

But this is not a rumour, and they did not succeed.

The meaning that the Quest held for Simeon and Lazaro Ferrara was exactly the same as that for other men. That meaning was—and is—damnation. The years marched by, and the knowledge grew in both of them that they were not going to make it. They lived—as do we all—on hope, but that hope was subject to the steady and unrelenting assault of failure. They found ten worlds that were no use to them, then a hundred, then a thousand. There were always a million more standing in the sky, but a man is only a man and a life is only a pitiful measure. Failure adds up. The disappointments and the discouragements accumulate into a terrible load. A Questor can never stop his load from growing, let alone lighten his burden. He cannot settle for anything less than success. In time, even the seconds that pass by in transit seem to add measurably to that load. Hope remains—it is unvanquishable—but it reclines in a bed of weariness and lassitude. Eventually, it even ceases to hurt, but acts as an anaesthetic instead. At this point the Starman's Quest

manifests its hollow, uncompromising choice, which is empirically the last and final choice: multiply failure until the load kills you, or accept another offer of oblivion.

Only when they came to this—the last of all choices—did the differences between Simeon and Lazaro prove more decisive than the bond. They were, after all, two men and not one. Fifty years had never contrived to pull them apart, but the Starman's Quest finally imposed its Law upon their unnatural union.

On the world called Berenita, they were offered a choice that only one of them could make. It happened to be Lazaro. He had only to say no, as he had done countless times before. But every single one of those denials had been an honest answer to an honest choice. This time he said yes, and that was an honest answer too.

The girl's name was Myrca.

It had to be a girl, of course. But it was not quite as simple as that. Simeon and Lazaro were way beyond youth and romance. Their love for one another was easily competent to conquer any claim which might be made on their love from outside. It wasn't love that Myrca offered. It was oblivion. She offered it to Lazaro.

Simeon would have refused out of hand. He had the ultimate intensity of determination. He was the irresistible force. There was nothing in the Universe which could have turned him aside from the Quest once he had embarked upon it. But Lazaro did not have that intensity of purpose. It was not that he found the burden of failure to be intolerable, but simply that he could not face its rate of inexorable increase forever. *His* load was an immovable object, and he knew that it would kill him soon. He knew that Simeon would outlive him by some years, and that he would have to be alone someday. He accepted that, but Simeon couldn't.

The Cosmic Whim, of course, was empowered to send them both to their deaths at one and the same instant, or to separate their dying by exactly the few seconds that had separated their being born. But that isn't the way of the Cosmic Whim. It favours brotherly love, but it is an implacable enemy of linear symmetry. It is a distorting mirror.

Myrca's body was ivory white. Her scales were silver and pearly. Her eyes were wine-red. She was not beautiful. She was an empath. Not an empathic-vulnerable, but an empathic-radiant, and a singleton.

Radiants are not rare. Singletons are. Myrca was one of the rarest of the rare. Most radiants shine only with love—and who needs a radiant empath to bathe in love? Even the sourest, sickest man can generate love within himself if he really needs it. But Myrca radiated something that a human *can't* synthesize. She was stillness of soul. She was heart's ease. She was more than con-

tentment and calm: she was peace. Very few men find peace. Very few know its value, but Questors always do, because it is in the nature of the Quest.

Lazaro Ferrara found Myrca, and for Lazaro she shone, and for Lazaro she wanted to shine. It hardly seems fair that such a gift should be so fragile that it should be for one man and one only, but Myrca was one girl and one only, and there *is* such a thing as balance in the Universe. And even if Simeon *could* have shared peace, he would not. No man has a common soul with another, no matter how close their selves might be.

Simeon Ferrara had to lift the *Nightingale* from Berenita alone.

Before that, he argued with his brother. When he saw that argument could not prevail, he *begged* his brother to come with him. He pleaded. He tried to cry, but he couldn't. Lazaro had always cried all the tears they had cried between them. Lazaro cried. But it made no difference.

"Somewhere," said Simeon, when even he knew that he had to go on alone, "somewhere there is Heaven. I'll find it. I *must* find it now, because you've made it so that I can't die without finding it. I *will* find that Heaven, Lazaro, and I'll bring it back to you, because Heaven is the only thing which can take you away from here."

"Heaven is out there," agreed Lazaro. "But there's also Hell, and it's a good deal easier to find. We've come too close to Hell, you and I, and I think you might go a good deal closer yet. I've chosen peace instead, and you know that you can't blame me for it. And you know that you can't bring Heaven back to me, because *my* Quest is finished now. My starlife is over. Go and find Heaven, Simeon, but don't bring me back any fragments of the stars, because they'll only hurt you if you do. Go now, and good luck."

"I'll go," said Simeon, "but I have to come back, and you know that you can't blame *me* for *that*. I need you, Lazaro, and it doesn't matter how much you need to stay."

The words tasted bitter, but each of them knew that the other did not wish him any hurt. There was no malice at all between them. Each one did what he had to do, and if it turned into a kind of war between them, then it was a war they could not avoid, and it was a loving war.

Lazaro stood on top of a lonely hill, surrounded by the scent of a multicoloured summer, and watched the *Nightingale* rise on a plume of fire, taking his brother back into the wilderness of stars. He knew that Berenita was the one world which Simeon would *always* be able to find again.

In the midst of his infinite peace, he realised that he had never managed to forget the name of the world which had been his home, and he wondered whether Simeon had won the competition.

A HANDFUL OF YEARS had passed by when Lazaro heard the engine-song of the *Nightingale* again, as she sank through the summer night to land upon that same hill.

The meeting between Simeon and his brother was a glad one. The gladness stirred Lazaro's peace and brought him echoes of pleasure and adventure, and it lightened Simeon's dark despair for a few nostalgic moments.

While Myrca sulked because Lazaro was diverted from her, Simeon gave an account of the worlds which he had visited and what he had found there. Time had buried the resentment which he had felt at the time of the parting, and he felt almost sure that the lure of the stars would draw Lazaro away from his peaceful half-existence.

He told Lazaro about his setting the *Nightingale* down in the drylands of Della Strada, where he had been able to earn a good living hunting snakes in order to buy fuel for the ship. He had worked twice as hard as he had been used to, because he worked alone for the first time. But he had avoided the snakebite which might have condemned him to stay there forever while the snake-healers doled out their cure day by day in return for his labour in the desert.

He told about Capua and Bakhout and Kilifi, and of the acute trading between these worlds which had turned him a steady profit on the money that was left over from Della Strada. But on Molvedo he had been forced to go back to work as a diamond miner. There he had met and worked with Cormac Alcala. Alcala had achieved some small fame among the star-worlds as the Starman who could not see stars. A strange vengeance had been taken by a rich man to whom he owed money—he had been subjected to psychosurgery so that he could no longer see the starlight which lit his Quest. It had not, of course, interfered with his Quest. Nothing could. Simeon and Alcala had worked together on Molvedo and had proved moderately successful.

Then there were the incidents on Ramiflora, Veronique, Cap Estel and Tirynthe. Lazaro listened to all of these, and he was moved by the stories. He could imagine the brilliant blueness of Ramiflora's sun, the shelled aquamen of Veronique, the steel supercities of Cap Estel, the relics of the War of the Elikon Empire on Tirynthe. The stars whispered to him, with Simeon's voice, and he was tempted. The allure of the million worlds, with their limitless offer of experience, he could not ignore. But he had already chosen peace, and there was no going back on the choice. He told Simeon that he was happy and secure, and that he would stay on Berenita.

Simeon realised now what he should have known all along—that his brother was not to be wooed back to the starpaths by traveller's

tales. Time was *not* on his side. Lazaro's peace was unshakable. He concluded that if Lazaro were to be won back to the Starman's Quest, then it would be by the power of a tremendous bribe, or by naked force.

Back to the stars went Simeon. He went to the ruined world of Chebec, visited the death-worshippers of Yami and the light-masters of Olein. He fought the space-storms to reach the distorted paradises of Firdaussi and Lycaon, and the mirror-world called Taj Dewan. But this time he was not simply following alone the same kind of course that he had followed previously with Lazaro This time he was *searching* as well as Questing—searching for something that he could use to buy his brother back from the radiant enchantress.

He did not know what he was looking for, but he never allowed himself to doubt that he would find it. He believed with all his heart that there were prices beyond the price of peace. He *knew* that in a Universe which he had every reason to think of as infinite, there was a price appropriate to everything. What he did not consider was the probability of his finding the appropriate price, and the possibility that he might not know it if he found it. As time went by, among the stars, he began to believe again that time might still be on his side. Myrca was only a girl, and she was growing older. Could her peace possibly be so attractive when her beauty began to fade? In this argument, Simeon's gathering desperation could be clearly seen. He *needed* to believe that he could win Lazaro back. He could not believe anything else.

The ghostfolk of Chebec's Lands of Blackened Ruin could teach him a mysticism which empowered the mind to considerable victories over time and matter. But Simeon knew that he could not fight Lazaro's peace with magic tricks. He knew that peace and mysticism are both counter-dynamic and could see that his brother would think the latter only a shadow of the former.

The masked priests of Yami possessed a drug that could make men young. They would not release it except to the most committed followers of their nihilistic faith, and although it blunted the effects of age it sharpened the feel of death. Simeon would have procured some somehow if he had thought it could be what he needed. But he knew that false youth without any extension of life would be a pitiful folly, and in any case Lazaro would not trade his maturity for new youth while he was at peace.

Simeon found real immortality on Olein, but the cost to the recipient was far higher than the price which the light-masters asked. Yes, he could have immortality for his brother and himself, but not in a human body—he would have to become a body of light. Simeon was well aware that

mind and body could not be dealt with as the light-masters suggested. Body *is* mind, and to accept what the light-masters offered was to surrender humanity. This could well be a version of the Hell which Lazaro had warned him about.

On Firdaussi, and again on Taj Dewan, and yet again on Casorati, he found opportunities to become very rich. But these were cloud-nebula worlds, and the opportunities involved the risks of time-chasms and space-lesions. He weighed the chances very carefully, because he wanted to be able to pay the price of the price he needed to find, and he knew that it would not be cheap. But in the end he decided that the Star-worlds had better offers to make to a man of his particular talents and inclinations.

On Lycaon they could sell him dreams, on Noemi it was glory. On Athdara it was the panacea.

On Hadad, a boundless, storm-torn gas-giant, the silver-haloed cryptomorphic hive-people offered him a silk-textured dust which might be any number of things to any number of races. For humans, at that particular time, they were manufacturing ecstasy.

Hadad was the richest world in the galaxy. It intended to become a great deal richer yet.

Simeon believed that he had found what he needed. Not mere happiness, nor ultimate love, nor vulgar power, but *ecstasy*. He began to assemble the fortune which he needed to pay the price. He was careful and cold-blooded. Diamond-mining and snake-hunting could not provide him with the wealth which he needed in an entire lifetime. He became an assassin on Heres and bought himself into worldshaping in the Nightscar cluster. He took a trawler with a fifty-parsec net through the cloak of blood, and from the bleeding suns he took the crystalline time and the molten mu-matrix. He bought the planet Paradine and used it as collateral for heavy loans. Four days later he bought Angelet and then mounted a relentless assault upon a vast star-trawling combine. Within a week he controlled the entire fleet and his pilots stripped the cloak of blood and the Catacrypt and the Scorpio Pit. Ninety men died and over half the fleet was lost, but the immediate profit enabled him to buy three stars and declare war on the Lincot Hegemony. The war was a formality—the enemy surrendered without a casualty, and Simeon stripped the worlds of their wealth.

Then he took the whole of his fortune to Spiridion. His intention was simply to double it at a stroke. That single doubling would take the mass of his capital over the critical threshold, beyond which it could be made to grow constantly without any effort at all, at a rate which was acceptable to the Hive of Hadad. He knew that the wheels of Spiridion were crooked, but he also knew that winners win, and at that

moment he was riding on such a colossal victory tide that Spiridion's entire Aristocracy of Chance would not be able to match him in any game they chose.

He played the wheels, and he won.

He claimed the silky-fine dust from the Hive of Hadad, and preserved it carefully. He did not want a single grain for himself. It was all for Lazaro. He carried it back to Berenita, still flying the *Nightingale*, although he could have bought any ship in the Universe a few days before, and not affected his ability to pay the price of the dust.

He told Lazaro the whole story—the whole of his adventures and the whole of his thinking. He was, by now, absolutely certain that Lazaro would understand everything, would appreciate the terrible risks he had taken, would be awed by the magnificence of his success, would accept the gift gladly, and would return to the Quest.

But Lazaro refused.

Simeon's winning streak was over. It had lost out to peace.

"I have no need of ecstasy," said Lazaro, and he took his brother to see Myrca. Myrca smiled. She was no longer afraid of Simeon Ferrara. Simeon saw that Myrca had grown older, but that she had grown older with majesty. She had never been truly beautiful, but now she had a carriage and a style which made her former self look pale. Myrca, too, had benefitted from her love-affair with the Starman. And Lazaro still loved her, and was still at perfect peace with life, death and the Universe.

Simeon was stricken by confusion and desperately sad. He clung hard to his futile belief that Myrca must begin to lose her battle against the ravages of age, and that when she did her hold must weaken. But Lazaro and he were now *old*, by any standards, and Myrca had a good many years in hand. For the first time, Simeon felt the closeness of death, and he knew that there was only one thing left that he could realistically try.

He also knew that Lazaro knew.

But Lazaro was at peace and could not resist. If Simeon cared to render his brother unconscious, he could take him away from Berenita. If Simeon wished, he could kill Myrca and *destroy* Lazaro's peace.

Simeon wanted to do either one or both of these things, He believed that the Starman's Quest was far more important than peace. But the strength of his own need only served to remind him of the strength of his brother's. Simeon loved Lazaro, and he could not override that love and draw his gun.

But the stars have the answers to all problems, and this was a very easy answer for them to provide. Where you can buy peace and dreams and youth and ecstasy, you can also buy misery and

remorse and despair and pain.

And lovelessness.

They come cheaper, too. When the *Nightengale* lifted from Berenita for the third time, Simeon was in search of something quite different from his earlier objectives. He was no longer at pains to avoid Hell. He wanted to buy a bit of it. He wanted to buy the freedom to forget his brother's need and fulfil his own. The difference between them, unapparent for fifty years, had now driven them to all-out war.

Simeon was an old man now, and he was giving way to obsession. Perhaps a younger Simeon could not have done what the old man now chose to do. But it is more likely that his loneliness had become a curse, that it had rendered his life and his identity meaningless. In all probability, his love was doomed by circumstance alone, and he merely sought to confirm the fact.

It was on Salamandra that he bought what he needed. It cost less than one thousandth of what he got in exchange for the silken dust, and he was forced to sell that for a tiny fraction of its value. But still the trip took more years out of his life, because in reaching Salamandra he passed through Lalika and La Carelle, Isfabva and Ferriol, Hypericum and Cinna, and half a hundred others. He was deliberately slow. He was fighting himself, because it was that kind of war. In any case, release might be cheap and relatively easy to obtain, but he sought a kind of release which many men needed but few were willing to buy. The supply was small, and not easy to locate.

In the end, though, the *Nightingale* alighted yet again on the fire-swept hill, and Simeon went to meet Lazaro with a crash-gun in his hand.

The Cosmic Whim has never been an admirer of violence as a means to the romantic end. It had long ago lost its sympathy with Simeon and Lazaro Ferrara and their Starman's Quest. It had already defeated them both.

Lazaro was dead, and his peace was now eternal. He had not waited to feel the pain of meeting his brother for one more time. He had died still cherishing his love for Simeon and the Assurance that Simeon loved him.

Myrca was there. She was full of love, but she did not radiate peace any longer. The threat of time was clear in her less-than-beautiful features.

Simeon wept tears of frustration and defeat when he saw his brother's grave.

With Lazaro's death, he found that the Quest was over. It had no meaning for him alone. Beside his brother's grave he prayed for another offer of oblivion—he prayed for peace.

