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THE
WHITE



EDITORIAL

FIRE FIRE! At about 10:00 pm, on Friday, August 8, a fire swept through the upper part of my house, ultimately destroying two rooms on the second floor and causing considerable water damage in the lower-floor rooms. Unfortunately, one of the lower-floor rooms most damaged by water was my office—which, after the firemen had left, was about a foot deep in wet paper. (While I am grateful to the firemen for saving most of my house, I rather wish they had restrained their impulses to knock piles of manuscripts off shelves and my desk onto the floor, to throw a chair across my desk, and to smash windows in parts of the house remote from the fire.)

The cleaning up will be a long, arduous task. It took me several days to clear the layer of soot and plaster—in some places several inches thick—from the floors of the ground-floor rooms. I've yet to sort through the huge pile of debris in the yard to see what can be salvaged from that. Rebuilding will take several months—the roof must be taken off, the entire second floor of half the house must be torn down, and the walls and ceilings below—all plaster—must be stripped to the framing and rebuilt anew.

Damage to my collections of books, magazines and records was astonishingly light, when the potential for damage is considered, but the comics

(which were in my office) were all soaked, and it's impossible to tell yet about the books and magazines still boxed in the basement. (Those boxes were on raised platforms off the floor, but may have been flooded from above.) There was some smoke damage, most of it, to my surprise, in the basement—where the drafting equipment and type for the covers is.

The main difficulty, for now, will be the manuscripts—both those accepted for publication here, and those which were still under consideration. (If you get back a manuscript which is water-wrinkled or smoke-browned, please accept my apologies.) Naturally it will take a while for me to get everything sorted out, and although by the time you read this the event will be months past, I hope this explanation will serve for those of you to whom it is pertinent.

Fire is a terrible scourge for anyone in my position, of course—so much that I own is flammable or vulnerable to water damage—and I've dreaded the possibility for years. Worse, I find, is that lingering memory of how things were *before* and can never be again. A part of my house has died, and with it everything that was in that part. Fortunately, no one was hurt—the life that was lost was inanimate, compounded of memories and associations: the epiphenomena of my own life and that of those closest to me.

(cont. on page 118)

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Jack Williamson has been active as a writer of science fiction for four decades and has contributed memorable stories to each of those four decades. It's a pleasure to welcome him back to our pages with a new story in many ways as memorable as any he has ever written . . .

THE DARK DESTROYER

JACK WILLIAMSON

PASSAGE through a major space gate was only a shock of shifting gravities and a wink of suspended sensation, but the one-way, one-person terminal on the Earth probe hadn't been engineered for comfort. Blacklantern was wrenched and squeezed and twisted through the narrow ring-fields, instantly ejected into the coffin-sized receiver, his breath squeezed out and a sharp taste of blood in his mouth.

"Blackiel" Snowfire's bright voice rang out of the dark. Though she had come through only hours ahead of him, her tone held no trace of pain. "Are you okay?"

He wasn't. His strength was gone. His bones ached. Not yet used to free fall, he was whirling down a dark vortex of giddiness. But he had no breath to say anything.

Blindly, he was groping for the laser energizer. He had worn it into the sender cell, holstered like a weapon to the belt of his stiff survival suit, but he couldn't find it now. Panic caught him.

"Here we are!" Somewhere over his head, Snowfire sounded intolerably cheery. "Safe in Earth orbit, with thirteen days to open the space gate and complete our rescue—"

"Las—laser!"

That took all his breath, but the energizer was their key to the space gate on Old Earth. Without it, they would be trapped there when the planet fell through the black hole. Fumbling wildly, he couldn't feel it anywhere.

Her laughter rippled.

"I've got your gadget. Floated out to meet me. Now reach!"

He reached. Her quick pale hand caught his black one, hauled him out of the dark receiver into the main cabin of the probe. A windowless pit, cushioned all around with stiff gray plexoid, it wasn't much larger. She swam above him there, at home in null gravity, trimly graceful even in her heavy yellow suit.

"Catch!" She sent the energizer soaring slowly toward him. "Take care of it. With only thirteen days to teach the Earthfolk they've been wrong about technology, you'll need it soon."

"Thirteen days!" He snapped the plexoid holster back to his belt and hung peering at her bleakly. "If they're as backward as Nggonggans, thirteen years wouldn't be enough."

"Perhaps they aren't so backward." Hopeful wonder lit her face. "On our first pass around the night side, I saw lights moving. High and fast. Climbing toward our orbit like aircraft."

"They had no aircraft." He clung to

Illustrated by STEPHEN E. FABIAN



a handrail, trying to stop the whirling of everything around him. "Not when the gate was built. They've turned against technology. Sunk back to where Nggongga was ten thousand years ago. No metal and no machines. Fire a sacred mystery. I doubt they could have invented aircraft in three hundred years—or decided to welcome strangers out of space."

"You're not yourself, Blackie." Her green-eyed smile rebuked him mildly. "You forget we're Benefactors, on a very tight mission. We've no time for gloom."

The narrow cabin kept toppling around him, but she was somehow always still above him. Nothing shadowed her bright expectant face. She was the golden goddess he had glimpsed in the swarmworld computer, almost too serenely perfect, more fit for worship than for love.

"I'll be okay." He fought his vertigo. "If we're in orbit, I want to look outside. I've never seen a planet from space."

"Sorry, Blackie, we've no time to squander."

She dived to where he clung, caught his shoulders with both hands, kissed him lightly. He tried to pull her to him, but she was already gone, swimming up the cabin as quickly as a fish, leaving a haunting cloud of her body scent.

"We're on the last orbit," her voice pealed back. "Time now to separate the lander and program our descent. Take your seat and secure yourself."

Still clumsy in weightlessness, he pulled himself along the handrails to the seat behind her, squeezed into its padded arms. His bones still ached. Clammy with sweat, he felt suddenly cold.

"We're in luck!" she called again. "There really is an ice age here. The

seas have shrunk and our maps don't fit. But I've located the gate. Dome still intact and beacon still burning—after three hundred years! Ready for your energizer."

Her voice faded and her bright head bent. She was the trained space pilot, with all the skills she needed to find a pinpoint on the altered Earth and bring them to a landing there. He knew how to fight tlys, but there were no tlys here.

The comparison rankled in him. Confined in his clumsy seat, he watched the dull gray walls and the meaningless shimmer and blink of the instrument panels beyond her. There was nothing for him to do.

"Secure restraints!" she called. "For lander separation."

He let the seat grip him, heard the warning *peep*, felt the lander shudder when the linkage parted. He saw Snowfire's head bend again, heard the first faint vibration of the jets, felt a slight increasing thrust.

"Why so quiet, Blackie?" She swung her seat around, intently frowning at him. "Were you hurt in the gate?"

"Just lost my breath."

"Why look so glum?"

"Perhaps I'm just Nggonggan."

"But this is not Nggongga, Blackie." Her reproving tone was lightly caressing, the voice of a fond mother correcting a favorite child, but it hurt like the sting of an un milked tly. "This is no place to pout."

"I'm not pouting." He kept his voice level. "But I need more to do."

"I know how you feel." She nodded, smiling too widely. "You always wanted to be the champ in the tly arena, with colored hats raining down around you. You wanted to be first through the gate, because you're a man. You wanted to command our

mission."

"Maybe I did," he muttered ungraciously. "Maybe I did."

"This won't be forever." Her voice was too soothingly warm. "We'll soon be home again—if you can open the gate. For now, remember we're both Benefactors. And please remember we're in love."

"Of course I remember—"

He was trying hard to smile, but he felt relieved when a chirping signal called her back to the controls. The thrust and roar of the jets was mounting fast, and he felt glad she had no more time for him.

She was right, of course. Though the mission had brought promotions to them both, she was still his senior in the service. When he advanced from lunar to planetary rank, she had received the golden sunburst of a stellar fellow.

Angry with himself, he sat watching the back of her red-gold head and trying to admire her cool competence. Only a woman, she came from a culture where women were highly regarded. Actually, he told himself, he knew no man who might have been a more able companion on this desperate undertaking.

Trying to accept her superior position, he let his thoughts drift back across the hectic events that had brought them here. Through all his years in the fellowship, he had longed for a chance at this Earth mission. Yet, when it came, he had tried to refuse it.

Back from the swarmworld, he and Snowfire had been raised to equal duty in the agency in Nggongga, the clans split between them. The problems of his two hundred million fellow blacks were vast enough to absorb them both, and they were very much in love.

She had aroused him in their bedroom at the compound with the news. Still drugged with sleep and her sweetleaf scent, he reached to catch her to him. She shook him again and slipped out of his arms.

"—Earth probe." Her words jarred him wide awake. "Benefactor Thornwall called to say it's now in orbit. Almost too late. The black hole is already swallowing planets. We're due on Xyr in an hour."

They rushed to the portal dome and flashed through the space gate. On Xyr, they found the Benefactor Thornwall waiting in his tower office. In no apparent haste, the old man made them sit while he siphoned out ruby cups of fragrant black stonevine tea. Blacklantern tasted it politely, and tried to decline the mission.

"I know I volunteered, sir. But that was long ago. Things have changed. I have Snowfire now, and we've been working well together. Nggongga is challenge enough for us both. My own newest project is a big plant to unsalt the brine from our sea and water a long valley in the Wind clan highlands."