He asked Myrca to love him as she had loved Lazaro. She told him that she might have loved him, but that he could no longer love her. She could not give him peace, because he had given away his heart. Perhaps she was only

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THE SPIRIT OF SEVENTY SIX

DAVE SKAL

Dave Skal tells us that he is an alumnus of both the Clarion and Tulane writers' workshops, and has sold stories to the first two Clarion *anthologies, Orbit and F&SF. Here he describes the meeting of a man and his . . . daughter?*

Illustrated by Tony Gleeson

HER FACE was a mask, its soft clean features plastered like a postage stamp on a crushed and clumsy parcel.

"I'm not your daughter," she said coldly. "I don't care if you spent Fort Knox." She wore a star-spangled cape bunched tightly around her asymmetrical form, high at the throat to hide the network of ugly scars in what struck Blaine Rendin as a vulgar show of mock shame.

"Then who are you?" he asked.

He regards us with disgust, as if we sought approval for some foul and unforgivable crime. He is fat and balding, with eyes of cracked glass and a sweaty manner suggesting thirty years of locker rooms, board meetings. Whorehouses. A pathetic cardiac cyborg, the pacemaker on his belt like an antique money-changer–he plays with it nervously as he speaks, as if left unprotected we would snatch it away. "I'm not your daughter," we say, inadvertantly employing the singular pronoun. Mere politeness or a significant slip? We only smile, revealing nothing.

THERE HAD BEEN seventy-seven originally, although only fifteen had been actually . . . used. But the catchphrase "The Spirit of Seventy-Six" proved so irresistible to the PR boys and the public alike that no one questioned the missing number. *The Spirit of Seventy-Six*: it had relevance, style. It resonated.

During an election year, every little bit helped.

THEY *follow us everywhere. Our aversion is not so much to the crowds–these are, after all, the very people we seek to serve–as their ignorant abuse, the sniggering innuendoes and vulgar comments. Ignorant, yes, and cruel–but at the same time suffering, blind to the pain they inflict.*

WHERE IT STARTS: in the chaos

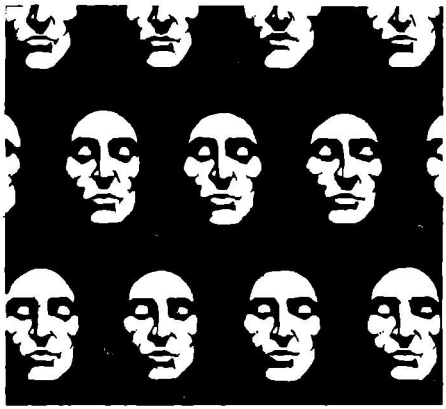
of transition, a society's identity in crisis. The post-industrial sacrifice of the bitch-goddess Success to the witch-goddess Teamwork, the magic appeal of collective security, the safety of numbers.

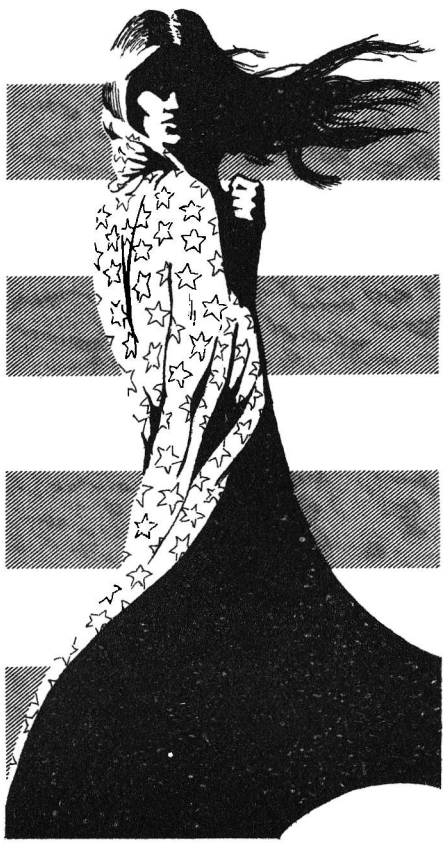
Some men chose to live dangerously.

Blaine Rendin was such a man. Of necessity, he learned cynicism early in the game. His first sobering shock came upon his graduation from college, when his father, whom he idolized, presented him not with a junior partnership in his prospering sling-assembly concern but instead a Monopoly board and a single dollar bill ("More than I ever had," the old man had said, with the sadistic laugh that had always passed for good-natured humor in the Rendin household.) The young Rendin vowed to eclipse his father; bitter disillusionment drove him to become what the old man had not.

But in order to eclipse, one first must encompass. Rendin never really escaped the shadow of the old man—even after his death, Rendin was haunted by a cancerous specter. By assiduously following his father's examples in business and in life, he had become the old man, down to the heartmeat core.

Gradually, identity problems took a back seat and Rendin was able to get on with the business of business, acquiring not one sling assembly concern but two, a steel mill, a lieutenant governorship and its attendant vistas, a string of





Las Vegas feelie parlors and *their* attendant vistas . . . not necessarily in that order. Finally, at an age when most men retire, he secured a top advisory position in the conservative hierarchy that continued to rule the country through sheer inertia.

Still, there was something missing. He had married late in life, choosing a woman easily managed, a compliant showpiece of whom even his father would have approved. But he grew to resent her ill health and many moods, which he took to symbolize an inner weakness that could not be tolerated. She died of complications following the birth of their only child, a daughter (he had secretly wished for a son—an heir, a successor, a monumental cliché, to be sure, but unlike more enlightened despots did not pursue the matter beyond a stage of cynical resignation.)

And so there was Janice. Willful, resentful, tough-as-timber Janice, with an iron resolution as strong as her mother's unbreakable complacency. As a child, Janice worshipped her father, but he pushed her away. In a son he could have tolerated emulation —that was to be expected—but to see himself reflected so pointedly in the mind and body of an adolescent girl shook the foundations of his most basic cultural conceits.

"I'll beat you yet," she once hissed, in a moment of childish rage.

Rendin sensed the beginnings of a pattern.

A CHILD *approaches us, propelled by two dough-like parents, each of whom wears a tasteful artificial scar on the wrist. "Say hello to Raggedy Ann," they tell him, adding with a confidential wink, "He's only seven."*

Children are always the worst.

We extend a hand to the child, as if in a blessing. But he sees the scars and his bright face collapses into howling tears.

The parents apologize and are gone in a flurry of embarrassed amenities. When they think they are out of earshot, they beat the child.

THE LIBRARY was padded and panelled like the interior of an expensive coffin. The books therein were judged solely by their covers, leather-bound and gold-embossed. To the trained eye, the effect was one of a rather shaky solidarity, but the room always inspired a superficial confidence, and it was there Rendin chose to meet her. The Spirit of Seventy Six.

"You came here," he said, with great portent.

"It was in order," came the curt reply. The voice—was it Janice's? And the eyes—dear God, the eyes! For weeks after the tragedy he had wracked his mind for some memory of their color, the exact, subtle, unduplicated shade—

Abruptly, he met her gaze. One eye was green, the other bright blue.

DO *we simply pity him, or is it*

something more, some lingering somatic link? An atavism asserts itself suddenly–the girl Janice makes her presence known in a silent mnemonic spasm. We should not have come here. The mixing was too recent, the old memories too strong, the flesh too weak. Rendin threatens our security, weakens the gestalt–

HE DID NOT look at her. He focussed his attention on his desk's lucite paperweight, in which was suspended a shimmering liquid globule, a chemical privately developed by his own laboratories under a government contract, one drop of which could exterminate an entire city. Unlike other biochemical warfare agents, this one did not directly contaminate anything—it merely broke down all the body's natural defenses, then stood back a professional distance as everyday germs took their lethal toll. (On another level, this unique property also solved most of the "rejection" problems of transplant surgery, superceding all known defenses and rendering almost any tissues compatible. Thus an occasional humanitarian transplant stunt could exonerate all manner of defense excesses.)

It had not, however, enhanced Blaine Rendin's home life.

"You're a tyrant, an anachronism, a freak!" she cried. "A holdover from the industrial revolution!" She invoked the epithet with all the venom the word "Victorian" had connoted a century before.

With obvious difficulty, Rendin kept his temper. "I'm only saying this for your own good," he began calmly. "Stop all this radical foolishness while you still–"

". . . IN the interest of Party solidarity."

Rendin had not believed what he heard. "You can't be serious," he heard himself say, as if from a distance. "It's murder."

A voice from the far end of the conference room: "Let's call it . . . a political expedient. Why, the public is practically demanding it—you've seen the latest polls. Get with it, Rendin. It's going to happen sooner or later. Better under our control than not."

Rendin said nothing. The wholesale assassination of political dissidents was being cooly engineered by the men before him, his colleagues and his peers, and he said nothing.

He had been silent far too long.

"–WHILE you still can. I suppose I am able to understand a sublimated resentment of authority figures–"

She clucked her tongue, disgustedly.

"–and that's one thing. But extending it to a private vendetta against the world is quite another. Especially in times like these."

"Is that a threat?"

"Janice–"

LIKE ALL executive advisors on that prearranged morning, Rendin

received a phone call of confirmation. A wrong number, in prearranged code. The message was clear enough—an explosion would take place promptly at noon. To all appearances, it would be a deadly mistake of the protestors themselves.

At noon he wandered into his library, clutching a drink in his leathery hand. He heard nothing, no convulsive blast of air and flesh and rubble. But the silence itself was more terrifying than the most fearful detonation.

Then he saw the note on his desk. The angry, angular cursive, like the seismograph record of an earthquake—Janice. *Father: Your latest series of dealings with anti-human elements within the administration have prompted me to denounce you publicly. I will deliver a formal speech at the free earth demonstration this noon—*

He squeezed his drink tightly, but the glass was molded of a singularly resilient polymer, and would not break.

IT WAS NOT the end, however. Blaine Rendin did not give up easily. Within minutes cryogenic rescue were at the scene. They hauled what they could from the wreckage, and, with the help of Rendin's own death juice, twelve top surgeons labored for a fortnight. For the sake of the old man, who footed the bill, they called the thing Janice. One always addressed the face.

It walked.

It talked.

It made inflammatory political speeches.

"This is the end of your career, Rendin," they told him.

He knew. The nation's executive manager was no longer assured of a job, and it was largely his fault.

". . . the end of your government contracts," they snarled.

He knew this as well. He had committed a minor treason in the name of selfish altruism (a private term, something the organization men of his time could not begin to fathom) and had, unfortunately, miscalculated. He had endeared himself to nobody, given fuel to a radical cause, and in the end sat forgotten in an empty house, waiting for his daughter's inevitable return.

"GUILT? Is that it?"

Rendin ran a manicured thumb over the pacemaker whose frequency modulations guided his artificial heart. (Even with the advent of perfected transplant techniques, he chose teflon and plastoplasm. He had faith in machines.)

The creature with his daughter's face was blatantly biological, however, even beneath its blasphemous cloak of red, white, and blue—it bore its scars proudly. Rendin thought of the trick holograms depicting genetic composites of the future—"amalgamites" in radical sociological jargon—and recalled the icy dread they evoked. This was worse.

"I came by invitation," said The Spirit of Seventy-Six. "Don't you remember?"

"Yes . . . of course. . . ." He avoided the eyes. *Which one is the original?*

"The movement owes you a great debt, Mr. Rendin, even though your contributions were probably unintentional. . . ."

"For the first time in a quarter of a century, the power is in the balance."

True—but after the campaigning, the elections, after the prizes had been won and the deck reshuffled—what then?

"And afterwards?"

"Component breakdown and cryogenic deposit. Organ banks."

". . . publicity stunt!" Rendin sputtered.

"This discussion is becoming ridiculous—"

"What have they done to you?" Rendin cried. "Does life mean so little—" He knew the rest—it had all been explained to him at the time of reconstitution. A total patchwork organism could not function indefinitely. There were too many problems—DNA psychosis, genetically-induced schizophrenia. The psychological dimension had hardly been explored.

The Spirit of Seventy-Six eyed him quizzically. He had watched her—Janice—for years, half-loving, half-hating the image of himself that bloomed over his daughter like mildew on a delicate portrait. At times he had been almost unable to look at her, but never with the abject horror of the present moment.

"My daughter . . . meant a great deal to me." *Does she hear?*

The Spirit of Seventy-Six did not yield. "We are not your daughter, nor anyone else's," she said, and, to prove it, untied her cape at the neck and shrugged it off muscular shoulders. She—it, for the hermaphroditic qualities were now more than apparent—peeled away the one-piece garment and stood naked before him.

"No," said Rendin weakly. "Don't—"

The hide was a patchwork of adhesions and jigsaw scraps of skin. The white face, attractive in its own right, was a pale apparition atop the corded stalk of neck. The ribcage swelled and subsided, rhythmically, stretching the leathery scarflesh into a rippling muscle playground. Curly black hair crawled across the ragged boundaries, flowing down where Rendin would not—could not—look.

"Please . . ." he said. "Leave me alone."

The voice was that of a stranger. ". . . other engagements. We—" A pause, but the pronoun stood uncorrected, "—really must leave."

Rendin heard the lisp of fabric as she dressed, the polite click of the library door as she went out. The room soon grew dark. Engulfed in shadows, and accompanied only by the liquid snicker of his mechanical heart, Blaine Rendin began the final confronta-

(cont. on page 93)

HAPPY NEW YEAR, HAL

NEAL BARRETT, JR.

Time had closed itself in a loop. Or was it a loop—?

HURRAY.

For the fourteenth consecutive year Hal gets Marta Lee Enright out of her bra. Tosses fluff bundle to back seat; turns to catch a question in her eyes. a dubious smile.

"We shouldn't, Hal."

Marta's voice: dull; mechanical.

"Listen, honey—"

Hal's voice: tedious; apathetic.

"Baby, they're great. God, they're just great!"

"Hal . ."

Hal mentally shuts his eyes; grinds his teeth; tries to keep his hands off; reaches out anyway.

"We've *got* to get back, Hal. Christ, Max'll kill me!"

"Max is up to his ass in bourbon."

"He never gets *that* drunk. Please, Hal—"

Brief, precious silence. mint seconds. unused. time span. nothing called for in the script. Hal rushes in with:

"Marta, I'm sorry as hell!"

Marta: suddenly alive: fear in her eyes; in the soft light from steamed windows, a half-circle shadow at the corner of her lips; taut; an overtaxed tendon looking for work. Hal nods encouragement.

Words blossom: explode: *"I would, Hal–I really would if I could!"*

"I know. Marta, listen–"

Too late; sudden; sharp: a blade through breath. Shift: back to the script.

"Come on, baby. Don't be like that."

"Hal—"

"Just tell me you like it. I *know* you like it."

"Please—"

"Tell me."

"Hal, I *love* it, that's not the—"

Wide eyes pleading, small hands raised automatically to fend him off. And Hal automatically pressing on.

Hal: cursing in silence. After fourteen insane reruns of 1974, most people could turn off Old-talk. Mouths spewed the obligatory words; ears shut out the meaning. Not Hal: total awareness: every bland sentence; worn sounds assailing the senses. Each a gem of enthusiasm: See Jane Run. See Spot Jump.

Watching Marta in half-darkness: ladylike struggle; struggle scheduled to end in nine seconds. Stalemate. Hal: blinking, as car turns corner. Lights sweep briefly over curves of flesh. eigh-

teen minutes and counting. Minimal petting; sparring; reluctant retrieval of bra and blouse; back to the party. Joan: where the hell have you *been* all this time?

"Where the hell do you think I've been?"

Witless grin: vacuous smile number fourteen.

"Where I've been is to get ice. You sent us after ice."

"Uh-huh." Joan: eyebrow raised in doubt. "I trust that's *all* you got."

"Ha. Ha. Funny."

"Not to me you son of a bitch."

"Get *off* it, Joan—"

Joan: turns away; busies herself at sink. Drone of party drifts in from den: hive of sleepy bees.

Hal: watches sack of ice melting on counter.

"Honey, listen—"

Wait. Joan scheduled to sulk for two minutes: free time: nothing in the script.

Joan: real voice. *"Hal, it's not going too badly. Not really."*

"Great. Glad to hear it."

She'd like to face him. Can't. Doesn't miss the tone, though.

"Be happy with what you've got, Hal. My God, any-real conversation is something, isn't it? We've had an interesting evening. Honest!"

Genuine irritation: *"If you'd just* try *not to hear the Oldtalk, Hal. You don't even try!"*

"I can't."

"You might try. For my sake."

"I have tried. I try all the time."

Voice cracks: *"How do you think I feel, knowing every damn time you're going out for an hour and a* half *with Marta Enright? How do you think I feel, Hal?"*

"Oh, God!" Hal: disgust. *"Do we have to bring that up again? Christ, Joan, what difference does it make? We didn't do anything—we didn't do anything fourteen godamn times in a row! Why can't you just–"*

Cut. Over and out. So: what did we do with freetalk time? Beautiful: just great.

Joan: turns on schedule.

"Here, see if you can break up a little ice, lover. Maybe it'll cool you off." Warning: "Hal. keep your hands off that bitch."

"Drop it, Joan."

"I mean it, Hal."

"Listen. Nothing happened—"

"We won't talk about it now. After everyone leaves."

Joan: stalks out of room. Hal: gets hammer from drawer; breaks up ice in sack; waits stoicly for wincing pain due after eighth stroke.

Talk about it: after everyone leaves. No way: there isn't any after. No one leaves until the 'new' year comes in. Then: back to the beginning. The big d.j. starts the record again. Chapter fifteen. Play it again, Sam.

Six. Seven. Eight.

"Damn!"

On target.

MAX ENRIGHT finishes Oldtalk joke. Rushes in three real words:

"Hear the radio?"

Wait. Liz Harmon's bit about

new scandal: What principal did or didn't do to girls' gym teacher.

Joan: *"Yes, I did! They've done real well this year. There was a lot of stuff on the station this morning and–"*

Hal: "Got to change those records. Who wants to hear what?"

Feels himself getting up. Fights it. Quick pain as body does what it damn well pleases.

Brushes by Marta. Black look from Max.

"I want to talk to you, Hal . ."

"Do that, Max."

"Anyway–" Joan: bits and pieces. *"They think maybe it's better–this year–than it was–two women died in Europe somewhere and–there was that plumber or whatever he was in–South Carolina I think–"*

Quick finish: before Max begins story of tricky real estate deal; pulled one over on those bastards in East Bay.

Hal: settled in for nine minutes of Oldtalk. Stiff slug of Scotch on schedule. Chokes. Slams mental brakes: wait: think: had he choked before? Ever? No—By God no. It was new! It was—

"Great, Max—say one thing, any time I can screw those characters I'll do it. If *you* don't, *they* will!"

Quickly-quickly: *"Listen. I choked. I choked and I never–"*

Oldtalk sweeps in: buries his bulletin. Maybe later. Not much—but something. Things did change. Right here. In this neighborhood. Madge and Ray Ackerlein: poison ivy: two years in a row. He'd helped tell it in town; later, heard it squeezed into a blank spot on the network.

"–don't forget the horse!" Liz Harmon: on tail-end of Phil's request for more of cheese and crackers he'd eaten; digested; eliminated fourteen times.

"I heard it this morning. It swam out into the water again only this time it didn't drown, *by God!"*

"Here, Phil, try some of this. It's onion dip."

"That was where–Jamaica?"

"Hey, good. Whadja say it was?"

"No, Bermuda, I think, but–"

"Just plain old onion dip. You can get it at the store. Liz, don't you ever *feed* this man?"

Midnight: minus six minutes and counting.

A look in the eyes. Even through the porcelin glaze of Oldtalk. Even poor godamn Max. Giving Marta hell. Glaring at Hal.

Marta: staring at him. Hal sees: reads it loud and clear. If it doesn't change this time, Hal—Wrong. Won't lose your mind, Marta. Just think you will. No way, Baby. You didn't bring a fuzz-brain into the year, you don't take it out.

Hal: head scheduled for right turn. Sneaks a look to the left. Minus three minutes and counting. Happy New Year. Ring out the old; ring in the old. Snap! Midnight: 31 december, 1974. Bong-bong-bong-bong-etc. snap! 12:01: 1 January, 1974.

Costume and set changes:

Marta: blue pants suit. Blink-blink. Red skirt, white v-neck.

Hal: black sports shirt. Blink-blink. Green turtleneck.

Joan: bourbon and coke. Blink-blink. Vodka and soda.

Etc:

Not so bad for some. Not so good for others. Phil and Liz at different party. Blink-blink. For Phil and Liz read: Jack and Ella. Zap! Just like Captain whatsizname. Jack and Ella at the door. thanks for a great time, Hal. 12:07 a.m. Jack: a little looped. Ella: giving Jack that look, the one Hal never gets used to. Bye-bye baby. Cut to: Jack and Ella. Car arcing off bridge. 12:23 a.m. Ella: instant widow, fourteen times removed.

Minus one minute and counting.

Phil: *"They're saying maybe it was the tests. The ones at the Pole ."*

Hal: *"What the hell difference does it make?"*

Max *"Godamn scientists. Don't know which end–"*

Marta: *"For Christ's Sake, Max–not now!"*

Liz Harmon: four words in Old-talk; nobody hears, not even Hal.

Hal: looks at Marta. Joan. Max. Etc.

Little hand crawls up to twelve.

Phil: "Happy New Year!"

Phil: "Happy New Year, everybody!"

Max: "Happy New Year, gang! Go get 'em!"

Marta: "Happy New Year—it was great!"

Hal: "Happy New Year—let's do it again soon."

Joan: "Happy New Year, Hal. "

—NEAL BARRETT, JR.

The Decayed Leg Bone (cont. from page 69)

had been dreaming; but for the life of him he could not remember the dream. He fell back to sleep again instantly and slept the sleep of the just.

—ROBERT F. YOUNG

An Offer of Oblivion (cont. from page 79)

being cruel in telling him that—punishing him for the fact that he had come to her with a crash-gun still in his hand. It is difficult to believe that Myrca could have loved Simeon.

He was tempted to kill her, but he didn't.

Instead, he raised the *Nightingale* from the hill which shadowed his brother's grave, and flew her to Spiridion, where he took his fortune back to the wheels.

This time, he was not playing to win.

—BRIAN M. STABLEFORD

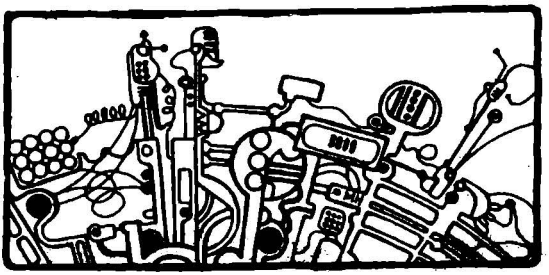
TO AMAZING STORIES SUBSCRIBERS

We are sorry for the lateness of AMAZING STORIES (Dec.). This was due to production breakdown which we hope will not happen again.

the Science

GREG BENFORD

...in Science Fiction



WHY CIVILIZATION?

I'VE BEEN writing a book titled *Life in the Universe*, a process that's taken two years now and absorbed an alarming chunk of my time. And the more I looked into the ideas science has about life and astronomy, the more I realized there were yawning voids, huge areas of mystery.

For example, take the time scales involved. If we want to generalize about life beyond earth, we really ought to be able to explain, in some vague fashion, what happened on earth. For 99% of the time life has existed here, there was no intelligence of any significance (as far as we know—and that's an interesting qualifier, in itself). Similarly, man has been around in some identifiable form for at least two million years—and 99% of that time we managed without civilization. Why did we suddenly alter this hugely successful pattern of hunting and gathering?

Something unique must have happened about 10,000 years ago. Befor that time there were no civilizations as far as we know. After that, man moved quickly from large hunting tribes to villages and then to cities. Civilization arose in Mesopotamia, India, China, Mexico, Egypt and Peru. Some of these societies influenced each other, while others were quite independent.

The fact that civilizations occurred on a timetable which is rapid compared to even man's evolutionary process is one of the most intriguing mysteries of human development. There are several theories which attempt to explain it. One of the most interesting and plausible begins with the recognition that, until about 10,000 years ago, man's hunting and gathering tribes had kept their populations below the level at which they would exhaust their natural resources. Apparently, this was done by simple expansion. People would immigrate to new areas as population rose.

Archeological data shows that immigration occurred on a continuing basis until about 10,000 B.C. By that time apparently all habitable areas of the world had

been settled to some degree. There was simply no empty land to move into. At about this time the glaciers melted, too, converting many coastal river systems into rich, shallow tidewater areas. These were quite rich in fish and other food sources. It was then, just as the world began to get crowded for hunting and gathering tribes, that man turned to agriculture and developing the sea.

Farming the land or sea requires that the farmer stay in more or less one place. Crops must be tended. In the Near East, the first settlements appeared where wild wheat and barley grew. Drier areas near there were not so favorable. However, as population increased there must have been pressure to develop crops where the water supply was inadequate and wild wheat and barley didn't grow naturally. The first agriculture probably arose when grains were deliberately carried from a rich area and planted in a poor one.

Archaeologists have found that all over the world, during these times, there were a great variety of experiments with methods of increasing the food supply. This meant catching new types of fish, exploiting plants that were inedible before (such as olives) and finally breeding plants for greater yield. The experiments worked; early villages formed and apparently families became larger. Many farming tasks can be done by women and children, so large families became an asset. (In hunting societies which are often on the move, children are mostly a liability.)

The invention of agriculture and fishing was a crucial step. Civilization followed immediately. Such societies expanded rapidly. Several billion years before, on the early earth, oxygen-breathing life consumed the organic molecules from which it came. In similar fashion, the early civilizations expanded and so changed the land around them that the hunting and gathering tribes could no longer exist. So civilization was a one-way street; it would be impossible now for us to go back to hunting animals for a living (unpopular, too; we've grown fat).

Between 7000 B.C. and 3000 B.C. populations in some parts of the Near East increased sixty times. Villages bloomed into cities. As the population grew, it became necessary to exploit food resources more and more efficiently. This meant development of new techniques, which in turn were communicated among the villages and cities. Survival placed a premium on transmission of information about crops, rainfall, new strains of wheat, etc. We can view civilizations as a device for processing such information. There were grains to count, animals to herd, items to buy and sell—and records to be kept of all these things. Institutions were set up to do these jobs, and as is usual with institutions, they quickly became self-serving. Writ-

ing and counting are not merely useful for dealing in grain; they lead to better control of complicated enterprises.

Not all civilizations followed the rapid development of technology. The Maya civilization in the Yucatan even at its peak had no wheel, no metal tools, no draft animals and a very simple slash-and-burn agriculture. Nonetheless, it was a sophisticated society with a complex organization. In some things they excelled; the Maya calender proved more accurate than that of the Spanish who conquered them in the sixteenth century A.D.

We are just beginning to understand the processes which led man from hunting to farming and finally to working in cities. Somehow, society began supporting large scale engineering projects. Perhaps these arose naturally from attempts to increase food supplies. Or they could have come from the deep impulse for protection through large weaponry and defenses. Both these motivations make sense. So do those of religion; the pyramids played some semi-religious roles, to be sure. Whatever the basic motivations, men assembled a technological society within a few thousand years. Our rise has been incredibly fast.

If the ideas mentioned above are correct, man became civilized simply because he ran out of living space as a hunter. Since a planet's area is always limited, any species will expand to the end of its resources and then find some accomodation. If the species is intelligent, it may find a way out of relying on wild natural resources by cultivating food, just as we did. In this perspective civilization is essentially an escape hatch from natural limits. The same escape hatch will exist on any planet.

This view of man and civilization makes technological societies virtually inevitable, once intelligence appears. Indeed, man's climb up from darkness is dramatic. It has the look of a "driven" process, as though we were simply the first species to discover the ecological niche for intelligence. Nature seems—so far—to reward intelligence of our sort with immense survival value. But can our experience be generalized?

As long as we're talking about land-based life, I think so. All planets have finite land area. Any successful intelligent life will eventually have to face a space problem. Of course, a social constraint can solve it—they could simply stop breeding. If an alien species can control its own reproduction, maybe the driving force behind civilization won't work.

There's another qualifier—ocean-based life probably won't react as land-based life does. Dolphins are true world citizens; they seem to have never had horizons in the sense we did. Their apparent elaborate social system may have evolved specifically to control breeding, so they never had to exploit more of the ocean, or

return to the land.

There's an interesting deduction we can venture, based on our tenuous knowledge. Alien land-living societies will have faced the cruel facts of scarcity—it's a basic requirement that forces civilization in the first place. So the idea of economy, of doing as well as you can with as little as possible, may be second nature to them. This idea is pretty fundamental to our own ideas of art, beauty, even science (Occam's Razor). Scientists have used this logic to argue that the search for intelligent radio signals should focus on the region between the hydroxyl line and the hydrogen line (around 21 cm). These two molecules are not only the signposts of water-based life; they also lie very nearly at the minimum of the background galactic radio noise. Looking around 21 cm is also the cheapest way to detect a transmission, because there the signal to noise ratio is highest.

I'll admit the chain of reasoning is long—from Babylon to 21 cm. We may never know how much of the chain is reasonable, or where it fails. But there's one easy way to check— tune in to the radio spectrum. Go and look. But any serious attempt to evesdrop on alien civilizations, or find radio beacons established by some other society, should be undertaken with a full recognition of how uncertain our ideas about the origins of intelligence, civilization and technology are. Of all the factors which fix the number of technological civilizations in the galaxy, these social issues are the most poorly known. This fact illustrates how intertwined the sciences are becoming. Findings in archeology may have significant impact on the riddle of life in the universe.

—GREGORY BENFORD

The Spirit of Seventy Six (cont. from page 85)

tion.

OUTSIDE, *the tension rises. Janice struggles to assert herself; the rebellion is contagious. Polarization: like minds in a centrifuge, jetsam in a whirlpool.*

Our pulse quickens. The crowds smile. We articulate their division, mirror their hurtful attempts to walk as one.

The Spirit of Seventy-Six goes out to them. There is appalause and approbation.

But inside the children are screaming.

—DAVE SKAL

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cord and had seized complete control of her motor nervous system: the thing had very definitely plugged in to her mind and memory.

The odds against him were growing. For the first time, he felt intimations of hopelessness. There were probably other creatures. They were waiting to attack him. He would be overwhelmed and enslaved, the same as Coret. Perhaps he should get out now, while he could, and call for help. The other exploration teams could join him within a few days. All together, they could explore all of the dozens, or hundreds, or thousnnds, of branches and forks of this accursed warren. Eventually they would find the creature. Yes, that was the logical way to do it.

And what would happen to Coret meanwhile? Would the thing permit her to eat and drink? He thought of the skeletons hanging in the tunnel entrance, and he shuddered. And then he trembled once more, because he could not accurately speculate as to whether Coret would be the eater, or the eaten. Or perhaps both. He was sure of only one thing. The creature would not go hungry. And that of itself would impose a double burden on Coret's blood and tissues. While she lived. And these filaments undoubtedly were spun spider-like from the body of the creature, who in turn took whatever it needed from its host.

If he did not find her in a couple of days, she would die.

From somewhere floated peal after peal of wild laughter.

He froze against the wall of the shaft. The hair on his neck stood straight out and goose bumps played in ripples over his paralyzed cheeks.

It was Coret, of course. The creature had found her voice.

And then the screams stopped, as suddenly as they had come. The echoes vanished. The black silence returned.

He clenched his teeth and continued downward. But now he was uncertain once more. For he had the eerie impression that the sound had come from above, not from below. Was it possible? Was he on the wrong path, after all? He decided to trust his instruments. His senses had gone awry in this gloomy place.

He continued down.

And now he came to a fork in the shaft. One fork branched downward to the right, one to the left.