"We were rather hoping you wouldn't want to go." Nodding calmly, Thornwall sipped his scalding tea. "A very chancy mission. Our problem is that the probe got caught by the hole and delayed too long. One planet already destroyed. With Old Earth next, the portal experts want us to scrub the whole project. I think they're right—"

"Sir!" Snowfire burst past him, a heady breath of sweetleaf scent, a blur of red-gold hair and green-gold eyes and pale-gold allure. Eagerly, she seized Thornwall's lean old hands. "I'm not refusing."

"No!" Blacklantern gasped his protest, gazing at her in blank amaze-

ment. He hadn't known she had volunteered. "I need you—we need you on Nggongga."

He turned desperately to old Thornwall.

"If the mission is so dangerous, sir, you wouldn't send a woman!"

"Please, *gungee*!" Breathing the word for lover she had learned in his own Nggonggan, she turned to smile at him. "I'm a Benefactor."

"Don't quarrel." Thornwall lifted his frail old hands. "We do need you both on Nggongga."

"We've been happy there." She brushed him with her body, strong and soft and wonderful. "We've reached a cultural compromise. Blackie has agreed to forget the barbaric notion that he has to own me. I've agreed to have his son—and I will, when we get back from Old Earth."

"Don't decide rashly." Thornwall paused to drain his tiny cup. "Let me show you what the hole did to Mars. It may change your mind."

His blue-veined hands clicked computer keys, and a blank screen in the alcove behind him became a window into stardusted space.

"The hole," he said. "Observed by instruments on the probe."

A thin green arrow stabbed into that dusty darkness, pointing at nothing Blacklantern could see. The keys clicked again, and a tiny rust-colored globe jumped into the window.

"This happened while the probe was fighting through the gravity fields of the black hole to find its Earth orbit," he said. "I'm showing you a taped time-lapse display."

The planet drifted toward the arrow point. Ahead of it, stars began to dim and wink. It swarmed faster, faster, its path sharply curving. Another click, and its image swelled till they

saw dark-rimmed craters and a white polar crown.

"Watch what happens," he murmured. "And don't forget that the hole is whirling on toward Old Earth."

The planet fractured. Black cracks ripped across the craters, sharp at first but quickly veiled with yellow dust. Its disk blurred and stretched. Red fire exploded from its heart, hurling black-walled blocks of its crust into a long spiral streamer.

Blacklantern heard the quick intake of Snowfire's breath, felt her cold hand quiver on his.

They watched that dark-colored spiral coil back around itself. It spun faster, faster, until it was a spinning plate. The crustal lumps crumbled and dissolved. At the center, a point of blue light began to burn.

"The hole!" Thornwall whispered. "A giant imploded star, now only miles across but so massive that nothing—not even light—can escape its gravity. All we actually see is only the funnel, sucking down the wreckage of the planet. The captured mass is torn to molecules. To atoms. Going down the vortex, drawn out of the observable universe, the debris begins to radiate. Heat at first. The light we see. Then gamma rays."

The picture went out.

"That's all." Trembling a little, he refilled the ruby cup. "The radiation burned our cameras out. But that was Mars. Earth is next." He lit the screen with dotted green orbital curves that came together at a bright red point. "In fourteen standard days."

He swung to face them, pale old eyes blinking shrewdly.

"How about it now?"

"I can't refuse," Snowfire said. "The gate is there. I know the Earth-

folk wanted nothing from us when it was built, but things are different now. It must be opened." She turned from Thornwall. "How about it, Blacklantern?"

Before her cool green gaze, he surrendered.

"We're going, sir," he told Thornwall. "Together."

They had been trained for probe missions, and their outfitting and briefing took only a day. Engineers from the space gate system taught Blacklantern how to replace the dead energizer, how to activate it to open the gate.

Creeping at only half the speed of light, the unmanned probe had been on its way for three generations. Its own narrow gate opened from a tiny sender installed beneath the main concourse of the portal dome on Xyr, five levels down.

A portal engineer met them there, the day they were ready—and urged them to give the mission up. A short fat bald man, he wore a bulging brain implant. Bright sweat filmed his colorless skin, and his odor edged the dusty air.

"You don't know what you're getting into." He stopped in the tunnel outside the sender, as if to block their way into the gloom beyond the heavy door. "Nobody knows how to cope with black holes. Experts have gone out to observe them, and seldom come back. Want to know why?"

"We've been briefed," Snowfire said. "We'll take our chances."

"Listen to me." He stubbornly stood in their way. "I'm the black hole specialist for the whole portal complex. I've watched planets go. Suns and ships. I've seen things your experts won't believe. The hard way, I've learned the truth about black holes."

"What's that?" Blacklantern asked.

"They don't come single. When a giant star falls into itself, dropping into nowhere in a fractional second, the gravity waves are tremendous. They crush nearby masses. A ripple effect. Planets and moons and meteors are squeezed out of space, into their own tiny gravitational pits. So the holes come in swarms. That's what traps the experts. Avoiding one, they back into another."

"I've heard the theory." Snowfire moved impatiently to pass him. "Cosmogonists doubt it."

"Experts!" He sniffed and blocked her path. "The live experts have never been near a hole." Scowling out of the shadows under the bulge of his naked, sweating cranium, he swung toward Blacklantern. "In any case, the planet isn't worth all you risk."

"But Old Earth is our mother world," Snowfire grasped his arm as if to push him aside. "The first home of mankind."

"A spoiled world. Our forebears had wasted its resources before they escaped to space. Those left behind were only human dregs. They've fallen into barbarism—the few that survive in a new ice age."

"We're going to rescue them."

"That's been tried," he protested. "We built the gate to bring them into civilization—but they don't believe in civilization. Called us creatures of their devil. Attacked our people with primitive weapons. Broke into the portal far enough to smash the energizer. Our advance crew just managed to escape before the ring-fields failed."

"Come along!" Snowfire's voice was lifting. "We've no time to waste."

"A moment more." His triangular gnome-face tried to smile. "If you want adventure, the portal system can

offer you something more rewarding. I'm in the survey division. All around the space frontier, we have slow probes in flight toward new worlds—most of them as rich as Old Earth ever was. We always need trained crews to flash aboard the probes when they arrive in orbit. I can give you a virgin world to explore, instead of the plundered Earth."

Snowfire had lifted her hands in impatient negation. His computer not quick enough to measure her mounting resentment, the engineer swung to Blacklantern.

"As I understand, your fellowship asks you to serve for the sake of service. The portal system enjoys a vast income from space commerce, and we can pay in cash and privilege. As pioneers opening a rich new world, you can carve out your own rewards—"

"That's enough," Snowfire snapped. "Stop the nonsense."

"I've never understood you Benefactors." With a shrug at Blacklantern, he stood aside to let them into the gate room. "An obsolete unit that really wrings you out." He waved a sweaty hand at the tiny sender cell. "Which one goes first?"

"I—" Blacklantern began.

"I do," Snowfire said.

Sitting behind her now, inside the tight restraints, he watched the back of her head and waited to see the ice-bound Earth. A boy cleaning boots on the streets of Nggonggamba, dreaming of the other worlds he scarcely hoped to visit, he had sometimes asked the tourists what ice and snow were like. Now, perhaps—

He heard Snowfire gasp, saw her bright head lift and turn.

"Blackiel!" Her voice was faint with shock and dread. "I'm afraid we're here too late."

SCARLET SIGNALS flashed and burned on the panels beyond Snowfire's head, and hoarse sirens hooted.

"What's wrong?" Blacklantern shouted. "What's going on?"

If she heard, she had no time to answer. He unlocked the restraints and plunged up the cabin toward her. Beyond her head, he glimpsed Earth's snow-cloaked face—with one strange line, wide and black, drawn straight across it toward an ominous horizon of twilight gloom.

"What—"

"Sit down!" Her sharp voice cut through the clangor. "Secure yourself!"

Back in the protective seat, he watched her gold head bobbing up and down. One by one, the warning lights went out. When the last siren had croaked and died, she turned briefly back to him.

"Brace yourself, *gungeel*!" she called. "Shock wave coming—"

While she spoke, it struck.

Something louder than thunder battered the lander. Something lifted it, whirled it, hammered it. Something dropped and spun and smashed it, till the impacts took his breath and the restraints bruised his body and his vertigo came back. He clung weakly to the handgrips and watched Snowfire's swaying head and waited for the ordeal to end.

But it didn't end.

Enduring that unceasing pandemonium, he tried to imagine its cause. The ice-caps here might breed more savage weather than dry Nggongga, he thought, but nothing this terrific. A volcano? When he glimpsed that vast twilight snowscape, there had been no cinder cones. The hole itself? That wide black line, so queerly straight, was nothing like the

ragged fractures that had riven Mars. What else? Nothing he could think of.

Following each dip and lift of Snowfire's head, he found himself wondering dully what had brought him into this strange plight. Red hair, perhaps? In escape from torment, his thoughts fled back to another redhead he had known. To a girl called Sapphire, who had fascinated and betrayed him.

Had he always been some sort of fool?

He closed his eyes against bone-jarring thunder and tried to recall Nggigi, the new receptionist they had hired for the agency. A slim Nggonggan girl, black and grave and beautiful, she had turned out to be so loyally competent that they had sent her on to Xyr to be trained for the fellowship. Perhaps, he thought, he should have married her instead.

She had told him shyly once that she had admired him long ago, when she was still a child selling hats and flowers in the tly arena. He had seen the hero worship still in her eyes, heard it in her breathless voice. She would have made him a dutiful wife, he thought, aware of her place, with no nonsense about cultural clashes.

But her hair wasn't red, her eyes weren't green.

The squeezing seat tossed him against the restraints, snapped him back, slammed him into the cabin wall, but he scarcely felt the impact. He was suddenly reliving a long forgotten meeting, on the square below the Nggonggan portal dome, with his very first redhead.

A tall young girl, walking in the throng of otherworlders just emerging from the space gate. Keen green eyes were looking everywhere, and she stopped when she saw him, smiling down in delight. It struck him now that perhaps she was an anthropology

student, captivated with native Nggongga.

He could have been no more than three, naked and hungry and no doubt filthy. The half-blind black crone who claimed him was using him for bait, making him beg while she robbed purses. The girl wore no translator. She was stooping over him, mouthing strange soft sounds, when the policeman seized him.

The black crone dropped the purse and dodged into the crowd. The policeman shook him, shouting at him, till the girl reached bare arms for him. Her sweet body scent came back to him now, and the feel of her clean white skin and soft red hair. She took him away from the angry officer, bought him a ripe yellow rockfruit from a vendor, let him go at last with a handful of gongs.

The old woman took the gongs that night, and beat him when he cried—

"Hang on, Blackie!" Snowfire's call broke up that poignant recollection. "We're under air attack!"

They carried no armament, because the fellowship condoned no violence. Snowfire crouched at the controls, driving them through evasive maneuvers. The battered lander lurched and twisted more savagely than ever, while Blacklantern clung to his restraints and tried to comprehend that impossible assault.

Surveying the planet from their own orbital probe, the builders of the gate had seen no cities, no factory smoke, not even a road. On the ice-bound surface, they had found only a few stone-age hunters, apparent worshippers of fire. The metal relics of the past were all taboo, untouchable.

Aircraft simply shouldn't be here—"Duck, Blackie!" Snowfire screamed. "Duck!"

The lander shivered and spun.

Fighting the controls, she had no more time or voice for him. Waiting for something else to happen, he tried to swallow his sullen resentment, tried to admire her cool skill, tried to recover his image of her as his green-eyed ideal.

But his bone-deep feelings were hard to change.

"I'm Nggonggan," he muttered at himself. "I guess I'll always be—"

Abruptly, their crazy motion changed. The lander struck and bounded, rocked and skidded, came to rest. The howling jets coughed and died. He sat stunned by an avalanche of silence.

For a soundless moment, nothing moved.

Then Snowfire swung slowly in her seat to face him, looking limp and pale. She caught a great breath and wiped her wet face with a stiff yellow sleeve.

"Listen, gunggee," she whispered. "Listen!"

He heard a far-off wailing, then a sonic thud.

"They're wheeling overhead." Renewed urgency sharpened her voice. "We'll have to abandon the lander. Bring the energizer and your emergency pack."

At the exit, she waited for him to jump first into the frigid dark. Snow crunched under his boots, but he could see nothing at all. He was reaching to help her when she dropped beside him.

"What are they—"

"Move fast!" She ignored his question. "We're on flat ice. No cover here. There's a ridge to the left. Outcropping rock. We'll try for shelter there."

She marched off into the dark. He slapped his thigh to feel the energizer, slung the pack of survival gear

to his shoulders, jogged after her vanishing shadow. Before they had gone fifty paces, something shrieked out of the black sky behind. A dull red flash threw their shadows on the snow. Pausing to glance back, he saw a red-flaring jet climbing above the vague mass of the lander.

"Come along," she commanded.

He slogged after her. Behind them another red jet blazed down from the sky, or perhaps the first returned. Its bellow hurt his ears, and its dull glare lit the rock-toothed ridge ahead. Their long shadows danced and froze, as it dropped on the lander.

A second attacker followed, then a third. The sustained howls of flight became hoots and yelps and shrill explosions. The hideous cacophony reminded him of carrion tlys he had seen fighting over the carcass of a nearman on the Nggonggan highlands. But fighter aircraft, he thought, shouldn't behave like hungry tlys.

The sky screamed again, and yet another attacker came straight at them, flying low. The crimson glare beneath it flickered on the ridge and raced toward them over the ice.

"Drop!" Snowfire gasped. "Flat!"

In his mind, he was back in the Nggonggamba arena, with a killer tly diving at him. Reflexively, he reached for his binding rope, but his grasping fingers found only the laser energizer.

"Down—"

The bellow of the jet drowned Snowfire's cry. The red glare flashed on across the snow. With the energizer in his hand, what he did was almost automatic. He aimed it like a gun. His thumb found the key. The wire-thin ray of pure green light pulsed out to splash the diving object in the dark.

Revealed, it unnerved him again. Vaster than any tly, it was massive

and black and incomprehensible—half mechanical, half monstrous. Its stubby wings were angular and rigid as those of some primitive airplane but its body looked too fat, and it had enormous jaws in a yawning cave of a mouth, studded with great dull black teeth.

Before its howling dive, he fell flat. The energizer trembled in his hand, but he kept the pulsing ray at work, searching out the paradoxical details of its strangeness. The enormous body, almost a globe, ridged with black triangular scales. The silver-black reflective pits at the roots of the wings, spaced like eyes. The black-cleated ridges underneath, that looked like legless feet.

Its screaming roar had broken, lifted to a brain-piercing shriek. The eye-like pits squeezed shut, as if his probing ray had blinded them. The black wings flexed, to pull it sharply upward. In an instant it had passed above them, its bellow dropping to a deeper tone. In another instant its hot red jet was climbing back into the dark behind them. Stinging fumes choked them, and the laser burned green in a trailing vapor cloud.

He clicked the green ray off, and they stumbled to their feet.

"Drop flat is what I told you." Anger snapped in Snowfire's voice. "Why did you fire?"

"Why not?"

"We don't allow violence. In this case, your reckless impulse could bring the whole flight down on us."

"In this case—" He tried to swallow his own sullen antagonism. "I think it drove the thing away."

"Perhaps it did." She reached to touch his arm. "Sorry, *gunggee*, if I was too sharp. But we can't afford such reckless risks. Let's try now for that ridge."

Wading calf-deep snow, they fled

DARK DESTROYER

again from the bellow and thunder above the lander. Nothing pursued. Running ahead, Snowfire tripped over a jutting stone. He picked her up, and they blundered at last over the crown of the ridge and down again into a boulder-walled hollow. He glanced back once at the red jets wheeling above the lander.

"Please keep down, *gunggee*," she urged him gently. "Maybe they'll forget us."

"What are they?" he demanded. "What happened to us?"

"That engineer was right." She leaned against a snowy boulder, breathing hard. "There's more than one black hole. A cluster, maybe. At first I couldn't believe what I saw from the lander. A furrow that plowed itself across the face of the planet."

"I guess I glimpsed it." He moved toward her in the dark. "A straight dark line across the ice." He stopped to catch his breath. "You think a black hole made it?"

"I saw the line drawn." Awe slowed her voice. "By a small black hole—smaller anyhow than the one that caught Mars. Just grazed Earth and went on into space. All in half a dozen seconds. Dreadful to see. It swallowed the mass in its path. Cut a canyon across the glaciers. Left a vacuum that made the shock wave. Sucked air and everything after it, to set off the storm we came down through."

"It passed so near?" Wonder dazed him. "And left us alive!"

"Gravitation varies inversely with distance squared," she reminded him. "Away from its center, the effects fall off fast. Our greatest danger was the radiation out of the funnel, which tripped the alarms. About all our shields could handle."

"Through all that—" His voice

balked, but he forced himself to go on, "—you did well to get us down."

"Thanks, *gungeel*!" She moved in the dark to touch his sleeve. "But you don't know the worst part. That canyon was cut ahead of us. Between us and the gate. I was trying to get across it, till those queer jets knocked us down. Now we still have that ditch to cross."

"The jets?" He paused to listen at the yells and wails and booms from beyond the ridge. "They fly like machines but they look—look somehow alive! What do you think they are?"

"I don't know, *gungee*." Dread quivered in her whisper. "I can't imagine."

3
THEY HID in that rock-walled hollow through what was left of the bitter night. Snowfire worked a long time over the charts and finders she had brought in her pack, estimating the dimensions of that vast new gorge across the glaciers, trying to map a path they could follow to the space gate.

"We aren't too far." She looked up at last, her face pale and strained in the glow of the self-lit charts. "Perhaps three days on foot, beyond the furrow. But we're on the wrong bank, and it's too long for us to walk around. We've got to get across."

"We can try," he told her. "We have ropes. I've done climbing at home, hunting nestling tlys."

He was thawing snow on a tiny stove to mix with their food concentrates. When they had eaten their sparing equal portions, she took the first turn on watch and told him to sleep. Though he was tired enough, that wasn't easy. The sounds beyond the ridge had subsided to occasional

hoots and rumbles, but the riddle of the flying things kept gnawing at his mind.

Had they evolved since the spacemen left, from creatures native to earth? He recalled a lecture at the fellowship academy about great reptiles on the prehuman earth, thought to be extinct—but none of them had been jet-propelled.

Invaders from space? His exobiology classes had surveyed the known variations of carbon-based life, with specimens selected from several thousand different planets. None had been so exotic as this.

Another order of life—or half-life?

With no answer for that, he dropped at last into an uneasy half-sleep. Even the powered suit failed to keep him really warm, and the hazards of their mission merged into nightmare.

He thought he and Snowfire were back in the imposing old hotel in the trading town of Krongkor on Ngongga, where he had begun to learn her ways of love. They had been diving nude off the stone pier and drinking old Champ's seaberry wine, and at last they had come up to make love in their great khamsin-canopied bed. But their joy was interrupted. Suddenly she was giving birth to their child. It was nothing human, but a black-scaled monster, breathing red fire and snapping black teeth at him, its round black belly swelling insanely, crowding him out of the bed.