He hung on to a ladder-like loop in the main shaft while he flicked the analyzer over the strands in the right-hand shaft. Several of them showed stress. Good. He was about to replace the instrument when he decided to double check his conclusion by shining the little beam into the left-hand branch also.

The strands there also showed stress, in fact, about twice as much stress as those in the right-hand branch.

He was stunned. Had something heavy gone down both

branches? He had speculated that other creatures might roam these dark caverns. Was this concrete evidence of their presence? In fact, did the extra tension in the left-hand strands indicate a second and much heavier creature? He shone the search beam uneasily down the left-hand shaft. Nothing moved.

But then a thought occurred to him. He clambered down the left-hand shaft for a few meters and then explored the strands below with the polarizer. None showed any stress.

So. The creature had climbed down here a short distance, then up again, and finally over into the right-hand branch. Just to throw him off the track. That explained the double stress of the first few strands here. They had been stretched as the creature descended, and then stretched again as the thing went up again.

He climbed up once more and lifted himself over the lip of the other shaft. The thing was making full use of Coret's intelligence. It was going to be tricky. The dimensions of his problem had expanded again. As he descended he tried to sort it out. The creature could move faster than he. The creature could sense his coming through the network of filaments, and could always manage to keep out of pistolet range. Furthermore, the creature would undoubtedly have opportunities to ambush and attack him. He imagined Coret's pearly teeth at his throat, and the thought chilled him. And then, of course, there might be other creatures, with or without host animals, lurking in the strands, waiting to drop on him, even as this one had dropped on Coret. The fluorocarbon cape was no protection against such assault.

The labyrinth itself was a major problem. Undoubtedly it radiated for many kilometers. And substantial portions of it were in three dimensions. He could expect to be in here for many hours. He had emergency food rations in his pack, and of course the little tank of hydrogen, which combined with the oxygen of the air in his fuel cell to give his drinking water as well as his long-term electrical energy.

The creature, he assumed, was even now parasitically feeding on Coret's blood and tissues. The thing was consuming Coret as though she were a seven-course dinner. He did not want to think about it, but he forced himself to consider it. For in that horrid symbiosis lay the only chance he would have of getting Coret out of this dismal place.

The cruel reality was this: he had food and water; Coret had none. And not only that, she had to nourish that horror on her back. He was in hard physical condition; Coret was not. It added up to this: if he could keep moving, not too far behind Coret, never giving them an opportunity to rest, she would eventually drop of exhaustion. Somewhere, eventually, she would collapse on the

cavern floor. On her face, perhaps, with the creature still fastened to her body. And so he would find them. His mouth twisted grimly. He would not need to moderate the pistolet beam. And he was an excellent marksman. He would need only one shot.

But all of this was wishful thinking. It might not happen that way at all.

Nevertheless, he knew his plan was basically sound. What was more to the point, it suited his immediate inclination to keep moving. The thought of sitting down somewhere to try to conjure up a better plan was absolutely intolerable.

He came now to the bottom of the shaft and flicked his search beam cautiously around him. It seemed actually to be the crumbling floor of an ancient stone room. He could make out some of the individual blocks. They appeared to be granite. Undoubtedly this planet had had a geological history similar to that of earth, and the highly cultured beings who had built this vanished city had made full use of their magmatic heritage in laying these cavernous foundations.

This had to be part of the lost city of Araqnia. What irony! He wished he had never heard of the hell-place. And that creature, then, must be a descendant of the once proud Araqnids.

10. THE RUSTLINGS

IT WAS THEN that he heard the rustling. Something was in this room with him. He immediately swept the light toward the sound. There was a dark, shimmering heap in the far corner. Thorin recoiled a step and in a lightning reflex movement, drew his pistolet from its holster. But he did not fire. He leaned forward. The surface of the thing seemed alive, undulant. Otherwise it did not move. Thorin took a couple of steps toward it. Nothing happened. The another few steps. The rustling was a little louder. Otherwise, there was nothing.

Whatever it was, it was not Coret.

He would hazard a shot, say a stun cone of about ten centimeters diameter.

He pressed the trigger. The beam formed and vanished instantly.

Thorin flung his arm over his face and fell back. Things hit his protective cape, and then bounced off again. His heart pounded violently as the light jerked about the room.

Tiny shapes were flying around him, and circling overhead up the shaft.

He knew instantly. Beetles! Hundreds of them. Scavengers. A ghastly thought hit him. No, of course it could not be Coret. Not yet, not yet! He walked over to the thing in the corner. It was a smallish quadruped. Patches of black fur still clung here and there to its eroding skeleton. Doubtless one of the creature's prior mounts. So this was their mounts'

ultimate fate. To be devoured by insects. He thought of the dermestes beetle that lived on the desiccated flesh of Egyptian mummies, and he shuddered.

He bent over to inspect the death-remnant. a six-inch circle of dead beetles covered one shoulder, where the stun ray had struck. He picked up one and studied it briefly. How were these things able to live here without getting caught on the strands? He fished in his pack, brought out the little spectroscope, and ignited a sample of the wing. There were strong lines of carbon and fluorine. The things were protected by fluorocarbon polymers, of about the same composition as the coating on his cape. Probably they had evolved in this way in millenias past, simply to serve this ghoulish service. They kept the tunnels clean.

11. A TOUCH OF WARMTH

AND NOW, which way? There were three corridors leading out of this room. He inspected each in turn. Each was stone-floored. Here and there, a few filaments slithered across the floor, and numerous strands hung from the ceilings. There was no moss or vegetation on the floors to catch the print of a bare foot. And the polarimeter showed that none of the strands anywhere had been pressed or stretched or, so far as he could tell, even touched. The creature had not permitted Coret to leave any trace of her passing.

And yet, there had to be . . . something. He realized now that this was merely his hope. It was not a certainty. There was no reason at all to assume that there was in fact evidence that she had entered any of the passages, or, if there were evidence, that he would be clever enough to find it. And he knew now from experience, that if he found a trace in one corridor, he might well find the same trace in the other two corridors. The real problem was to find something in one that the other two did not have.

He returned to the tunnel on the right, and knelt down and examined the floor. It was well-laid granite. It had been here for thousands of years, and it was strange that it was not covered with dust. But there was little or no dust. The sticky strands, acting very much like nasal mucosa, had caught every particle. And yet . . .

He pushed the infra-red filter over the lends of his handlight, put the i.r. scope to his eye, and surveyed the floor, foot by foot. Nothing. He retraced his steps and entered the middle corridor. He was a bare meter into the tunnel when he found something. The red blotch in his scope resolved into the fall of a foot, complete with five toes. Coret had been running. This was her route. Still, to be safe, he checked the left-hand tunnel. Nothing. He returned to the middle corridor and

began trotting down it.

He was perspring freely. He wished he could remove his cape, but he knew that was impossible. He would be hung up in the strands in seconds.

He now had an idea how the creature was able to protect Coret from this hideous network. He speculated that the thing was able, by simple touch, to neutralize or "turn off" the adhesive surface of the strands as Coret moved along. Thorin had not got a very good look at the creature in the beginning, but he thought it reasonable that the thing had exterior tentacles, perhaps a meter long, and he could imagine these thin arms reaching out and touching the strands. Perhaps a sort of electrical current passed, which had the effect of altering the surface chemistry of the strands. He carried his speculation further. The strand surface was undoubtedly highly polar. He conjured up several models in his mind. A long-chain linear polymer, certainly. And the simplest kind of high polarity would be oxygen based. Which meant that the polymer probably contained a high percentage of hydroxyl and carbonyl groups. Very sticky indeed. And yet, at the creature's command, these groups were "switched off". How? He visualized a stream of electrons flowing from the creature's arms to a strand. These oxygen groups would thereby be reduced, perhaps for several meters along the strands. The carbonyls would become hydroxyls, and the hydroxyls might lose their oxygen altogether, release it to the air, leaving behind an inert methylene group. It must be something like that. It would seem to follow that the oxygen was very loosely bound to the surface molecules of the strands. A rather mild electrical charge was apparently sufficient to dislodge them and render the strand inert. He turned the thought over in his mind. He would have to figure out a way to verify it. If he ever got a breather, it should be a simple matter to run a C-H-O analysis on a strand fragment before and after passing an electrical current through it. Such a mechanism might explain the jasmine scent at the beginning of the chase. Evidently, the creature could control the entire network of strands from any point within the web, and could generate electrical impulses that released the exact combination of molecules that made up the very complex odor of jasmine.

Well then, suppose he was right, so what? How was it relevant in his battle to recover his wife? That he did not know. Maybe it was not relevant. He was not sure what was relevant and what was not relevant.

The hours wore on. He stopped twice to drink water from his fuel cell, and once he took time to open a tin of emergency rations from his pack. He wasn't hungry, and did it only on principle.

He encountered many more forks. Sometimes the creature tried to deceive him with false trails, sometimes not. He noticed now, when the pursuit led along horizontal runways, that an occasional drop of moisture might be found among Coret's footprints. It showed up as a great bloody blotch in the i.r. scope. This puzzled him. Were these tears? Was Coret weeping? He thought not. The creature probably had sufficient control over her voluntary nervous system to prevent any such emotional display. No, it had to be perspiration. Coret was tiring. In fact, Coret must be very tired indeed. Coret might walk several miles a day in her kitchen, and in cleaning their little apartment, but that was not the kind of exercise that would equip her to run and climb hour after hour. It must eventually happen, as he had forseen from the beginning: Coret was going to drop. The creature might keep her moving during the initial phases of her exhaustion, by brute application of electrical impulses delivered as overpowering hammer blows to her spinal cord. But finally that would fail. And then he would find her. Dying . . .? Dead . . .? He stumbled and nearly fell on his face. Was he going about this in the right way? On the other hand, what other way was there? He set his jaw firmly and plunged on. But now he was thinking even more furiously than before. Alternates! He needed alternates. But there were none.

12. THE BALCONY ROOM

He was well into the twentieth hour of pursuit, and he had long ago lost track of the numerous twists and turns, ascents and descents. He relied on the orientor to record his route. Otherwise, even if he found Coret, they might wander here for days, and finally starve or die of thirst.

The way now led ever higher. He suspected that he was in a great building, possibly above ground. It was probably covered with lava and vegetation, and that was why the aerial surveys had missed it.

A muted humming, persistent but not unpleasant, seemed to fill the corridor. He was coming to something. Machinery? No, the sound was more like that from great electrical transformers.

The passageway opened into a great circular chamber. Thorin played his handlight briefly over the expansive walls and high ceiling. Glassed bookshelves lined the walls. Tapestry-covered tables and odd-shaped chairs bordered the sides of the room, and cabinets filled the corners. Some sort of electrical apparatus sat on the far cabinet. Ten casket-like boxes with opened lids clustered in an area to his right. Statues, faintly luminous, graced some of the table centers.

Thousands of years ago intelligent beings had lived here. He couldn't really know exactly what the Araqnids looked like. But evidently they required space, and

room to work and live, the same as human beings.

It was then that he noticed the light. Across the great room there was a rectangular opening in the wall, and a gentle luminosity was drifting in through it. A window to the outside world? Was it possible that the creature had fled through here to the outside?

He panned the room quickly with his handlight. He saw no other exits.

He stepped across the room cautiously and stood before the aperture.

He listened. Over the pervasive electronic huming he could hear strange noises. He knew immediately what they were. Street noises. Vehicles moving rapidly up and down streets, clanging at each other. Even occasional squeaky cries.

It was not possible!

The light evidently came from a balcony that overlooked a busy street. He would have to see this!

But if he stepped out there, would the creature be hiding by the side of the balcony doorway, waiting to ambush him?

He hung his light on his belt, grasped his pistolet firmly in his right hand, and stepped carefully to the balcony entrance. The street sounds were much louder. Very slowly, he peered first to the right, then to the left. The little balcony was empty.

And now, even without stepping out on the balcony, he could see that a marvelous vista lay open before him: greensward and gardens, fountains and colonnades swept down the valley. The great mall was bordered on both sides by majestic white buildings. They were so tall he could not see their top storeys. He ducked back on reflex as a great metal shape hurtled past the balcony. His jaw dropped in total awe.

He had found Araqnia.

Beyond this balcony the city had shaken off millenia of desolation and had sprung back to life. It was like some fairy tale left over from his childhood.

He had a sudden impulse to step out to the balcony railing and peer into the streets below. But he did not. There was something wrong here. It was all too, too strange.

The creature had tried to lose him, first in two dimensions, then in three. The next logical step would be a false trail in four dimensions. This balcony led backwards in time. And he suspected it was a one-way passage. If he stepped out there, he would step into this city as it existed thousands of years ago, with no way to get back to the present.

On the other hand, perhaps the creature had forced Coret out there, and was even now laughing at him from the vantage point of distant aeons. Was it possible?

From where he stood, he examined the surface of the balcony floor. Like most of the other structures he had encountered, it was stone. It seemed devoid of disturbance, ancient or recent. He played the i.r. scanner over

the surface briefly, but without result. No, Coret had not come this way. He could relax on that score.

He stepped back into the room, trying to stay in the same path he had used on entering the room. From the center of the chamber he shone his light slowly, meter by meter, around the walls. The only exit he could see was the doorway whereby he had entered.

He got out the i.r. again and began systematically to cover the floor. He got firm readings only when it touched his own footprints.

And yet Coret's footprints had been in the long corridor. And the corridor led here, and only here.

He returned to the doorway. Here he picked up her last set of footprints with the i.r. In fact there were several prints. She had been standing there, doing something that involved moving her feet a little. And then she had vanished into thin air.

He looked back into the great room. And now in the grayness of the high ceiling, he picked out an irregularity. As he played his light over it, it resolved into a black disk, about a meter in diameter. It was, he suddenly realized, a hole. A hole in the dome of the ceiling. And it had to be Coret's exit from this room.

But how had she reached it? There were no filaments hanging from the ceiling; it was totally bare.

He examined the walls with his light. Here there were no strands, no filaments for her to climb up to reach the ceiling.

And yet, somehow, she had stood here in the doorway and had reached that hole in the ceiling.

And undoubtedly the horror on her neck was at this moment hovering over the edge of the hole, listening, and perhaps even peering cautiously over the ledge when Thorin's back was turned.

He opened his pack once more and pulled out the sonar.

The sonar beam would not make direct contact with Coret's body, of course. But he did not think that was necessary. The beam would go through the hole, hit a surface, perhaps the ceiling of the room above, then be reflected to another surface, then to another, and another, and it would do this perhaps several dozen times. Eventually, however, a reflection would return to the instrument. He would make ten or fifteen readings, and one of them ought to be weaker than the others. And if it were correct, it would be because something —perhaps Coret's body—was shielding out the reflections to a measurable degree.

He found something before he had completed one-third of the circle.

Something.

Coret?

There was no way to know unless he could get up there. And if it were Coret, how had *she* got up there? He thought he knew; but

he needed to make an experiment.

He returned to the passageway, and with his pistolet, severed a length of filament. The strand was about 5 mm. in diameter, a dirty translucent gray, except for its core, which was a tiny black thread. It reminded Thorin of something. An insulated electrical conductor? Perhaps. But there might be an even closer analogy. A mammalian neuron: the central axon with its protective myelin sheath. Very likely it was actuated in the same way as a motor nerve. The creature touched it with a tentacle, and a tiny electrical impulse, perhaps measured in milliamperes, passed into the strand. The electrical characteristics of the filament changed. Electrons traveled along its surface, reducing carbonyl groups to hydroxyls, perhaps even releasing loosely-bound oxygen to the atmosphere. And when that happened, the fillament, for a couple of meters from the point of contact, was no longer sticky.

This could be easily verified. He plugged conductors into his fuel cell. One conductor end he left bare on the stone floor, to serve as a rather poor ground. The other he touched to one of the strand garlands hanging at the doorway. It adhered tightly. He turned the current delivery knob to one milliamp. The conductor on the strand fell away instantly, bounced off two more strands, and dropped to the floor. That was interesting to know. Neutralizing one strand seemed to neutralize all strands in the same area. Of course, it was not too surprising, since they were all interconnected.