"Blackie! Your watch, Blackie!"

Vastly thankful when she bent to wake him from the horror of that dream, he wanted to take her in his arms, but she was in no mood for tenderness.

"The creatures are quiet." Her tired voice was crisply impersonal. "Lying around what's left of the lander—if anything is. Watch them

while I rest. Alert me if anything happens. And don't fire the laser."

He climbed back to peer over the crown of the ridge. With a moon rising somewhere beyond the clouds, the snow was now almost luminous. Out where the lander had fallen, he found five grotesque shapes sprawled in black silhouette against the ice, almost motionless. Now and again they coughed great booming puffs of steam or crimson fire. The icy air was tainted with their odor, a biting sulphuric stink sharp as the reek of burning plexoid.

Before dawn, they began to yawn and crawl about, with screeching blasts and rumbling explosions from their jets. He woke Snowfire to watch them take off. Moving clumsily, like over-loaded aircraft, they had to slide a long way down the ice to gain flying speed.

The last one struck an outcropping rock. It spun into the air and rolled far over the snow, snorting scarlet fire, and finished on its back. The others dived and wheeled above it, while it tried to right itself.

Its efforts were laborious and slow, but at last it tipped itself over and fell back upright on the ice with a crash that jarred the ridge. It came roaring back down the strip they all had worn, and climbed at last into the sky on its tail of crimson thunder. All five vanished together in the dark west, as if in flight from day.

After another hurried meal, they packed their gear and went down to where the lander had crashed. It was gone. The creatures had left only a slick black hollow worn in the ice. He stared into that, and back at Snowfire.

"What sort of thing can they be?"

"We learned too little to tell." She shrugged uneasily. "If they're really alive, their chemistry functions at

high temperatures. They consume metal. They seem to dislike light. They move as if they're fantastically heavy. That's about all we observed."

"I hope we don't meet them again." He shivered. "They're—monstrous! By comparison, a killer tly looks like a pet kitten."

"They went west." Hopefully, she turned to face the frosty dawn. "The space gate is southeast—with that furrow still in the way."

Before noon, they were climbing off the ice, up another stony slope. The snow cover here had been disturbed by recent rockslides, and long fractures scarred the hillside.

"Marks of quakes," Snowfire said. "Caused, I think, by the passing gravity field of the hole. Here it must have been intense. We are near the trench."

Before they reached the summit, Blacklantern looked back along their trail and found a dark fleck creeping over the snow. He hauled the light binoculars out of his pack.

"Somebody following," he told her. "A sledge. People pulling it. One person riding. Two more running behind. All dressed in animal skins. The runners carrying spears. The barbarians, I guess, that we've come to rescue."

"So we're in luck!" Relief lit her smooth gold face. "We may need their help to get across the trench."

"Are you sure they mean to help us?"

"We'll persuade them." She was briskly confident. "Language should be no major problem—the builders of the gate picked up half a dozen native dialects that we've programmed into our translators. When they learn that we're here to warn them about the end of their world and offer them a way to survive it, they'll cooperate."

"I hope," Blacklantern muttered. "But let's have a look at the trench."

Snowfire was climbing ahead when they came to the crest of the hill. She froze there with a mute gasp of amazed dismay. He clambered to her side, and his breath went out when he looked into the trench.

Not so wide or deep as that awesome pit the machines from the swarmworld had dug into the heart of Nggongga, it was just as appalling. Its jagged lip was so near that he swayed giddily back. The farther wall was miles off, tall black cliffs standing on vast slopes of broken stone.

"We do need help," Snowfire whispered. "We can't cross that on foot."

"Nor on a sledge," he muttered. "Even with strong barbarians to pull it."

Still dazed, he looked to right and left. That awesome gorge ran straight forever in each direction, talus slopes and towering cliffs diminishing into hazy distance. Oddly, it was deeper toward each side, with a rounded ridge of shattered stone at the center.

"Formed of rock not quite captured." Snowfire gestured at the ridge. "The hole was moving too fast to swallow everything drawn toward it. The trail of debris left behind fell back into the trench."

He raised the binoculars to scan that endless pit, and abruptly they shook, blurring all he saw.

"Something moving!" he breathed. "Something coming down the trench."

What he had seen was a plunging mass that hid the boulder slopes and rose to the foot of the farther cliffs. Its steep gray face was swirled and streaked with dirty white. A faint vibration filled the gorge ahead of it, a dull rumbling that swelled and swelled until it became deafening thun-

der. The earth quivering underfoot, they watched great towers of stone shaken from the cliffs, slowly toppling, splashing into an insane brown flood.

"The sea!" Snowfire cried, green eyes wide with sudden comprehension. "The trench was cut all the way from the sea. The flood rolling down it has just reached us."

"Now I know we need help to cross it." He had to shout against the thunder from the gorge. "More help I think than those barbarians can give us."

They climbed and slid back down the quaking hill, to wait at the edge of the ice. While she checked and adjusted her translator, he studied the Earthfolk with the binoculars.

Six gaunt men ran like animals to draw the sledge. Halfclad in crudely laced gray-furred hides, they looked like animals. Their long pale hair and beards were stained and matted, their scarred faces red with cold. Panting, they exhaled white clouds.

Their driver was a tall young woman, in trimly sewn white fur. She was black—but oddly black. When he focused the binoculars, he saw pale circles around her eyes and pale streaks across her cheeks. Standing on the back of the lurching sledge, she cracked a long whip at the half-naked backs of the leaning men.

Her two followers were also handsome young women, each half-smearred with the same streaky black, one on the right side of the face, the other on the left. They wore smooth white fur, with bone-white daggers at their waists, and carried flint-tipped spears.

"The black is only paint." He passed the binoculars to Snowfire. "Their light skins puzzle me. I thought the people of Old Earth were mostly

darker."

"I suppose the ice-age has bleached them," she said. "Pigmentation seems to be a function of climate. You Nggonggans evolved it for protection against a hot blue sun. Under these cloudy skies, too much pigment would cut off essential ultra-violet. But I don't understand the paint."

She handed the binoculars back, and he studied the whipped men straining on the ropes.

"Women seem superior."

"What does that matter?" She shrugged. "I know your own Nggonggan bias, but all we need is their help to reach the space gate."

"They look like the lowest sort of savages," he objected. "Too backward to be much use to us."

"Cultures differ." She reached for the binoculars again. "You can't draw sound conclusions from a single observation. These people may surprise you."

She climbed on a rock as the sledge drew near, and spread her hands wide in what was meant as a gesture of peace. The natives stopped a hundred yards across the ice, however, well beyond translator range. The black-painted rider huddled with her two spear-carriers. Through the binoculars, Blacklantern saw them peering apprehensively at him.

"We'll walk out to meet them," Snowfire decided. "Move slowly. Keep your hands open and wide. Don't touch the laser."

When they started forward, the natives showed alarm. The rider whipped her team of men into a sudden turn, as if for flight. Her two followers stood behind, spears pointing at Blacklantern.

"They're afraid of you," Snowfire said. "Maybe they've never seen an actual black. Wait here. I'm going on

alone. Whatever comes, don't use the laser. There'll be no violence."

Unwillingly, he waited.

Hands spread wide, she walked slowly out across the ice. The natives watched her narrowly. When she was still twenty yards from the sledge, the rider beckoned her to stop. The two followers moved a little forward, to face her with their spears.

He saw them speaking, but his translator picked up nothing. The rider beckoned Snowfire forward, and the others closed in beside her. Presently he saw them all looking back at him, saw the spears lifting toward him.

The talk went on a long time. He saw Snowfire waving at the clouds, pointing back along their trail, gesturing ahead toward the trench and the space gate. The rider frowned and stamped her boots on the snow and waved her whip toward him.

Snowfire came plodding slowly back at last. Her golden face looked bleak and tight, and the binoculars showed her tears of frustration. The natives followed her with the sledge, keeping a wary distance.

"Anyhow, we tried." She gave him a small wry smile. "Not much luck. They won't believe anything I say. About the gate and the Benefactors and the danger from the black hole."

Unconsciously, his hand had fallen to the laser.

"Don't touch it!" Authority edged her voice. "I promised not to let you hurt them. In return for their promise to be humane to you."

"Why humane to me?"

The laser was not designed for combat, but its stabbing needle could be blinding. He fought a savage impulse to try for the eyes of the white-furred leader. Quivering with confused emotions, he almost lost Snow-

fire's words.

"—let them take you prisoner. Otherwise, they're determined to try to kill us both."

"Why me?"

"Our bad luck. And their own, of course. They've identified you as an evil god they call Ghur. The dark destroyer. They blame you for all their recent catastrophes."

"How—how can that be?"

"A whole train of disastrous coincidence." Her slim gold hands fanned out in a gesture of futility. "Ghur, I gather, is a god of fire and machines, burned black with the smoke of his forge. The things that attacked us—the *bomzeeth*—are creatures of his."

Behind her, the spear-women were cautiously advancing.

"They saw our lander crash, with the *bomzeeth* swarming around it. We seem to be the fulfillment of a prophecy that Ghur will return in a season of storm and earthquake and signs in the sky, to destroy the world and all its people."

She paused to wave the women back.