Now he was ready. He repacked the conductors, picked up the piece of strand he had cut, and re-entered the room. He took careful aim and threw the fragment toward the ceiling, near the hole. It stuck there.

And that must have been how the creature had reached the ceiling. It had spun a fresh filament from its own body, and Coret had thrown the strand through the hole, where it had caught, and then Coret had climbed up the fillament, hand over hand, through the hole (her palms must be raw flesh), and they had pulled the cord up after them.

The thing was consuming Coret. Her body was being transformed into this horrid network. How much of this could she take? Evidently quite a bit. For she was waiting for him up there, waiting to kill him.

"Earthling!"

"Aie—!" The call was so unexpected that Thorin screamed. He picked the pistolet from its holster and looked up.

A face peered down at him. He did not recognize it at first as belonging to Coret. It was a twisted, animal thing. The hair was bedraggled, held together in front by perspiration. The eyes were not in good focus. One seemed to wander while the other gazed vacantly at his feet.

"Earthling!"

He held the light with his left hand while he raised the pistolet slowly, quietly confirming with a flick of his eye that it was still on "stun".

The face disappeared.

He was not surprised. The creature would not risk paralysis of the host body.

The next call was muffled. "Earthling, I mean you no harm. Nor do I understand your persistent attempts to recover your mate. How can you resent my using her? In your own world you ride horses, camels, even elephants. You kill and eat cattle, sheep, pigs, and chickens. And you know you must die. You have very short lives, less than one hundred years. Why be concerned if it is somewhat shorter? In the few days your mate has left, I will give her many lifetimes. I do not have to do this, yet I shall, as a favor to her and because she has given me a glimpse into another way of life, primitive though it be. For these reasons I have permitted her to see into my mind. And there was much to see, for I have lived three hundred of your earth years. I am Keeper Number Ten. The ancestor of the Ten Keepers was named Eroch. He was a great scientist. It was he who built this window into time. Before he died he was able to set apart ten eggsacs, one for each of the ten three-hundred-year periods that would follow on this side of the window. I am the last. Our prime directive is to preserve this room until the Death-One comes. Nothing must change until the Death-One comes. Go, Earthling! If you die here, the Death-One might be warned away."

It was eerie, unnerving, to hear this coming from the lips of Coret. He understood none of it; yet instinctively he felt he had to keep the creature talking as long as possible. He cried, "Am I the Death-One?"

"No."

"How will you know him?"

"Ah! He sprays treacherous death from his mouth! And when he comes, he must die, here in this room. He must not go forth on the balcony."

"Why?"

"There is more, much more. But I cannot remember. Or perhaps I was not told. My ancestors were ready to send forth great ships, to found colonies. And then the Death-One came, and they died."

"Where? Where were they going?"

"Ah, where? What was it? Was I ever programmed to understand? I do not know. But you must not be here when the Death-One comes. Nothing must affright him. When he stands before the balcony, he dies."

Now that was odd. Thorin had walked toward the balcony, and he had not died. There must be a comparator beam that had analyzed him and decided he had not been worth killing. Was there something up there? He played

the handlight carefully over the lintel of the balcony entrance. Yes, there was a glassy grid. Some sort of closed circuit TV. The comparator was evidently waiting for the "Death-One". And if you believed Keeper Number Ten, the comparator had been waiting quite a while . . . three thousand years! It didn't make sense.

The creature was making Coret speak again. "This time he must not get through, to bring death. Ah, foolish young Earthling, you don't answer. You don't understand. So be it. I now leave you. Don't follow. There has been enough death. It would truly sadden me to have to kill you."

Thorin waited a moment. Overhead there was total silence. But the thing might still be there. He made a rapid pan with the sonar. The rim of the hole registered blank. That was not necessarily decisive. The creature might have withdrawn into a nearby doorway.

And then, as he stood there, he realized that the creature had come to this room, this sanctuary, this tiny remnant of a lost civilization, and and found no weapon to counter the pistolet. The evidence was irrefutable: he had been visible to the thing for several minutes and he was still alive. Were weapons unknown to this thing and its culture? Probably not. But probably none were needed at home, and perhaps up to now the creature had seen no reason to keep one in its home. But weapon or no, as long as the thing controlled Coret, he was in great danger. He must follow with great caution.

He fished a tiny barb-ladder out of his pack and fired it into the ceiling hole. He could hear the muffled metallic clank as the sharp teeth struck somewhere out of sight overhead. He drug the cord until the barbed tines caught, apparently in a crack in the flooring. He fixed the light to his visor, grasped the pistolet in his teeth, and began the ascent. He reached the ceiling and paused a moment before climbing over the edge of the hole.

If he were going to be attacked, it would be here and now. He listened. If Coret were nearby, he should be able to hear her breathing. The creature would not be able to prevent that. But he heard nothing.

He stuck his head up and looked quickly over the edge, front and back. There was no movement in the chamber above him. No sound. Nothing. He clambered out on the floor. The room was empty, save for a few cabinets and shelves at the sides. And there was no filaments. Hence there ought to be dust. And where there was dust he should be able to follow Coret's footprints with his naked eye.

And there they were. The creature had made Coret walk out through the archway at the right.

13. FATAL CONTACT

HE REPACKED the ladder-barb

into his kit, pulled his cape about him, and walked over to the passage. The light reached into another tunnel. Here, there were strands again. It was a puzzle. Why were some areas choked with filaments and some completely devoid of them? Perhaps the stranded areas were the entrance ways, which this Araqnid and his predecessors had lined with webbing both to trap and to bar the wild life of the Ferrian forest. Deep in the interior of the labyrinth it was probably not needed. The Araqnid's historical mounts, the Llanoans, were either all dead or had reverted to the wild, and this last of the race was forced to move on his own spindly legs, except when he found an occasional mount. Well, the thing had one now.

Thorin trembled. Even if he were successful in killing the creature, would Coret recover and live? After seeing her face, he was no longer sure that he would be doing her a favor to rescue her. Perhaps, from her viewpoint—if indeed she still had some sort of mind of her own—she wanted only to die. But it was wasted mental effort even to think about it. He would get her back or be killed. And just now he suspected that the chances of the latter were fairly good.

For his adversary was a three-headed monster. Part of him was Coret and Coret's mind and knowledge of human limitations. Part of him was the creature of the vast culture and technology of Araqnia. And finally, the ultimate and dominant part, the part that controlled everything else, was an insane spider-like beast.

He peered down the empty corridor. His light shown bright and true. There was no movement. The deadly garlands hung limp, silent, waiting for him.

It was a long passageway, and it sloped upward, so that the end, if there was an end, was cut off from view. The creature might have disappeared in that direction. On the other hand, there might be sidepaths. He pulled a set of zoom binoculars from his pack and examined the corridor again. Yes, about halfway down, there appeared to be branch tunnels leading off on each side. And beyond that, another pair.

The thing might have disappeared in any one of five directions.

He clamped his light to his visor once more, got out the i.r. scanner, and, pistolet in hand, proceeded slowly down the way.

The floor was dust-free, and he had to rely almost exclusively on the i.r. Without any attempt at concealment or camouflage, Coret's footprints led into the right branch. And the thought occurred to him that the creature lurked just around the corner, waiting. He stopped in his tracks and listened. Did he hear breathing? He was almost certain he did.

This would be the end. All the creature had to do was tear his cape and hurl him against the wall strands. He would be stuck. And

forever. Or worse, he would be the next mount after the creature had finished with Coret.

He knelt down, opened his pack once more, and brought out the flexiscope. This was a flexible tube tipped with a photocrystal, extensible to the length of a couple of meters, and which would turn corners on command. A tiny light beam paralleled the crystal. Thorin snaked out the tube, guided it around the corner, and examined the right-hand corridor. Nothing. Very odd. So, what had he heard? He retrieved the instrument and repacked it.

Then he stepped abruptly into the intersection and shone the handlight down the length of the right-hand branch of the corridor.

A hell-cry burst into his ears from behind him. Something hard and sharp slashed at his right hand. The pistolet sailed down the corridor, where it slammed into a cluster of webbing.

He got up from his knees even as the creature ran past him. He took one step, then in frozen horror saw the creature riding Coret's neck, touching the strands in lightning-like gestures with its thin tentacle-like arms, as Coret ran on her toes. He knew he would lose the race to the weapon. He turned and ran back into the main corridor.

Peals of crazy laughter followed him.

He knew instantly what had happened. There must have been an overhead passage. The creature had gone into the side corridor, taken a flight of stairs overhead, and had come down into the left-hand passage, there to await him from his rear.

Fleet steps would follow him now. The creature knew its own territory, and could make Coret move about it very rapidly indeed. He knew that already. It was pointless to try to outrun this thing.

He slipped into the next side corridor and dropped his pack quickly from his shoulders. He had no real weapon left. Certainly nothing to compete with the pistolet. Still, there was one last thing to try. He opened the face of his fuel pack. If the creature were able to send a modest stream of electrons into the strands and thereby depolarize them to inertness, it just might be possible to neutralize the creature's imposed current with an exactly equal current of opposite polarity. That might make the strands adherent again—even to the Araqnid. He need only reverse the conductors and adjust the amperage. With savage haste he jabbed the clamps of the filaments. There was no current yet; his hand rested on the switch handle. He waited.

Howls reverberated down the corridor. An explosion sounded far beyond him, down the main tunnel. The creature was testing the pistolet. The footsteps were pounding closer.

That was good. He wanted Coret to be running. He wanted the creature to be touching those

little strands in rapid succession.

At this moment he ought to be thinking of death and destruction. But all he could think of was Coret. But not this poor ridden wretch waving his pistolet. He remembered Coret on their wedding day: floating in a radiant whiteness, and with tiny red flowers in her hair. Let him die seeing her in perfection.

He pulled the switch.

An inhuman scream.

A grunt.

A body falling.

He stepped out into the main passage.

Coret lay motionless on the floor. Behind her, the creature dangled from the ceiling strands. His four tentacles, torn out at the roots, hung in the filaments a couple of meters behind his body. His thorax was ripped open where it had been fastened to Coret's neck. It gushed a purple liquid in rhythmic spurts on to the floor below. Only the eye-stalks seemed undamaged. It seemed to peer in immense surprise at Thorin, as though to be caught in its own web was totally impossible. A thread of filament oozed slowly from the thing's spinneret and collected in a crazy obscene coil on the cold stone surface.

Thorin kenlt over Coret and felt for the artery in her throat. The pulse was strong. He picked up the pistolet, turned the heat gauge up as far as it would go, and incinerated what was left of the Araqnid.

He then tried to lift Coret up. She was stuck to the floor strands, but that was readily fixed. He reversed the conductors again. Now the strands were in their reduced, non-oxygenated phase. Nothing would stick to them.

He folded the cape up, slipped it into his pack, holstered the pistolet, clamped his light in his visor, reversed the orientor, picked his wife up in his arms, and started out. By the time he had lowered her down into the balcony room, she had recovered consciousness and was able to drink some water from the fuel-cell flask.

She coughed, looked up at him, then took the little canteen with both hands. "My . . . God!"

"Yeah. But don't try to talk."

"What *was* it?"

"An Araqnid, I guess. Just rest awhile."

She handed the canteen back. "I saw the city."

He nodded toward the window. "The balcony?"

"No, not the balcony. He was in my brain, and I was in his. They programmed him while he was in his egg-sac. Complete with implanted memories. He was born one hundred percent educated. He knew how it was before the Death-One came. I know just about everything he knew. I can read those books in the balcony room."

"You're talking too much."

"All right. Can we get back?"

"I think so. It may take hours, but the orientor should get us there."

"He doubled back and circled around a lot."

"The orientor can cancel out the doubles and circles."

"I wonder if they've missed us yet."

"I guess so. I'm several hours overdue to make the evening call."

"They'll be there waiting for us."

"Maybe."

"We'd better start."

"You can't even stand."

"Yes I can. Help me up."

"And let me fix your hands. Your fingers are bleeding." He got out the first aid kit. "You'll have to do some climbing in those shafts."

"Do you have an extra cape and gloves?"

"Sure."

"But maybe we don't need them. Couldn't we just leave the power pack up there, plugged in to neutralize the web? Save a little weight that way, too."

"No. Too risky. We'll wear capes and carry the pack. I'll go back and get it. In the first place, the orientor is integral with the pack. Secondly, we may need the fuel-cell water before we get out. Finally, suppose the electrical effect quits?

"I just asked. Cape and gloves, then. What's the matter?"

"I was just wondering. The web. Maybe it's a good aerial."

"You could get a signal out?"

"Worth a try." He jabbed the aerial probe from his communicator into the nearest strand and adjusted the dials. "Calling Archeology 411. Thorin here."

The receiver crackled almost immediately. "Speidel here. Thorin, are you two all right."

"Pretty much, professor. Where are you?"

"I'm at the base. Jones is on his way now to your camp to check up on you. Why didn't you call in?"

"Professor, we've been having a sort of adventure. We couldn't shake free until just now. It's going to take us several hours to get out of here."

"Where are you?"

"Well, I guess you'd call it a network of tunnels and shafts. It used to be connected to Araqnia. Your lost city."

"*Araqnia*? Don't make jokes with me, young man."

"It is . . . it *was* Araqnia, professor. Right now, I don't really care whether you believe me or not."

"Hmm. Can you make it back to your camp?"

"I think so."

"Meet Jones there. Give him a full report."

"Whatever you say."

14. SPACEGRAMS

TX TO R SPEIDEL
CARE WOLFRAM MINING CORP
FERRIA
TRUSTEES REDUCING EXPEDITION BUDGET THIS SEASON AND NEXT; REGRET
NO VACANCIES
INTERSTELLAR GEOGRAPHIC

The professor sat down in the canvas chair. He looked up at Zachary Stone. "You know what it says?"

"Yes. Sorry, Professor."

"Actually, they've got two digs next year. They think I'm too old. Seventy isn't so old."

"Professor, listen to me. A dig is no picnic. You could break a hip real easy."

"A man with fifty years in the field doesn't have silly accidents."

"And right now you have a cold. Your eyes are watering, your nasals are blocked. You're running a degree of fever. You ought to be in bed."

"I can't. I've just contacted the Thorins. They claim they've found something. And perhaps I believe them. Anyway, I have to get up to Sylva." He arose. "But first, a word to Geographic. Could I use your TX again?"

"Of course. Just give the message to the clerk."

The professor wrote it out quickly:

TX TO INTERSTELLAR GEOGœ RAPHIC
WASHINGTON, D.C.
HAVE A LEAD ON ARAQNIA. DOES THIS CHANGE ANYTHING?
SPEIDEL

AS HE RETURNED down the path, Stone was waiting for him. "Can I do anything for you, Professor?"

"A couple of things."

"Say on."

"You once offered to lend us a blastovator. Perhaps facetiously?"

"I may have smiled. But it's yours. Just let us know when you want it, and for how long, so we can schedule our stripping operations."

"Can you get it up to Sylva for a couple of hours tomorrow? The Thorins talked about tunnels in the plateau. I'd like to cut through to one of them."

"No problem. We'll run it up on the ore freighter."

"This is a big help to me, Zachary. Perhaps it's just as well you got into mining."

"I was never much good at archeology."

"Not a popular career. Partly my fault. I don't inspire the kids. I see things. I see people moving in the past. But I don't know how to tell them, how to let them see."

"It's not everybody's bag, professor."

"No. Suppose not. Do you know how many ark majors I have in this group?"

"How many?"

"Not one. I don't count Jones. He's a post-grad assistant. They're all in it for the summer outing and the snap credit."

"You can't blame them, professor. My summer course with you in fifty seven was a real treasure. I met my wife there. Do they still have guitars and beer at midnight?"

"Yes, I think they do." The professor tapped his hat on firmly and blew his nose. "Damn cold. Can't throw 'em off the way I used to. The antivirals don't seem

to work for me." He let out his breath slowly.

"You ought to try Arizona or New Mexico, professor. Get out in the desert. Soak up the sun."

"You mean retire."

"Not necessarily. You could try some of the digs there. Cliff dwellers and such."

The professor shrugged. "I won't give up just yet. This lead on Araqnia will reopen the whole thing. Interstellar Geographic is going to change its mind."

"I hope you're right."

"When their offer comes in, could you TX it up to Sylva?"

"Sure, professor."

"Well, then, I'd better get on up there."

15. THE CUT TO THE TUNNEL

WITH THE AID of his orientor Thorin and the survey crew took bearings on the balcony-room corridor inside the hill. The great blastovator then moved up, zeroed in, and began chewing away at the hillside. They got through the overburden in a matter of seconds. The top soil simply disappeared from in front of the machine and reappeared as a dust storm out of the mouth of the waste conduit two hundred meters down the hillside. The engineer turned on the water spray at the conduit mouth and the dust quickly turned to a dirty gray sludge. And now they hit bed rock. It was lava. The operator turned up the heat, and the water spray below them turned to steam as it hit the white-hot particles of rock spewing out of the waste tube below them.

As the shaft jabbed deeper into the hillside the 'vator moved slowly forward with it. Within a quarter of an hour the operator had shut the cab visor, turned on his air conditioning, and the great machine disappeared into the shaft, dragging the waste tube with it. Fifteen minutes later it backed out again.

The professor ran over. "Did you reach the corridor?"

"Yes. Some kind of tunnel. It dead-ended right inside there. Full of sticky stuff. You through with me now, professor?"

"If you can wait another ten minutes, I would like Mr. Thorin to check. Make sure this is the right place."

"Lemme hose it down before you go in. It's still hot in there." He closed the visor and the 'vator rumbled forward once more. It disappeared into the shaft amid a cloud of steam, and reappeared a few minutes later.

"Well?" cried the professor.

"You can make it. But you'd better hold your breath while you're in the shaft, and you'd better run until you get into the far corridor."

"Fine. Thank you very much. You and the mining company have done the University a great service. Please express my gratitude to Mr. Stone."

"Sure, professor." The machine coiled up the waste conduit,

turned around, and lumbered off down the valley toward the waiting freighter.

"Well, I think we are ready," said the professor.

"Not quite," said Thorin.

"Why not?"

"Because of the webbing inside the corridor. I'll have to go in first to see if I can neutralize it with my power pack. And even though I may be successful at our entrance here, I'd like to take a cape and check the webbing through the entire length of the tunnel."

"Hmm. Yes. A good idea. Please proceed."

The instrumentalist pulled on his cape and entered the shaft. A few minutes later he was back. "All clear." He led the little party through the shaft.

The professor and Pompeii Jones were strangely silent as their handlights flickered over the stone walls of the corridor.

"Here is where I killed the Araqnid," said Thorin laconically. He pointed upward with his light to a great gap in the garlands of webbing. "I had the pistolet on 'high'. It vaporized him and melted the stone ceiling here. He was probably the last of his race."

The professor groaned. "A wanton needless act, Mr. Thorin. He would have been invaluable to us."

Thorin hesitated a moment, then turned around and faced the great man. "Professor Speidel, that is a very stupid remark. That thing nearly killed Coret and me. Now, watch the turn here."

The professor stared at him in amazement. Jones was horrified.

The savant cleared his throat. He said stiffly, "Well, I suppose you and Mrs. Thorin have had a rather trying experience. I can understand that you will need a little time to recover fully. So I am inclined to overlook—"

"The balcony room is straight ahead, and below," said Thorin shortly. "But before you get close to the balcony, there is a thing I have to do. So let me go on ahead."

"No more destruction, I hope," said the professor hurriedly.

"In a moment you can judge for yourself."

They entered the circular chamber.

"Beneath us is the dome room and the balcony," said Thorin. "I will drop this rope ladder down through the hole in the dome. Let me go first, and I will take a look around."

"Go ahead, but don't destroy anything," said the professor. "And, Jones, can you please call outside and tell the base where we are and what's going on."

"You can plug in to the nearest strand, said Thorin. "It's a good conductor and a good aerial."

Jones made immediate contact. He turned to the professor. "Sir, they've been trying to reach us. You have a TX relayed from Wolfram Mining."

"Ah, yes. From Interstellar Geographic?"

"Yes sir."

"They changed their minds!

They finally saw the light!"

Jones looked uncomfortable. "Could you step over here a moment sir?" He led the professor down the corridor from Coret. "The message said, 'Good luck on Araqnia. Still can't use you.' "

"Ah."

"Sorry, sir."

"It's a disappointment, of course. Too bad, too bad. They were the last, you know, Jones."

"Yes sir."

"I'm an old man. I'm . . . finished."

The assistant was silent.

Finally the professor asked, "Did you report our present location to the camp?"

"Not yet, sir."

"Tell them we're waiting to go down into some sort of room. With some sort of window."

"Yes sir."

After a moment Thorin called up. "All clear. Come on down."

The three clambered down the ladder.

The professor looked about in wonder. "Just imagine! A scientific laboratory! Intact. With apparatus and library. And there of course is the balcony. I can hear the street noises. And there's a shadow passing. By the great god Thoth! A window on Araqnia!"

"The window was made an an Araqnid archeologist named Eroch," said Coret. "He built it in order to look out on ancient Araqnia as it existed three thousand years beofre his time. The Araqnid watchers of our year one thousand B.C., who had attained space travel, looked through that balcony, and saw their ancestors of four thousand B.C. in carts drawn by animals.

"But then, in one thousand B.C., they learned that a nearby volcano was about to erupt. They decided to emigrate. But before they could get away, the Death-One came. And he came to them through this window. He came to Aragnia from our year 2177."

"I must have a look!" cried the professor.

Thorin barred his way. "Just a minute, professor."

"Stand aside, young man!"

"Not just yet. See that lens over the balcony?" Thorin let the beam of his handlight play on the TV barrel.

"Well, yes. So?"

"The Araqnids put it there deliberately. It is supposed to kill this thing they call the Death-One, so he won't go out on the balcony."

"But you stood here and it didn't kill you."

"True. And it was a stupid thing to do. But as it turned out, the lens rejected me."

"Well, do I look like this . . . whatever it is?"

"Not to me. But you might to them."

"Nonsense. I am going out on the balcony."

"You ought *not* to go out on the balcony. But in any case, before you even get near it, let me shoot out the lens."

"No! Wait—."

Thorin aimed and fired. There

was a tinkle of glass.

"Oh . . . oh . . . "moaned the professor.

"I think you *were* their Death-One, sir," said Coret. "I believe the comparator beam has been waiting for you for three thousand years. It was put there for the sole purpose of detecting you and then killing you, so that you would not go out on the balcony."

"I don't believe it! They never saw me before! And certainly I would not do them the slightest harm. Well, in any case, is it all clear now?"

"I think it is safe for you to stand in *front* of the balcony," said Thorin. He added firmly, "But I don't think you ought to go *out* on it."

"And why not?"

"Two reasons. Number one, suppose it is a one-way time passage? If that is the case, you're out there in their world of one thousand B.C., and you couldn't get back in here to 2177. Number two, suppose they grab you while you are standing there admiring the view?"

"Young man, why do you force this humiliation on me? Must I plead with you? Don't you realize what has happened? No one will hire me. I've been kicked out of archeology. It doesn't matter what happens out there. It doesn't matter whether I can get back.

"Sorry, professor. I can't let you risk it."

"I'm going out there, Thorin."

"No you are not, professor."

16. THE WINDOW

SEVERAL THINGS happened very suddenly.

The professor dashed for the balcony. Thorin made a flying leap and grabbed him by his left foot. He had him! But now Jones jumped into the melee. Jones grabbed at Thorin's arms. The professor's leg was free. The great man struggled to his feet, flushed, panting, and very angry. "How dare you!" he shouted at the instrumentalist.

"Professor . . ." ventured Thorin. But Jones stepped between them.

Coret spoke up. "Let him go." She held the pistolet loosely, not aiming at anyone in particular. But she was speaking to her husband.

Thorin stared at the weapon incredulously. "Coret . . . but why?"

The professor dusted off his jacket and without a backward glance stepped out on the balcony.

They watched him in awed silence as he leaned over the railing and looked up and down the vista. He interrupted his inspection a couple of times to cough and sneeze. Finally he pulled out his handkerchief and blew his nose with enthusiasm and turned to re-enter the room.

But it was as though he had run into a glass wall. He stepped back, shrugged his shoulders, waved toward them, then turned outward again.

"Coret . . . I tried to tell him," whispered Thorin.

They watched in horror.

"You mean, it really is one-way," said Jones hoarsely.

"Yes, it really is," said Thorin grimly.

In that moment a great shadow filled the balcony. The professor stepped back in hasty reflex. A group of furry things, each carrying a spidery creature on his shoulders, swarmed down an exit ramp out of the hovering airship, and then they hauled the professor back into the ship with them. The professor turned, got one arm free, and waved farewell. They caught wisps of his voice. When last seen, he was evidently trying to explain something to his captors. Then the airship vanished.

"They got him!" gurgled Jones. "They took him away."

"Just what he wanted, wasn't it?" said Thorin. He looked over at Coret. He held out his hand and she gave him the pistolet. It was on 'stun'. "I think perhaps you would have shot me if I hadn't let him go on through. Why?"

"It is as I said. He was the Death-One . . . the monster they dreaded. When he walked through, on to the balcony, he carried with him the disease that destroyed them."

"I thought he only had a cold."

"He did. But to them it was the black death. It killed their mounts—the Llanoans. And lacking mounts, they died. They couldn't eat, they couldn't drink."

"But even assuming his cold is what did it, why would you want to let him destroy them?"

"Don't you see, dear? Those four hundred heaps of iron oxide out on the launch pad are what is left of four hundred colonizing ships. The creature told me. If nothing had stopped them, they would have landed in the Nile Valley about one thousand B.C. Homo sapiens wouldn't have had a chance. We wouldn't be here today talking about it."

He looked at her wide-eyed. She was right, of course. "But why did they go to all this trouble, leaving behind guardians of the window,. and all that? Why not just turn off the time-stream?"

"They didn't know how. Eroch, the builder, was among the first to die. And since the professor came to them from three thousand years in their future, they knew they'd have to stop him—three thousand years in their future. Which for us is right now, this instant. Which meant they'd have to set up the comparator beam *then,* to kill the professor *now.* And they'd need a series of guardians—the Keepers—to see that the system was not disturbed for that three thousand years. It was remarkable that they got all this put together in the little time remaining to them. It was their bitter ironic paradox that their very efforts to destroy their Death-One, served to preserve him."

"All right," said Thorin. "The professor is gone. I think we must

count him missing in action possibly dead in the line of duty. And I don't see anything we can do about it." He flicked an inquiring glance over at Jones. "Pom-pom, I don't suppose you would want to go out there and look for him?"

"Not me."

"Then I think all we can do is notify the Interstellar Police and the University and any next of kin, and see if they have any recommendations. Meanwhile, I suggest that we call in the other teams and see how much of this stuff we can haul out of here."

17. A MEMORIAL

SOME TEN DAYS LATER, as they were packing the last of the books in the balcony room, Coret called out from the wooden scaffolding they had placed in front of the balcony. "Something is happening out there!"

Thorin came running. "There hasn't been any motion out there for three or four days. What is it?"

"Something is falling in the streets. Not rain. Hail . . .?"

Jones said uneasily, "That's ashes and lapilli. A volcano is erupting somewhere near here!"

"You mean, has already erupted," said Thorin. "Remember, we are looking at something that happened three thousand years ago."

"Wow! Look at that . . ."

"Volcanic bombs," said Jones. "Globs of molten pumice as big as your head."

"And those flashes of light!" cried Coret. "What's happening?"

"It's lightning—from the volcano," said Jones.

"So that's what finished them," said Thorin. "The volcano."

They looked at each other in shocked silence.

"The professor . . .?" whispered Coret.

"He dies a hero," said Jones.

"*Died*," said Thorin. "Out there, it's one thousand B.C."

The room began to vibrate.

"I think we have caught a molten flow," said Jones. "It's filling the streets."

"How high can it get," asked Thorin.

"I don't know. Vesuvius covered Herculaneum to a depth of over ten meters. But lava flows several miles deep are not uncommon."

"I think we had better get out of here," said Coret.

"But all this took place thirty centuries ago," said Thorin. "Here we are in the twenty-second century. It can't touch us."

"Just the same, I think we'd better get out. The window might not hold."

The room began to rumble.

Jones pointed at the balcony. His voice shook. "White-hot! And it's already filled up the street." He dropped his books on the floor and started up the ladder.

The others looked at Thorin. "We can come back tomorrow," said Coret. "If there's anything to

come back to."

"Yes. Everybody grab whatever you can carry. Let's go. Women first." He picked up the volumes that Jones had dropped and brought up the rear of the group.

Outside, they dropped their loads on the tarpaulins spread out on the ground and turned back to listen.

Thorin moved over to Coret. "That's why no trace of Araqnia had ever been found here before now. The lava must have covered the city completely."

Coret put a finger to her lips. "Listen!"

They looked up at the entrance to the shaft. The sound began as a barely audible rumble. And then it grew louder, and became a continuing muffled thunder. A cloud of dust swirled out of the tunnel mouth.

Looking back every other step, the group edged uneasily down the slope.

And then the rumble died away.

"I think the window collapsed," said Thorin. He looked at Jones inquiringly.

The other shrugged his shoulders. "Very likely. Perhaps the combination of several thousands of pounds pressure and the white heat were too much for it."

"But why did the lava stop?"

"It probably filled up the room, ran along the corridor for a hundred meters or so, and then it cooled down enough to form a plug."

"The window is gone?"

"Gone," said Jones.

"So this is all we will ever have . . ." Thorin waved his hand at the books and boxes. "Even so, enough for a thesis for all of us."

Jones turned his face away. "Don't expect me to do it."

"But you're the only ark in the group."

"I don't care. And anyway, I'm getting out of ark. A fellow could gert hurt in this business. I'm transferring to classical languages."

"All right, Pom-pom. Anybody else? Lots of stuff here. We really ought to do something with it. We owe it to the professor."

They all shook their heads. "I'm in stage design," said one. Another: "I'm phys. ed. I just did this for the easy credit." A third, "This fall, I'm overloaded with Englit."

Thorin lifted his hands in a hapless gesture. "All right, all right. Of the whole bunch here, I'm the one least qualified. But somebody has got to do it. We can't let the professor walk out for nothing. So I'll do it, even if I have to switch my major from instrumentation."

"I can help," said Coret.

"Yeah," said Thorin.

"I mean, I really can. I can read Araqnid. I got it from the creature—from Number Ten. You and I can completely reconstruct life in Araqnia. The books tell their technology. Their space drive. It's beyond nuclear: it's an anti-grav system."

"Well, what do you know. Anyone want to join us?" he asked.

"Any science majors here? Phys? Chem? Engineering? Instrumentation? Anyone for fame, fortune, and maybe an A+?"

Silence.

"It's all yours," said Jones. "And you've certainly earned it."

"So be it. Well, one last thing. Any art majors here?"

A lone arm thrust up reluctantly.

"We want a memorial for the professor," said Thorin. "See if you can create a design, maybe with a couple of araqnids in the borders."

"Where's this going to be, and how big?"

"In the rock by the corridor excavation. Let's have a big one, say three meters on a side. We can burn it out with my pistolet."

"What words go on it?"

"Don't really know. But it ought to say something important. Like,

DOCTOR REITER SPEIDEL ARAQNIA, 2177.

"The Council of Universities would certainly ennoble him," said Coret.

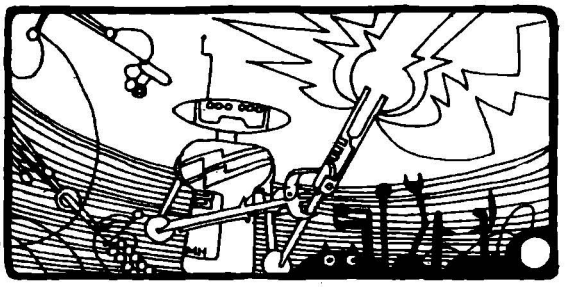
"Yeah. Make that Baron Doctor."