"These natives belong to a Ghur cult. Larlarane calls herself his bride—her official title translates as 'bride of night.' All their rituals seem planned to placate him. Black is his color. Metal is sacred to him. Only the cult members are allowed to touch it, and then only to offer it to him. Larlarane was crossing the glacier when our lander fell, collecting junk metal for his altars. She's terrified now, because their rituals were meant to prevent your prophetic return. Your arrival means that their religion has failed. Now they don't know what to do."

She turned again, calling strange syllables she must have learned from them.

"I had a hard time persuading them not to attack us at once. We finally reached a bargain. I'm surrendering you, in return for agreement not to kill us. Not a very good arrangement, I know, but at least it buys us time to learn a little more about the situation and perhaps to frame some better plan."

Warily, in spite of her gestures, the women were closing in.

"Sorry, Blackie." She stepped quickly toward him, with a pale appealing smile. "I knew you wouldn't like it, but this is the best thing we can do." Her gold hand reached. "Now give me the energizer."

H⁴ E RECOILED in dazed indignation, clutching at the laser energizer.

"Surrender?" he gasped. "To three women?"

"Not only to them," Snowfire protested. "But to a total situation."

"Two spears against my laser! I can wipe them out."

"Perhaps you could. But what then? We're still on this side of the trench. We'd never reach the space gate." She reached again for the energizer. "Please, Blackie! Remember we're Benefactors. This is the only way."

Clutching the energizer, he faced them all. The black-daubed priestess with her whip. The half-black fighting women. The toil-stooped men huddled in front of the sledge, peering dully at him through matted yellow hair. Snowfire herself, whom he loved and suddenly hated.

The energizer lifted itself in his quivering hand. The women poised their stone-tipped spears. Larlarane flicked her whip at him, its crack a cruel explosion. Snowfire flung herself in front of the energizer, seizing it

with both hands.

Shuddering, he let it go.

"Thank you, *gunggeel*!"

The women closed in around him but kept a cautious distance, afraid to touch anything about him. Under their eyes, Snowfire was busy stripping him of everything metallic. His binoculars. His pack. The coiled climbing rope. The knife and tools from the pockets of his suit. Even his translator.

At a shrill command from Larlarane, the men came trotting with the sledge, which already carried a few shapeless bits of rusty iron. Snowfire piled his gear on the iron, secured it with pieces cut from his own rope, and finally came back to him with a length of the rope.

"Sorry, *gungee*." Her voice was faint and strained. "Hands behind you now."

"Nol" he whispered bitterly. "I won't be bound."

"Blackie, please!" Her green eyes gleamed with tears. "If you resist, they'll kill us both."

"You're a fool!" he muttered. "So am I."

But he didn't resist.

She tied his wrist behind him, knelt to tie his ankles. At another command from the black priestess, she ripped a stripe from the hood of his suit to make a blindfold. At that point, the women were brave enough to seize him. They dragged him from his feet, loaded and tied him on the sledge. The whip cracked, a man howled with pain, and they lurched into motion.

The old metal and his own lumpy gear made the sledge a painful bed. The ropes numbed his hands and feet. Arctic cold sank into his bones. But the cruelest fact was his own spineless surrender, a rankling

wound, harder to endure than anything physical.

He tried to imagine some chain of events that would set him free and let him open the gate, but imagination failed. Even if Snowfire somehow secured the willing aid of these degenerates, that appalling trench was still in the way.

Fighting despair, he seized and searched each new sensation. The hissing of the runners against the snow. The cracking of the whip and the crunch of running feet. The voices of Snowfire and the women, all stripped of meaning now, since she had taken his translator. Nothing permitted any hope.

"Dzanya Dzul!" he shouted once, calling Snowfire's native name. "Where are they taking us?"

"Quiet, *gunggeel*!" she answered sharply in his own Nggonggan dialect. "They're afraid you'll cast some spell. If you try to speak again, they'll gag you."

He lay silent, hating her and hating himself. Trying not to brood upon his hopeless situation, he sought to recall brighter bits of the past. The first tly he had been able to bind, as a learner in the arena. The wild tly he once had trapped and tamed, on the Wind clan highlands. The earlier time in Nggonggamba, when a loud other-worlder kicked over his boot-cleaning box and he followed the man into a crowded shrine of Cru Creetha and escaped with his fat wallet. But such recollections were too fleeting and brief to ease his long anguish.

At last the sledge stopped. He caught a tantalizing scent of broiling meat and longed to be unbound and fed. But the whip kept cracking. Men shouted and yelped. Boots crunched the snow, and the sledge lurched on—now drawn, he supposed, by a

fresh team of men.

A long time later, it stopped again—and shuddered under him. A grating vibration throbbed deep in the earth, heavier than thunder. The sledge pitched. The black priestess screamed, feet thudded, something sharp jabbed his chest. He heard Snowfire's sharp protest echoed from her translator, then her quick warning in his own native Nggonggan.

"Quiet, *gunggee*! Don't try to move or speak. Larlarane thinks you're making the quakes."

He lay silent. The quakes ceased at last. The jabbing spears withdrew, and the sledge rocked on—and on and on. His whole body ached. Thinking dully again of Cru Creetha, he cursed Snowfire and himself and all the Benefactors in that dark god's name. His awareness faded slowly, before fatigue and cold and pain.

He came half-awake at last, somewhere in the dark. The ropes were gone, though his hands and feet still prickled and throbbed. He lay sprawled on something hard. Animal skins had been thrown over him, and he wasn't quite so cold.

Wondering dimly where he was, he remembered being rolled off the sledge to some sort of litter, being carried on by running men, remembered swaying on a rope tied under his arms and falling on this hard floor. He rubbed his bruised wrists, pulled the skins around him, and went to sleep again.

"Wake up, *gunggee*!"

For one happy instant, when her soft voice roused him, he thought they were safe in their bedroom in the compound on Nggongga, thought the whole mission to rescue the Earth-folk had been an incredible nightmare.

But then he smelled the reek of the

untanned hides and heard their brittle rattle when he moved and felt the hard floor under him. Sitting stiffly up, he found Snowfire standing over him, holding a small clay lamp. Its flame lit a bare stone floor and a curving wall behind her.

"If things go wrong, *gunggee*—" Trouble slowed her breathless voice. "If things go wrong, I hope you'll try to forgive me."

He stumbled to his feet, swaying painfully on swollen ankles, and stood staring blankly at her. Her yellow emergency suit was gone; instead, she wore white fur. Her golden skin was all dyed black.

"What is this place?"

As she hesitated, he peered around him. In the flicker of her tiny lamp, he saw that they were in a big circular room. He found no door or window. The domed ceiling was high, with one dark round opening at the center.

"A sacred place," she said. "Sacred to Ghur, because of the machines that used to be here. From what I've seen, I think it was once a launch point for the shuttles that carried our ancestors into space. This cell must have been a fuel tank."

"So what happens now?" He searched her black-stained face. "Have you found any way to the gate?"

"I've tried." Despair dulled her voice. "But all I say turns against me. Larlarane wants nothing to do with the space gate. The whole region around it is taboo. According to the legends, the men who built it were Ghur's demons, trying to open a way from Earth into his dark inferno. These people are afraid to go anywhere near it."

She bent to set the tiny lamp on the floor and sank despondently down

beside it, as if too tired to stand.

"I've tried, Blackie. Tried—and tried again." Her voice quivered. "But everything about our arrival seems to justify their prophecy that Ghur will return in the last days, to tempt them to use his evil machines and destroy themselves. Larlarane rejects everything I say."

"Don't they remember anything?" He knelt urgently before her on the little pile of skins. "About their own great ancestors? And the scientific culture that put mankind in space?"

"They don't believe in space." The lamplight glittered on her exasperated tears. "Earth, to them, is the only world there is—except the smoky hell under the volcanoes, where Ghur forges his machines. Tales of other worlds are lies told to lure people into his traps."

"So we're on our own." He peered at the dark opening above. "We've got to get out."

"They won't let you out. You're the only black man they've ever seen. Your color is proof enough that you are Ghur. They're convinced that you brought the ice, and burned Mars, and dug that trench. They believe the *bomzeeth* are your children—born of a white princess you raped, who turned black in your arms. They think you have brought them back to haunt the dead world, after all humanity is gone."

"Those flying things?" He peered into her pale-eyed face. "What have you learned about them?"

"They appeared only a few seasons ago—sent, Larlarane believes, to prepare the way for your return. They fear the light—she says they lurk in caves and old mines through the day. They fly out in the dark to look for food. Metal is the food they prefer—that's evidence they really are your

monster children. And why Larlarane was gathering junk metal. She was trying to appease them."

"But you don't know what sort of thing they are?"

"I—I've a theory, Blackie." She hesitated, frowning through her mask of blackness. "You may laugh, but it fits the few facts I've been able to gather. I don't think their vital energy comes from any ordinary biochemical process. I think it's—gravitational."

"You don't mean—" A shock of intuition took his voice.

"I believe that engineer was right with his notion that black holes come in swarms, in all sizes. I think each one of those creatures carries a tiny black hole in its belly. I think they live on the gravitational energy generated when mass is sucked into it. That's why they seem so heavy, and why they're able to eat metal and ice, and why they seem so hot inside."

"How—how could such things evolve?"

"All life is an unlikely function of energy-flow," she insisted. "The energy flow from a star takes a long time to evolve our kind of life. Perhaps the energy sink around a black hole can form life—or something that looks like life—just as well." She shrugged forlornly. "Not that it matters to us now. The evolution of the *bomzeeth* can't get us to the space gate."

"I don't know what can get us there."

They sat for a time in abject silence. The yellow flame of the little lamp flickered slightly, casting huge unsteady shadows on the tall, unbroken wall. Listening, he heard no sound from anywhere outside. Once the stone floor quivered, as if to another after-quake, but even that was soundless.

"Forgive me, Blackie," she breathed at last. "This isn't what I hoped for."

"I don't like surrender." Staring into her darkened face, he asked, "Why the paint?"

"The only way I could reach you." She hesitated, almost shyly. "The purpose of the cult, you see, is to propitiate Ghur. The black paint is a sign of dedication. Larlarane is officially your bride—but naturally somewhat apprehensive about the consumation. She let me take her place."

She swayed a little toward him, opening the white fur to show herself completely black. Beneath the rank muskiness of some native perfume, he caught a faint hint of her own sweet-leaf scent.

"If you wish, *gunggee*—" she whispered. "If you love me—"

"It's no time for love." He shoved her back. "If you're still a Benefactor, get me something to eat. Get me out of this pit. Help me find a way across that ditch to the space gate."

"Forgive me, Blackie." Shivering, she pulled the white cloak back around her. "I have been begging for the food in our packs, but Larlarane won't trust us with anything. She doesn't know what we might use for magic. Certainly she doesn't intend to set you free."

"I guess all our technology looks like black magic to her—but magic is what we need." He stood up, swollen ankles still a little stiff, and caught her stained hands to pull her from the floor. "Go on back to Larlarane," he told her. "Invent some magic for us."

"I'll try, Blackie." She clutched the white cloak around her. "But what—what could it possibly be?"

"We'll have to fly," he said. "Nobody can climb and swim across the

ditch."

"Fly?" she gasped. "How?"

"Any way we can." He paused to grope for the miraculous. "A fire balloon—if we can find paper to make it. A glider—if we can find anything light and strong enough. A kite, perhaps—the Wind clan hunters used to fly men on kites to reach the cliffs where the wild tlys nest. With cloth and a few sticks and our own climbing rope, we might make a kite."

"In the few days we have?" She shrugged hopelessly. "With no tools? With nothing?"

"We can't just sit. We've got to fight."

"I'll try, Blackie." She turned uncertainly away, toward the center of the cell. "I will try."

She called something through her translator at the dark opening overhead. A looped rope dropped. She stepped into the loop, waved a black hand at him as the rope hauled her upward.

Carrying the lamp, he explored the cell. The curving wall was seamless, slick and cold—forbidden steel, perhaps, but hidden beneath a yellow ceramic. The floor was rough masonry, with no drain or other possible exit.

Something came thudding down behind him.

What he found was a small straw basket of food. Scraps of smoked fish. Bits of something dark and tough and sweetish, perhaps dried fruit. Stone-hard cakes of black bread. A small skin of some sour, weakly alcoholic liquid.

Too ravenous to be critical, he gulped the beer and gnawed the bread, trying to infer what he could about the native culture. There was fishing and farming and brewing of a sort—since the food was all pre-

served, he thought it must have come from some more fertile region, perhaps as tithes to support the bride of night. Nothing suggested a technology advanced enough to cross the trench.

While he ate, the tiny lamp flickered out. Left in utter blackness, he finished the food, drained the last drop from the skin, and sat back restlessly to wait.

Desperately, seething with his own frustration, he groped for ways to escape the pit, to cross the ditch and reach the space gate. All the plans he found were sheerest fantasy. He saw no action he could take.

He was blindly pacing the floor, avoiding collision by the echo of his footsteps, when the earth quaked again. Thrown against the wall, he fell back to the pitching floor. The planet reverberated under him, its vibration more powerful than sound.

Struggling to his feet in the dusty dark, he was flung down again. At last he merely lay there, ill from the motion of the troubled world. The floor quivered again to smaller concussions, and he wondered if some tunnel above him had caved in to seal the cell.

At last there was silence.

Lying helpless there, with nothing else to do, he imagined the black hole still plunging Earthward, dragging the unswallowed fragments of Mars. The new quake was due, he supposed, to the beginning strains of its terrific tidal forces—or perhaps more likely to the passage of another satellite hole, like the one which cut that trench.

Perhaps Snowfire would know.

With slowly waning hope, he waited for her to return with news, with some unimagined miracle that might carry them across the trench to the space gate, but she didn't come.

His mouth was parched and hunger tormented him and still she didn't come.

He tried to estimate the days or hours left, but his sense of time was gone.

Finally, exhausted, he slept.

5.
SNOWFIRE woke him.

"Sorry, Blackie."

Her touch shattered a dream in which he had been a boy again, newly apprenticed to the arena and elated to be in the highlands on his first tly hunt. The master hunters had rigged a kite, and he was riding on it to reach the nests on the cliffs.

"I did—did try!" Despair broke her voice. "No luck."

He sat up stiffly, his dreamed elation dying.

Stooping over him, she held a clay lamp in one black hand and a coil of his own climbing rope in another. Her black-streaked face looked pinched and bleak.

"What now?"

"Forgive me, *gunggee*." She set the lamp on the floor and bent as if to kiss him. "Can't you forgive me?"

"What do you want?"

"This isn't I who wanted this. Believe me, *gunggee*!"

Frozen, he sat staring at the yellow rope.

"It's Lar—Larlarane." Her voice shook. "She's afraid to hold you any longer. Since the moon is breaking up. She thinks that's your doing. She wanted to fill the pit to bury you alive, but I convinced her that you could make a new volcano here to lift you out again. Her solution now is to give you to the *homzeeth*."

He merely stared, in dazed protest.

"Please stand. Hands behind you."

"Not again!"

"We must."

He stood unwillingly and felt her fingers knotting the ropes.

"The blindfold, too." Her low voice caught and quivered. "We—we must. Because Larlarane's still afraid of you. She won't risk letting you see her again, or even the inside of her underground temple." The blindfold covered his eyes, and he felt her cold lips brush his. "Good-by, *gunggee*. And please don't blame me."

"I don't blame anybody," he muttered hoarsely. "What's the use?"

She slid a rope under his arms. It tightened. He felt himself hauled upward, dragged through the ceiling vent, tossed on a litter. Silent men ran with him. The air on his face was suddenly cold. He heard the crunch of snow underfoot, and the crack of Larlarane's whip. At last the litter bearers dropped him into soft snow and ran. Their receding footfalls died. All he could hear was a faint crackling, like a fire that gave no heat. He lay somewhere alone, in an icy wind. Once he caught a sharp whiff of wood smoke, but he felt no warmth from anything.

Shivering, he waited.

For this useless end, he and Snowfire had been trained as Benefactors. They had waited long years for the slow probe to reach Earth. They had left undone all their tasks on Ngongga. They had lost each other—

Whipping about him, the arctic wind was suddenly alive with another sound, a far-off steady howling. On a more advanced planet, it might have been the whine of some jet-driven aircraft. Here, it could only be a diving *bonzeeth*.

He lay trembling. Trying not to feel the numbing cold, he wondered about those alien creatures. Really, could their vital force come from small black

holes? The physics of it troubled him. There would be radiant heat of course, from matter sucked into the funnels, and the energy of falling particles might be trapped by magnetic fields, but he couldn't quite imagine the anatomy.

The nature of the holes themselves was another puzzle. If the force of gravity was propagated at the speed of light, how could the gravitational field of the swallowed mass reach out to trap more matter? He should have asked that double-brained portal engineer more about the theory.

Though he found no answers, he kept himself busy with such problems. They were better than counting the seconds toward the break-up of the Earth, better than regretting that he would never know the son Snowfire had promised him.

The wind brought another whiff of pungent smoke. He heard sudden distant shouts, the far-off crack of Larlarane's whip, the jangle of broken ice beneath running feet.

"*Gunggee!*" Snowfire was suddenly above him, gasping for her breath. "I slipped away—from Larlarane—to die with you!"

"Untie me!" he rasped. "Can't you untie me?"

"Here's your knife. I'll cut the cords."

He felt her at his aching wrists and ankles. Suddenly the blindfold was gone. He sat up unsteadily on a snow-sifted pile of broken iron. Though it was night, the half-light seemed strangely bright. He looked at the sky—and trembled.

What he saw was a long egg-shape of silver fire, pierced with one hot blue point. Flecked and streaked with black, it reached from the zenith of the sullen sky far toward the ice horizon. Its strangeness brushed him with

a numbing chill.

"The moon of Earth," Snowfire was whispering. "Broken up by the tidal forces of another black hole—larger I guess than the one that cut the trench. The fragments are in elliptic orbits around it. The blue point is the funnel of the hole itself, at the upper focus."

Shaking, he staggered to his feet.

"A dreadful thing!" She caught his arm, and he felt her trembling. "And it fits a prediction that you will set the sky on fire before you destroy the earth. Larlarane is terrified. She was afraid to follow me."

He looked uncertainly around him. The eerie light of the shattered moon lay blue and cold on a vast flat field of snow. A foot-beaten trail ran far across it to a low stone building, which he thought must be the temple of Ghur. Beyond, rounded mounds were soft with snow.

"Ruins." Snowfire gestured widely. "A city—when Earth had cities. This flat field is where the shuttle craft took off. Your altar, now. The fires must be a signal to the *bomzeeth*."

He found the fires as she spoke. Three smoky blazes, spaced wide about the pile of broken metal where he had been tossed. Their yellow light was dim beneath that great frozen whirlpool of brighter fire overhead.

"What—what now?" Her teeth chattered. "What can we do?"