"Anything else?"

Thorin thought of the professor spreading germs in the sacred Araqnid air. "Yeah, add a kind of motto, maybe in small print: 'Archeology is a process of destruction.' "

—CHARLES L. HARNESS

...OR SO YOU SAY



Letters intended for publication should by typed, double-spaced on one side of each sheet, and addressed to *Or so You Say*, Box 409, Falls Church, Va. 22046.

Brian Stableford's "S.F.: The Nature of the Medium" in our August issue provoked considerable response, of which a selection follows without editorial comment.–TW

Dear Mr. White,

Only by an intellectual chopping and stretching, so to speak, of almost Prokrustean violence can science fiction be described as a medium of communication. It is a *mode* of communication and entertainment *via* the *medium* of the printed word (or, occasionally and, as a rule, badly, the celluloid film). This observation is not mere semantical nit-picking, for it is his failure to distinguish "medium," which is to say "means" or "agency," from "mode," a "method of procedure" or "form of manifestation," that vitiates the theoretical structure erected by Mr. Stableford to support his conclusions. (The above definitions are those of the fifth edition of the Pocket Oxford Dictionary.)

As a mathematician, I am extremely well acquainted with the related processes of abstraction and generalization. A large part of mathematics consists in abstracting from a family of concepts some common feature and studying the class of mathematical constructs possessing that feature. Thus, in elementary geometry one studies the triangle, a plane, three-sided figure with straight sides, and in algebra one studies the "group," a set with a binary operation defined thereon so as to satisfy certain rather simple laws. One discovers in the process that a great deal can be said about triangles and groups; indeed, there is a whole branch of modern mathematics, called "group theory," devoted entirely to the study of abstract groups. But, and this is a crucial point, in the process of abstraction some information is lost. The triangle formed by three corners of my living-room ceiling has certain properties not possessed by an arbitrary triangle, or even by an arbitrary right triangle, just as the additive group of the integers has certain properties not possessed by an arbitrary group, or even by an arbitrary commutative group. *It is precisely that loss of specific information which makes abstraction and generalization such powerful tools*, in that attention is focussed on those features of the objects or concepts under study which are in some context of greatest importance or interest.

Now, one way to view the progres-

sion from speech to writing to print is as a process of abstraction. Although he does not use the term, Mr. Stableford nevertheless describes the process quite clearly. Of course, other factors are involved as well, but this point of view is a useful one. For example, one effect of the process, here as in mathematics, is to facilitate the interpretation and manipulation of those aspects of the original objects preserved by the abstraction. As Mr. Stableford puts it, "translation of writing into print . . . increases the speed of reading and the generalization of the activity."

But the relationship of "literature" to "print" is clearly of a quite different nature. One might reasonably describe literature as an abstraction from human experience, an abstraction which is then preserved and transmitted *via* the medium of print; but to speak of it as deriving from print by a process of abstraction or of selecting for emphasis or retention certain features of the latter is plainly nonsense. It is in fact difficult to imagine what the next term of the sequence "speech, writing, print" might be. (One possibility might be the transmission of data in the form of sequences of zeroes and ones. Such transmission lacks even the vestiges of character preserved in print, retaining only its linearity.) In any case, Mr. Stableford's "family tree of SF" has a gaping discontinuity between "print" and "literature," a circumstance which knocks his elaborate and ingenious theory into a cocked hat.

Nevertheless, I consider Mr. Stableford's *conclusions* to be, in the main, entirely sound. To see why this is so one must re-investigate in the light of the foregoing comments the nature of the relationship between literature and science fiction.

A natural question is whether that relationship is analogous to that which obtains between, say, writing and print. However, a moment's reflection should suffice to show that this is probably not the case. Perhaps the easiest way to see this is to observe that there are techniques available to the writer of science fiction which are quite without parallel in the repertoire of the so-called "mainstream author," the most obvious example being the creation, in voluminous and minute detail, of worlds and cultures altogether different from our own, as exemplified by *The Left Hand of Darkness, Dune, Red Moon and Black Mountain,* and—example *par excellence*—Tolkien's Ring Trilogy. This technique is a tool wherewith the writer of science fiction can construct and carry out elaborate and exquisitely detailed sociological "thought experiments" of a kind utterly denied the mainstream writer, whose closest approach to such conceptual freedom is by way of the historical novel. (It would be interesting to discover how many readers of science fiction are also fond of the well-researched historical novel.) This observation alone is not, perhaps, conclusive evidence, although the total absence of any parallel is at the very least extremely suggestive. But one may further observe that although they overlap considerably, the subject areas of literature and of science fiction are distinct. It would be more nearly correct to say that that of science fiction includes that of literature than to hold the converse view, and insofar as that inclusion is valid it might, for some purposes, be useful to consider science fiction as arising from literature *via* a process of abstraction and selection, (in which event, be it noted, literature would

properly be viewed as science fiction which has been subjected to certain additional constraints—just as commutative groups are groups whose elements obey the further restriction that a+b = b+a—so that it would still not be the case that what is "good" or "useful" in literature is *a fortiori* "good" or "useful" in science fiction); but I think it more accurate and much more natural to regard literature and science fiction, as well as science, as *parallel* abstractions from human experience emphasizing different facets thereof.

Adoption of this point of view has several immediate and welcome consequences. No longer can one regard science fiction as a provincially third-rate enclave of literature, for the two are seen to be separate entities. Thus, in particular, there is no reason to suppose, *a priori*, that the standards and techniques of literature will necessarily be applicable to science fiction. On the other hand, it is apparent that literature and science fiction are far more similar, morphologically, than are, say, literature and science. Consequently, one would expect to find that many of these same standards and techniques *will* be applicable. This is of course the case: the better-written book (in the literary sense) is *ceteris paribus* almost invariably the better book (as science fiction). The present eminence of Ursula K. LeGuin and Robert Silverberg, two quite different writers, is in large part due to their ability to combine literary with "science-fictional" excellence in their writing. The fate of any given technique must be determined by its compatibility with the aims and subject matter of the field; and although such compatibility (or its lack) must often be judged on the basis of actual experiment, certain guiding principles can be reduced. Mr. Stableford makes, in this connection, an extremely pertinent observation:

Many techniques evolved in the mainstream increase the density *of data, relying on [their] familiarity to enhance pattern-perception. SF deals with data which [are] fundamentally exotic, and simplicity of organisation cannot be so readily disposed of.*

It is also worth pointing out, however, that science fiction is much younger than literature, and that it is therefore quite probable that the techniques of the former are nowhere near as completely mastered and delimited as those of the latter, a circumstance which should serve to encourage further experimentation.

Finally, the point of view herein adopted suggests a partial justification for the "ghetto-like" nature of the science fiction community: if science fiction and literature be truly "separate but equal," then there is no reason for their respective audiences to be co-extensive. If it is commendable for a nuclear physicist to read Shakespeare or for a Shakespearean scholar to understand the integral calculus, it is nevertheless, I regret to say, noteworthy: one does not expect it. For myself, I feel that the aspects of human experience emphasized and studied by science, science fiction, and literature are all important, and that no-one who is totally unfamiliar with any one of these fields can claim to be well-educated.

Literature can tell us where we are and whence we got there, and science can tell us whither we might go and how to get there; science fiction can help us to decide whither we *want* to go and to keep sane in our headlong

career—while entertaining us into the bargain.

BRIAN M. SCOTT
680 W. Badger Rd., Apt. 5
Madison, Wisconsin 53713

Dear Mr. White:

I would like to thank Brian Stableford for standing up to all those nasty elitists who want science fiction to be literary. I must say we haven't had such a heroic defense against the *Littérateurs* since John W. Campbell. Of course, Mr. Stableford never says quite what properties of the mainstream the *littérateurs* are trying to force upon us, but presumably it's the ones we hear the most demands for—rounded characterization, believable dialog, good prose style—that sort of thing. I used to worry about that too, but now Mr. Stableford has set me free.

While he's at it, he could use all the same arguments to make the readers of pornography feel better about their reading habits. Of course, pornography appears to cover only a small part of the literary field, but in "mediumistic" terms, that means that pornography actually contains literature; and as Mr. Stableford points out, it would be ludicrous to expect pornography to fulfill all the functions and potentials of literature. Furthermore, we don't have to worry about literary standards, since pornography is a different medium. We cannot define pornography—we can only describe it, and no amount of pontificating on the part of literary critics can ultimately change or conceal the fact that different people may use pornography in different ways.

ARTHUR D. HLAVATY
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New Rochelle, N.Y. 10801

Dear Mr. White,

I wonder how many readers had a double-take reaction to Brian Stableford's "SF: the Nature of the Medium"? My first take was one of enthusiastic agreement; my second, of puzzlement. Let me explain.

Mr. Stableford has given sound, tightly logical support to one of my own favorite prejudices; hence the enthusiasm. "We cannot judge SF purely and simply by 'literary standards'," he says. Amen, brother. And, while not going all the way with his McLuhanish justification, I heartily agree that SF's extrapolative function is what "mainstream" critics, and my academic colleagues especially, have most consistently misunderstood. An academic critic from "outside" the genre who is trying to say something nice about it can conceive of SF as satire (i.e., as a sideways comment on our *present* conditon); or as allegory (i.e., as timeless, mythic, and universal); or as psychological symbolism (and hence, if you're orthodox Freudian or Jungian, also timeless mythic and universal). What he cannot conceive of is that SF intends its extrapolation *seriously*. In this respect even Hugo Gernsback with his heavy, one-dimensional technical predictions, was nearer the mark than many of my fellow academicians. I am thinking of one chap who assigned James Blish's *Triumph of Time* in an American lit. class. Well and good, except that he managed to give it a Freudian explanation! Such may well be in it, I suppose. But Blish himself says he wanted to write a novel about the end of the universe . . .

"We cannot define SF—we can only describe it," Stableford goes on. With that ringing in my ears, I read the stories in the same issue of AMAZING, trying to apply to them Stableford's

Law: "SF extends only part of the range of sensory experience which is the concern of literature, but it extends it in a different direction . . . more temporal than spatial." And hence my second take, of puzzlement. For most of what you printed in the August issue is not really extrapolative at all!

Take the serial, for example. Unless you posit that the history of the galaxy is going to be a circular replay of the history of man on this planet (which, to be sure, some SF writers tend to assume:Blish, Asimov, Poul Anderson), then the first installment of "The Domains of Koryphon" is not a journey to the future but into the past. Specifically, the nineteenth century. Here is Euro-American imperialism in full flower, on a continent which variously resembles the Rocky Mountain West, the South African veldt, and the Australian bush. Here is an island-city with its cosmopolitan outlanders (Singapore, maybe, or Cape Town), off the coast of an imperial domain lorded over by patroons, *haciendero*s, or—as Vance acknowledges in his second footnote—big ranchers. Here are Indians, with a distillate of the practices of various North American peoples: torture of prisoners, a socially-sanctioned caste of deviates, making people run the gantlet, etc. But they are not only American Indians, they are also Indian Indians (or Pakistanis); Muffin, grown to manhood, can't dine in the white man's Great Hall. Kipling said it a long while ago in a short story "The Man Who Was," speaking of a flashy polo player named Hira Singh: "Of course, he could not eat in the mess". Don't misunderstand me. I think "Domains" is good stuff; character portrayal is soundly novelistic, in the old-fashioned way of which John Galsworthy was a master and which Mary McCarthy can still do well. But extrapolation? Hardly.

The short story "Searching the Ruins" illustrates the point in another way. You have published quite a few in this vein, which in their language, treatment of sex, generational attitudes, and so on, have sought to be "relevant"—an already dated word. The trouble is that their "relevance" is to the middle Sixties; and far from being fresh and contemporary, a story like Thurston's sounds even more archaic than Vance's, which can be read in the leisurely fashion of a historical novel. To take one painful example: how relevant is it to have the adolescent character still referring to all cops as "pigs" and to Washington as Piggington, D.C.—in an era when a power-hungry President (at present writing) seems about to be brought down ultimately because of some smart police work by one of Washington, D.C.'s cops who happened to make the bust at Watergate? This 1960's countercultural theme is getting to sound terribly dated; can such old-hat stuff be extrapolative, in Brian Stableford's sense? I doubt it very much.

The point is underscored when "Searching" is compared with Demmon's and your own "Manhattan Square Dance." There, you have brought it off convincingly. I agree with your headnote; the story did not require a since-1964 revision. True, it (like Thurston's) contains thematic material of the mid-Sixties; the commune situation, for example—compare an episode in *Easy Rider* (1969). But, as the Panshins might say, you have transcended it. The question before the house: what makes one SF story convincingly extrapolative, and another not?

Finally, there's "New Route to the Indies", which *reverses* Stableford's categories; the medium is SF, and the content is—what? Fantasy, a la the old *Unknown*?

It gives one furiously to think, as Hercule Poirot used to say.

PAUL A. CARTER
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Why not narrow your question down to, "What makes one story convincing, and another not?" That, of course, will require a corellary question: "Convincing to whom?"—TW

Dear Mr. White,

If this letter has all sorts of bizarre typing errors in it, I apologize, but I am writing this at 1:20 A.M., the only time I seem to be free anymore.

The reason I am writing is to praise you on your story "Manhatten Square Dance". At last someone in Science-Fiction has treated the subject of the counter-culture with a positive atitude, or at least a fair amount of objectiveity. I've been quite fed up with stories knocking hippies, as the characters in "Manhatten . . ." knocked the bleekers. The favorite repository for the anti-hippie sentiment in s-f has been in *Analog* with such absurd work's as "Generation Gaps" by Clancy O'Brien in the September 1972 issue. (I enjoy most *Analog* fiction immensely, but their politics can drive me up a wall.) In that story he has the counter-culture running the country; with the result being illiteracy, ignorance, the collapse of civilization, and the creation of five-year old cannabals. Now come off it!

But the animosity does not flow in both directions. The youths of today, and particularily the counter-culture adherents, are great fans of science-fiction and fantasy. Witness the underground popularity of the Tolkien triolgy, and the production of such albums as *Blows against the Empire* by Paul Kanter and the Jefferson Starship, an offshot of the Jefferson Airplane; champions of the San Franscisco movement. In that album, the entire side two is devoted to telling the tale of a band of people hijacking a starship and leaving Earth for better things. Frank Zappa on his *Freak-Out* album, lists those people who have influenced him in his music, and among them are Cordwainer Smith and Theodore Sturgeon. Paul Kantner lists on his album thanks to: Kurt Vonnegut, Theodore Sturgeon, and Robert Heinlein. I wonder what Heinlein would think about that?

So why not write a few tales giving the culture a chance? They're on our side, after all.

A final question, or perhaps plea. Where is Chad Oliver?

JOHN NIZALOWSKI
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New York 13736

At a recent convention a long-time fan came up to me and said, "I just read your story in AMAZING*–you know, I recognized nearly everyone in it." In fact, the bleeckers and their society was modelled on a group of fans who lived in New York City in the late 1950's. Which may go to show that a) the counter-culture predates the current "hippie" focus; b) sf fans are ahead of their times; or c) our diverse culture has always had room in it for bohemian sub-cultures. Or d) none of the above.* –TW

Dear Ted White:

I write to protest your answer to Don Schenk's letter in the August '74

issue. From up here in New Hampshire it would seem that whether or not Mr. Schenk is a bigot, his carefully thought out criticism of Brunner's novel deserved more than your saying that he was a pot and had no call to look at the kettle.

Personally, I enjoyed the novel—liked it enough to buy it again in paperback—but I was not blind to Brunner's stacking the deck, and (in places) knee-jerk liberal attitude. Personnally, I believe *you* let the author down when you didn't ask for rewrites and insist that the good guys be a little less self-righteous or, at the very least, the bad guys not all steal candy from children and kick dogs. What could have been a great book was thereby reduced to merely a good one.

JON P. OGDEN
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You seriously misquote my response to Don Schenk. In its entirety, it read: "The point of science fiction is that many viewpoints have validity. It seems to me that you've missed most of Brunner's points, and are unwilling to grant any of them validity–thus matching his 'bigotry' with your own." The point of that reply is tolerance for differing viewpoints, not an attack upon reader Schenk, who has a perfect right to his viewpoint, however much I or anyone else may disagree with it. His letter produced several responses, however, two of which follow. –TW

Dear Ted,

The bigotry of Don Schenk (lettercol, Aug. AMAZING) is shown in a very concrete way, as well as in the general tone of his letter. I have no idea whether Brunner would be personally offended at the congruency of "The man exploits workers, molests children, and writes science fiction". I rather doubt it. But I find it interesting that Schenk jumped onto his bandwagon at the description of "small-time thief, practising Catholic, treated his wife abominably". Because, by god, I feel a lot more offended by Schenk's own phraseology: "a Jewish queer, who's defensive about being both" and "a Homosexual Jew as a replacement for the good old Drunk Village Atheist".

I enjoyed Brunner's story very much; did not in fact find it so much confusing, as intriguing. And I felt that the extrapolation of current trends was quite accurate in pointing up their absurdist facets. For me, though, one of the most exciting factors of the story was the inclusion of a gay person, as a whole character. He was not placed in the story *because of* his sexual activity. I did not feel that this factor merited comment, because I believe that science fiction is about the only place in contemporary literature where such a feat is possible. But I was glad, because even s-f writers are just coming to admit that gay males and lesbians exist (a rather belated admission; how many years ago did Kinsey point out that one man in ten is gay, and that one man in two has enjoyed homosex?).

I found Schenk's use of the noun "queer" to be both personally offensive, and singularly without taste. It was rivalled only by his description of a woman as "the broad who beds him", Gay males are not queers, nor are women broads, any more than black people are niggers, or Semitic people are kikes. The use of words like "queer" implies that the speaker/writer has a vision of the sub-

ject as wholly Other, completely and irremediably alien from himself. To have someone speak of me that way, is intensely offensive.

Schenk's letter was indeed "pretty disjointed", and even the irony of his protest against alleged anti-Catholic sentiment in Brunner's story cannot alleviate my own profound irritation—no, *anger*, at such callous bigotry.

Thank you for allowing me to sound off.

DENYS HOWARD
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Portland
Orygun 97214

Dear Ted,

I normally don't write letters of comment but the letter by Don Schenk riled me into it. I must admit also that I didn't like "The Stone That Never Came Down" either but for vastly different reasons than Mr. Schenk. I just thought that the novel was John Brunner writing left-wing relevant again which wouldn't be bad in itself (everyone is entitled to their opinion), but it's so predictable. However, and here's where I part company with Mr. Schenk, I don't think John Brunner is an anti-Catholic (or anti-Christian bigot). In fact I think John Brunner was raised as a Catholic though I can't be sure of this as I've never met John Brunner or had any two way communication with him. He had a Jesuit hero in *Times Without Number* though which Mr. Schenk probably has not read. In answer to a couple of his other questions: there has never been a religion that was neither persecuted or a persecutor and that includes secular religions like Communism and Nazism. In fact the worst persecution of Catholics that I can recall offhand was during the French Revolution, all in the name of the goddess Reason. Try reading *The Man Who Killed the King* by Wheatley if you want examples. On the other hand I am getting a wee bit tired of Brunner's heros and villains coming out of an underground newspaper.

As to Richard Nixon, Watergate, et. al. We have the unsavory choice between a president who aided and abetted the coverup and is a crook or one who knew nothing and is incompetent. In spite of all that I don't think he's to blame for the energy crisis. The basic fact is that anyone with any brains saw it coming years ago but neither the president nor Congress (and I blame Congress more in this) wanted to face it. After all the average American would rather be cut into little pieces than have to give up the unrestricted use of his car and the Congress knows it. We will all be facing a tremendous change in our lifestile over the next few years and look for all our leaders to pass the buck because the average American isn't going to like it. I won't either even though I know intellectually that it's necessary.

I hope I don't sound like a crank. I like your magazines for the most part. I haven't liked everything but who does? I usually like something in each issue. I'm a Jack Vance fan but won't be reading the serial until part two.

LYNNE HOLDOM
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Dear People:

I do not wish to start an abortion debate in your magazine; such a debate obviously cannot be resolved since both sides seem adamant in their positions. However, I do think

that the question of the here-and-now impinges on the writings of science fiction. True, there are stories which reflect the horror of forced abortion, sterilization, or euthanasia. But the overwhelming point of these stories is that unless present population trends are curbed, these alternatives will be the only ones open to cope with an over-abundance of humanity.

Mr. Rob Carson, who wrote so fervently in August issue against abortion will never, I repeat, never, be faced with so much as the remote possibility of an unwanted pregnancy. I am a woman. It is a part of my life to consider the possibility of pregnancy. I am not, by conditioning or temperment, a candidate for motherhood. Furthermore, I have hereditary disease which has already passed through at least five generations in my family; I am not about to perpetuate that kind of genetic material. I believe it would be highly irresponsible for me to bring a child into the world. Accordingly, I practice birth control, but even the Pill has a failure rate, increased dramatically if I should inadvertently miss a pill.

The thought of a parasite feeding on my blood and growing inside repulses me. It is a parasite because it can have no existance apart from me, and cannot sustain its own life. Laws or not, I would, even at the very real risk of my life, have a backstreet abortion if no other type was available.

If Mr. Carson's wife ever has children, he may discover how expensive delivery and up-keep of children is. However, he will never know the sensation of being torn apart as a seven-pound creature emerges from the vagina . . . or labor pains, or the cramped feeling of something pushing all the intestines upward for months.

He uses the catch-phrase about adoption. It almost amuses me. Each "Adoption not Abortion" sticker is a plea for healthy, white infants. There's more than enough children up for adoption already, literally thousands whom no one will take because they are black, or some other minority group, or physically or mentally defective, or over-age. I will believe in putting unwanted children up for adoption after these have been taken by the anti-abortionists. I will have sympathy for the fear of euthanasia being used on the retarded and old when the anti-abortionists have removed the problem by taking as many of these people into their homes as possible, and have contributed their time and money to institutions if they can't.

Ultimately, I have faith that abortion will remain legal for those of us who feel it is our right, and the right of the unborn. "Never to love or laugh," says another bumper sticker. And never to starve or cry, either. In my women's section of my library, there are numerous books about the utter immorality and degeneracy of birth control and divorce, screaming for the wrath of heaven to fall on the law-makers who acceded to the will of the majority and liberalized the laws. Abortion will go the same way.

Personally, the anti-abortion people I've talked to have been priests or nuns (celibate, and hence, never worried about providing for a child), men who will never be pregnant, and quite often, guilty women. Two of the most intense advocates of the "pro-life" movement were high school friends. One had been forced to get married by her pregnancy, ruining her husband's chance of attending a large univeristy, because the loan stipulated that the student must be

unmarried. The other woman had had an abortion. When her boyfriend found out, he nearly beat her to death for killing his "son" (daughters didn't count). They later married and because of the unskilled manner in which her abortion was performed, she is unable to have children. Her husband still beats her and has shaved her head. I admit this is an abberant case, but when this woman approaches me with the lurid literature of the movement, what am I to think?

I, too, write to Congress regularly. . . . urging that abortion remain safe, legal, and inexpensive. Abortion should never the the first line of birth control; it should be the last resort in family planning. Of course, birth control once was illegal, also. I also write to my state legislature when they try to pass punitive measures, such as requiring an unnecessary ceasarean section for all abortions to discourage women from having them.

I want to be certain that the world is never so overcrowded that worlds such as those in "Silent Evening" (in *Again, Dangerous Visions*) and *Stand on Zanzibar* ever exist.

LOLA L. LUCAS
8246 Jefferson
St. Louis, Mo. 63114

My reply to Rob Carson in the August issue dealt with two subjects–drugs and abortion. Of necessity, much which should have been said to buttress the points I was making was sacrificed for considerations of space–and even then my comments were as long as Carson's letter. Thus I'm grateful to Ms. Lucas for providing some of these buttressing points as well as a perhaps more relevant podium from which to make them. I will take issue with her on one point, however: her description of childbirth as "the sensation of being torn apart as a seven-pound creature emerges from the vagina . . ." From her letter I assume this description is second-hand, and it perpetuates a long-standing myth which should be firmly disposed of. In fact, if the prospective mother takes any training in the various forms of "natural" childbirth (my wife used the Lamaze method) there is no reason for a normal, healthy birth to feel like that. My wife described the birth of our daughter as orgasmic, a peak-experience, and said that if only pregnancy and raising the child afterwards were not involved she'd like to have lots more. I think it is significant that in parallel with the legalization of abortion for unwanted children there is a movement to improve and humanize the birthing of wanted *children.*–TW

Dear Ted:

I would like to begin by commenting upon a letter from Mr. Federowicz, published in the April AMAZING. I too share his wish for immortality. There are too many things to do in this world that a person obviously can't do if he dies.

My interest in this has been renewed lately since I just finished reading Heinlein's *Time Enough for Love*. Amazingly, this is the first of his novels that I have read involving Lazarus Long. Now I don't know if I should buy *Methuselah's Children* because I've read the last book in the Lazarus series. Please list his other novels involving Lazarus or characters he portrayed.

I attended an astronomy club meeting May 20, where a lecture on black holes was given. It seems that these theoretical possibilities are our only chance of exploring the universe. Ever since I could understand space

(Cont. on page 129)

Editorial (cont. from page 4)
the chance to prove himself. He may become the best president since Truman—there are a number of parallels—and I wish him success.

And what of Mr. Nixon? In leaving his office he admitted nothing—save that his "political base" in Congress had eroded, surely the most debased use of our language yet to issue from that man. But his final, grudging release of the transcripts of his conversations authorizing the Watergate coverup is in itself a tacit admission of his enormous guilt. Nor are these transcripts the final word on his criminality—other tapes have been turned over to the Special Prosecutor, and more may follow.

Some people are saying now that Nixon's humiliation and resignation are "punishment enough" and that he should not be prosecuted for his crimes—although his aides are being prosecuted for them even now—or that if prosecuted and convicted he should be pardoned by a joint act of Congress and President Ford (any pardon from Ford alone would be suspect and would seriously tarnish Ford's administration).

But Nixon committed unique crimes—crimes which are perhaps the closest to High Treason any man in the United States may commit—the crimes of corrupting the office of the Presidency. He used his position as "the most powerful man in the world" to wreak havoc upon his office, to attempt the corruption of high government agencies (the FBI, the CIA, the IRS, etc.), to institute a covert police state, to personally enrich himself, and to gather to himself *power for the sake of power.* It is becoming clear from the published transcripts of his White House tapes that he had neither the intelligence nor the inclination to make good use of this power—the *fact* of the power was enough for him in itself.

Surely no man can commit such high crimes, causing the indictment, prosecution, and, in many cases already, conviction of virtually his entire staff—and walk away free to enjoy such benefits as approximately $175,000 annually in benefits accruing to ex-presidents, still free to proclaim his innocence and martyrdom, still free to try yet another "comeback" when the public has forgotten his perfidity (as he hinted in his resignation speech).

It will be a grave miscarriage of justice if Richard M. Nixon is not brought to court to answer for his crimes.

I want to make a few predictions—predictions you can check me out on a few years from now. I would be happy to see them proved wrong.

1. Richard Nixon will never stand trial. If the Special Prosecutor moves for his indictment, Nixon will leave the country—perhaps joining Robert Vesco in exile, safe from extradition. He will be financed by his pals, Alplanap and Rebozo, who will liquidate his assets in this country (most of which will turn out to be in their names or in their control anyway).

2. Within five to ten years, if Nixon succeeds in avoiding prosecution, he will surface again in a major international scandal, probably financial, not unlike that in which Vesco was involved. The cover story may include international "goodwill" diplomacy, and the like—not unlike that presently being conducted by his former Vice President, Spiro Agnew, who is now euphemistically described as involved in "export-imports." It may involve illegal trade in drugs or currency, or it may be merely good

old-fashioned business-world hanky-panky.

Time will tell.

IN THE MEANTIME: I sincerely hope that the above will be my last editorial on a political subject, and that events will require no more from me on these topics.

THE ISSUE AT HAND: This issue we've foresworn our usual balance of serial-to-shorts and present both more stories and stories of more varied lengths. This is in the nature of an experiment, and one on which I am soliciting your response. In upcoming issues I intend to continue varying the mix—I have some surprises in store!—and now more than ever I need your letters. Tell me what I'm doing right and what I'm doing wrong. It is impossible to publish—or even to answer—every letter I receive, but I *do* read them all, from hastily scrawled one-liners to carefully thought out essays-at-length. It is impossible to deal with every request, but each is weighed and a consensus is searched for among responses.

—TED WHITE

Or So You Say (Cont. from page 127)

exploration, I've yearned to explore the universe, and perhaps find a place where immortality is possible. Perhaps this urge to explore the stars is the reason that I decided to become an astronomer. I am currently majoring in astronomy at the University of Maryland.

I hope that if Michael sees this, he will write to me. Even today, I look forward to be placed in suspended so that I can go on those "Star Trek" adventures among the stars, "where no man has gone before."

Finally, I would like to mention a new amateur astronomy group to any astronomy enthusiasts reading this. It is called American Astronomical Research Group, located at Box 1000, Teaneck, N.J. 07666. They plan to have a huge observatory complex and a data retrieval system. Write to them for details.

THOMAS HUPFELD
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To the best of my memory, Methuselah's Children *was the only other Heinlein novel in which Lazarus Long appeared. But it was part of his Future History series, and Long may be alluded to elsewhere in that series, as well.*—TW

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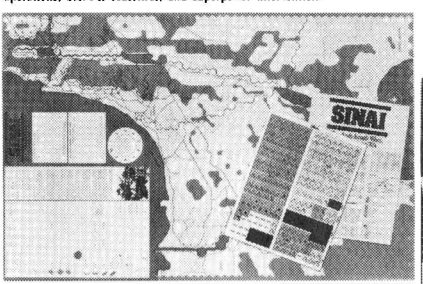

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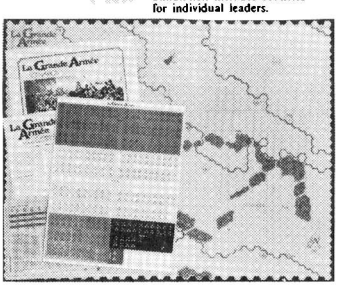

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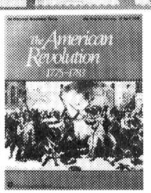

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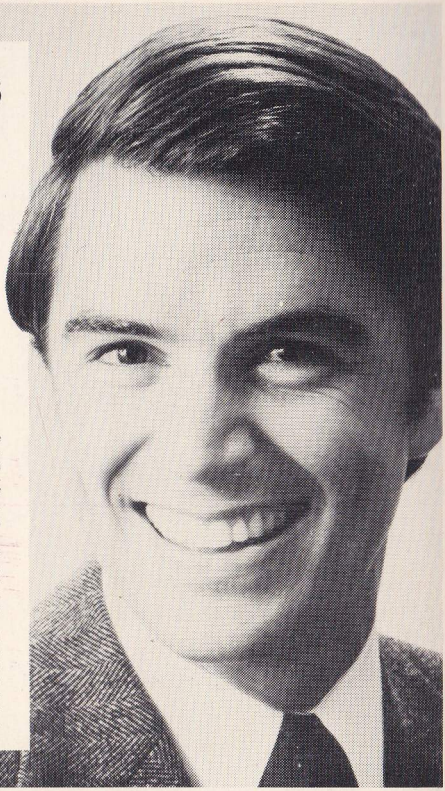

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