He caught her arms and held her off to look into her green eyes. They were lusterless and hollow, dull against her black-dyed face. He felt her shivering beneath the loose white cloak.

"We're still Benefactors," he told her. "We'll do what we can."

She still held his knife in one black hand. Behind her, among the scraps

of metal offered to Ghur, he saw their packs, his binoculars and translator, Snowfire's yellow survival suit, finally the laser energizer.

"Our key!" He bent to snatch it up. "If we could reach the space gate—"

His voice faded when he heard the howling returning overhead. The diving creature thundered low above them and climbed again on its plume of scarlet flame. In black silhouette, its big-bellied shape crept upward across the silver egg-shape of the splintered moon.

"Can you run?" She tugged at his sleeve. "Maybe it will wait till the fires burn lower before it drops to feed."

Scarcely hearing, he stood following its far red fleck, climbing and wheeling above the broken moon to dive again. Trembling, he felt almost that he was once more in the great arena at Nggonggamba, awaiting the dive of a killer fly. His numb fingers tightened suddenly on the laser energizer.

"Get out of that cape." He swung suddenly to Snowfire. "Get into your suit."

She slid out of the loose white fur. Nude and black, shrinking from the bitter wind, she looked so defenseless, so utterly despondent, that a lump throbbed in his throat. He held the stiff yellow suit while she slipped into it, then bent to gather up the rest of their gear.

High in that uncanny sky, the *bomzeeth* turned to dive again. He saw a ripple of color beyond it, and paused to stare at the long curtains of green and crimson fire dropping toward the blue-lit white horizon, all across the north.

"The aurora," Snowfire whispered. "Caused I guess by particles from the funnel that tore up the moon." Breathless, she finished fastening her

suit. "Shall—shall we run?"

"Not far," he murmured. "Not too far."

Just beyond the nearest signal fire, he pulled her flat beside him in the snow. The *bomzeeth* came roaring down, more appalling than any tly. The ice quivered when it struck. Sliding on to Larlarane's offering, it began licking up the broken iron with an enormous rough black tongue.

"Come along!" He hauled her upright. "We're going for a ride."

She hung back, staring blankly. "Are you crazy?"

"Maybe," he muttered. "But the craziest chance is better than none."

He dashed back around the fire, toward that dark and monstrous shape. At the last instant, its alien black-scaled hugeness almost broke his resolution—but an unseen drag had already caught him. Swept unexpectedly ahead, he jumped high. Snowfire came flying behind him, drawn after that same savage attraction.

They crashed against the hot black scales. The impact dazed him for an instant, before he caught his breath and tried to stand. The pack had been torn off his back, and his limbs were leadenly heavy.

"So I was right!" Her outcry was oddly triumphant. "It does have a black hole in its belly. We're already caught in the gravity field."

Fighting that ruthless force, he was climbing the great scales to the top of its swollen body. Twenty feet beneath him, that thick snake-like tongue dropped a mass of rusted arm and struck savagely at him. He thumbed the laser alive, and slashed back with its blinding green needle.

The tongue recoiled.

The creature bellowed, with a hurricane of sound that battered him

backward and ached in his bones. Snowfire seized his arm, screaming. He heard nothing, but saw her arm pointing. He turned and found the creature's black-fluked tail whipping toward them.

He stabbed it with the laser.

The blade of pulsing light did no harm that he could see, but the creature thundered louder. The tail stiffened, red fire exploding from its flaring jet. The hot thick scales quaked underfoot, and suddenly they were gliding across the flat snowfield.

Snowfire's clinging fingers dug hard into his arm. Glancing at her, he found her eyes dark and staring. Beneath the mask of blackness, her drawn face wore a look of startled incredulity.

"Down!" he shouted. "Hang on!"

She gaped at him, unhearing, unbelieving.

Crouching against the bitter wind rising, he beckoned her down behind him. Followed by its long plume of crimson thunder, the creature was sliding faster, faster. Larlarane's tiny signal fires were lost behind. The airstream tore at him, till he had to drop deeper into the grip of the creature's great belly and clutch the edge of a massive scale. Suddenly they were in the air, lifting above the rounder mounds that once had been a city. Wheeling beneath the blazing ellipse of the fragmented moon, the creature swung north, toward the cold high shimmer of the aurora.

"The wrong way!" The shriek of the icy wind and the roar of the jet swept Snowfire's voice away, but he saw her dark mouth moving and saw her black hand pointing and understood her desperate words. "The gate is south-east!"

He searched to sense and master the creature, as he would have

probed to control a fighting tly. Fighting the cruel wind, he played his wire-sharp laser blade against its left-hand fluke. Its rough scales bucked under him and its bellow hurt his ears. But the massive tail flinched aside, and the aurora slid back across the sky.

Pure joy lifted him, a sheer elation he had never felt before, but had only imagined once long ago, the first time he sneaked into the arena to try picking pockets and discovered a new ambition when he saw a black champion binding a vicious tly, with thrown hats falling in a colored rain to acclaim his triumph. Nothing in all reality had left him feeling quite so splendid.

The aurora, he saw, had wheeled too far around. He stabbed the laser at the right-hand fluke. The creature roared and veered sharply back. Snowfire was suddenly shaking his arm, pointing down. He saw the trench.

An endless black slash across the blue-lit snowfields, it crept back beneath them. To his left, the bottom of it shone with sudden silver, burned with one bright blue spot, reflecting the shattered moon.

That brief reflection dimmed, and the barrier chasm was suddenly behind.

"The beacon!" Snowfire's scream was whipped away again, but he followed her pointing arm to the green-and-orange blink on the far white horizon. "The gate!"

It was slipping aside, and he stabbed the laser at the left fluke again. Again the creature veered. Green-and-orange, green-and-orange, the beacon winked straight ahead.

The wind-stream tore and battered at him, blurred his eyes with tears. His straining fingers ached and slip-

ped on the edge of the great black scale. Snowfire lost her clinging grip on his arm, clutched at him desperately. He flung his free arm around her, to pull her down behind him.

And the beacon crawled on toward them.

He ducked his head to wipe his streaming eyes and found the dome beneath it, a tiny bulge on the vast expanse of blue-lit snow. He gave Snowfire a grin of elation, and saw the agonized question on her tear-streaked face.

How were they to reach the ground?

"Here we are!" He yelled into her ear, though he knew the wind would take his words. "With no fall gear."

Testing the responses of the creature, he played the laser on the eye-like pits at the roots of the hard-scaled wings. It lurched and bellowed and at last began to drop. He stopped the stabbing needle, until it tried to climb again.

The beacon and the dome came nearer, nearer. He let the creature lift a little, held it level, forced it sharply down. Howling, it touched the ice, plowing out great plumes of snow.

"Now!" He lifted Snowfire. "Off!"

Fighting the pull of that vast anomalous mass in its belly, they climbed the thick-scaled tail, dropped off into a bank of snow. He heard its jet boom and shriek behind him, felt its scorching blast above him, saw its crimson glare receding.

And it was gone.

Dazed and bruised, he pulled himself out of the drift and turned to look for Snowfire. He found her standing where they had fallen, bent double. Sick, he thought, or perhaps hysterical. He was stumbling to help her when she straightened with the ener-

gizer, which he had dropped.

"Here, *gunggee*. You'll need this."

They slogged to the portal dome. Built of massive permalith, it stood unscarred by centuries of vandals. The tall entry doors slid open before their translators. Inside, they found gloomy silence, a few scattered rocks and sticks left by the ancient Earth-folk when they disabled the gate, a dusty human skeleton sprawled beside a stone-tipped spear, where one invader had died.

On the high control stage, everything looked intact except a single shattered plexoid panel with a rock still embedded in it. With stiff and trembling fingers, he pulled out the broken energizer beneath it, snapped the new unit into place.

Nothing happened.

"Something wrong!" A shock of fear took his breath. "I don't know what—"

"Wait!" Snowfire whispered. "I think the ring-fields are forming."

The console was suddenly alive with winking symbols. At the center of the vast floor below them, where the entry ways and exit ways converged around a circular pit, fleeting wisps of dark shadow and pale blue fire had begun to flicker. The fire suddenly ballooned to become an enormous blue iris. The shadows blackened and condensed into its center, became the staring pupil of the interstellar eye. Sudden light flushed the vault above them. Signals chimed from the console. The ways began to crawl.

"*Gungee!*" Elated, Snowfire gripped his arm. "We've done it!"

They ran down the ramp to the nearest entry way. It swept them into that enormous lidless eye. Transit through the ring-fields that bridged the light-years was only a shock of shifting gravities, a wink of suspended

sensation. With no more sense of motion, they were abruptly in the vaster portal dome on Xyr.

The fat bald portal engineer found them there, in the emergency hospital center. Between their tests and shots and treatments, he wanted to know every fact they had learned on Earth. News of the *bomzeeth* lit a glint of eager interest in the pale eyes beneath his implanted computer.

"Gravitophores." His great naked double cranium nodded ponderously. "Fragmentary reports of such creatures have been sent back from two or three explorers of black holes, but you are the first to return with actual confirmation."

The nurses were taking Snowfire to wash her black paint off, and he stayed to question Blacklantern.

"We've no time to waste," he apologized. "Earth has only ten days now, before the central hole arrives. We're anxious to initiate the research and rescue programs we have planned. A dozen major expeditions are organized and ready. Archeologists waiting to salvage the last relics of our ancestors. Anthropologists interested in the culture of our surviving cousins. Teams waiting to study the swarm of black holes—I myself am hoping to capture one of the gravitophores you report."

"What's happening to the Earth-folk?"

"The portal authority is offering them free transit." He shrugged, not much concerned. "If they decide to leave."

A technician had come to take Blacklantern for counter-radiation. When he returned, tingling all over and pleasantly half-drunk from the treatment, the engineer was still waiting.

"One more item." Beneath the

mass of his auxiliary brain, the small eyes shone shrewdly. "If this has been enough of the Benefactors, I still want you in the portal survey division. You've seen the last of Old Earth. We've an explorer probe in orbit now around a virgin world with a rich carbon-based biosphere. I'll make you the planet manager there, at a scale of pay you can't refuse—"

"But I can," Blacklantern said. "I'm still a Benefactor, and my own people need me."

"You Benefactors!"

With a puzzled shrug, the engineer waddled away.

Snowfire came back, scrubbed golden-pink.

"You're released," the senior medic told them. "No permanent damage from radiation or exposure, though I advise a few days of rest."

Benefactor Thornwall was waiting with congratulations when they left the emergency center. He kissed Snowfire and greeted Blacklantern with the palm-touch he had learned on Nggongga.

"I'm putting you up for promotion," he told Blacklantern. "To a stellar

fellowship—"

"Gunggeel!" Snowfire flung eager arms around him. "You've earned it."

"And I've a choice for both of you. You may go back to Old Earth when you feel able, to lead our effort to persuade the natives that technology might be a good thing for them. Or you may return to Nggongga, to carry on as our co-agents there. How about it?"

They looked at each other. Without the paint, Snowfire seemed strangely pale, but her green eyes were shining. She reached quickly to take Blacklantern's hand.

"The rescue effort mustn't wait for us," she told the old Benefactor. "Anyhow, Blackie's the wrong color for it." She turned to smile at him, her tone gently mocking. "Before he tamed that dragon, the Earthfolk thought he was their devil-god. They'll be certain of it now."

"We'll choose Nggongga," Blacklantern said. "We've work enough waiting for us there."

"And love." She squeezed his hand. "We're going to have a son."

—JACK WILLIAMSON

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THE COMPUTER CRIED CHARGE!

GEORGE R. R. MARTIN

Illustrated by TONY GLEESON

THE AUTOTANKS drove across the hellplain in a double column of fifty, towards the distant mountains where the enemy lay in wait.

Ugly was the word for autotanks. Low, hunched shapes of battledark duralloy, they crawled on woven metal treads over ground that would have melted anything else. Screechgun mounts and the snouts of lasercannon broke their unpleasant symmetry.

Even the dull sheen of their armor was gone, hidden by the thick black heatgrease that oozed from within, shielding them until it cooked and cracked and was covered by a fresh layer.

Beneath the hardened grease: a foot of metal, then a tangled web of weaponry and circuits and motors and computers. Beneath that: the deep-buried synthabrain, fist-sized mind of the autotank. Within that: the programmed mentality of a bloodthirsty moron.

Ugly was the word for autotanks. On most worlds they were an obscene intrusion, a blot, hideous things that crushed out life beneath them with only a rumbling purr, nightmare

shapes that touched beauty and left ruin.

Here they belonged.

They moved across a flat, fissured plain of yawning desolation and unending heat. They moved in a world where water was a legend and the rivers ran with white-hot metals, over rocks that hissed at the touch of their treads, around lakes of molten magma. They moved in an awful stillness, save for when the winds came. And that was no relief, for those screaming sulfuric blasts would cook the heatgrease and rip it off and sear and pit the duralloy beneath.

Across the face of the inferno, the autotanks crawled like a line of fat black slugs, ignoring the bluewhite burning blindness that filled up half the sky. Behind them they left a trail of hardened grease cooking on the rocks.

ABOVE: it was not hot in the command center of the dropship *Balacloa*, and the hundred-plus men working there knew it. They knew the ship was high in orbit, safe in the cold womb of space. They could see the readings on their temperature gauges.

They could hear the faint whine of the pumps and cooling systems that kept the air circulating in the huge, bustling room.

Yet, in spite of all this, they squirmed and sweated and loosened the collars of their uniforms. They knew it was not hot, but knowledge was no defense. For the main view-screen filled the entire forward wall with a scene from hell, and they could see the lava and the great blue sun that was larger than the mountains and the rocks that baked and cracked and hissed. And the bluewhite brilliance flooded the command center and beat at their eyes, and they could see and feel the heat that did not exist.

The worst off were the men along the port wall. When they ignored the main viewscreen and tended to their instruments, the same sun pounded at them from a thousand smaller screens. And they had to watch; each screen was the eye of an autotank, down on the face of hell, reporting what it saw.

The telecom men along the starboard wall were much better off, for they watched only blinking lights and wavering lines and dancing needles. But they'd forget at times, and look up at the main screen, and then the heat would wash over them in a torrid rush.

The computer techs were the best off. The dropship's Battlemaster 7000 Tactical Computing System took up the wall directly opposite the main viewscreen; tending it, they had their backs to the sun at all times.

General Russ Triegloff, drop commandant, wasn't so lucky. Moving around the mountainous holocube that filled the center of the room, Triegloff faced the screen as often as not. He was a huge, hairy man, and his



brown uniform was already soaked with sweat.

He'd asked Captain Lyford to cut the main viewscreen at least twice. But Lyford, a lean hawk-faced Navy type who wouldn't condescend to perspire if you paid him for it, had politely declined. He was very cool. He'd gotten the dropship into orbit without incident, and now he just wanted to sit back and watch Triegloff worry—and sweat. Every time the General mentioned the heat, Lyford would point to a thermometer and cluck and tell Triegloff that he was working too hard.

So Triegloff had given up on that particular crusade; he had bigger things to worry about. Flanked by a couple of under-commanders and a host of orderlies, he stomped about the room restlessly, watching the holocube from a dozen different angles, studying photos of the enemy positions in the mountains, and thinking furiously.

He calmed a little when Lee Williston, the portly blond civilian who headed the TCS experts, fought his way through the underlings and slapped a stack of computer printouts into Triegloff's hand. "There's seven assault plans there," Williston said. "Projected likelihood of success ranges from thirty-seven to seventy-two per cent."

Triegloff moved to a desk beside the holocube, and spread the seven printouts alongside each other. "That's not bad," he said, studying the plans with the quick familiarity of a man who has done this a thousand times before. "The seventy-two per cent has the highest casualty rates, of course."

Williston nodded, and his double chins bounced. "Of course. And that casualty figure includes men and

material."

Triegloff looked up, and brought his grizzled eyebrows together. "Men?"

"Yes. Plan four—that's your seventy-two per cent—calls for landing a couple battalions of assault squads to supplement the armor. That means human casualties, naturally, and pretty high ones."

Triegloff picked up plan four and looked at it carefully. "Yes, I see," he said, flipping through the pages. "I'm tempted, too. Don't like having nothing but autotanks and juggernauts down there. They're tough enough, but not too smart. Can't think on their feet, like a man could, y'know?"

Williston returned a fussy frown. "The war machines will do the job for you, General, if you just program them correctly. I wouldn't recommend choosing plan four, really I wouldn't. The casualties are quite high. Battlemaster has given that plan a 'least recommended' rating, despite the high success figure." He pointed.

"Still," said Triegloff. "Men would give us so much more battlefield flexibility..." He dropped the printout back to the desk reluctantly. "Well, what else is there?"

"Six other plans," said Williston. "Two have success indices below fifty, however, and I'm sure you wouldn't want them. That leaves four reasonably sound tactical approaches to those emplacements. All of them are roughly equal, except for a few variables."

"Such as?" Triegloff said.

Williston shrugged. "Holes in our data, General. We don't know everything about the enemy position we'd like to know, and Battlemaster's projections can't be fully reliable without full information." He paused and looked around. "Anyone have those photos?" he asked.

An orderly shoved a stack of blown-up aerial photos at the computer man. Williston took them and turned back to Triegloff. "Here," he said, jabbing at a photograph. "These black holes in the cliffside are the biggest problems. Until we know for certain what they are, we won't know which plan to push."

Triegloff, still studying the printouts, barely glanced at the photo. "I can guess what those holes are," he said gruffly. "We picked up energy readings from that area. And not from the big laser turrets, either—those are clearly visible. I figure we got hellglobe tubes down there, built right into the damn mountains."

"Yes, that is a possibility," Williston said. "In which case, that whole valley would get a fortification index of four-oh-seven-six. Your autotanks would be decimated attacking something like that; you just don't mess around with those sort of figures. If those *are* hellglobe tubes, plan two is optimal."

Triegloff glanced at plan two. "Right," he said. "A joint autotank-juggernaut assault. Should do it. The juggernauts could use their shields to cover the tanks."

"Exactly," Williston said. "However, it's also possible that those holes are caves, or some other natural formation. Or perhaps the only thing inside is more lasercannon. In *that* case, the fortification index drops to two-two-oh-nine. And plan seven becomes optimal."

"No," Triegloff said firmly. "I don't care what Battlemaster projects; those *are* hellglobe tubes. I know it. A hunch, but it makes sense. That valley is the main approach of their whole sector HQ. It'd be held with everything they got, and they got hellglobes."

Williston was about to say something, but a hand on his shoulder shut him up. Captain Lyford, smiling and immaculate in fleet-black, stepped around him and clucked at Triegloff. "I still say we should just lob them to slag from orbit," Lyford said smoothly. "It would save you ever so much trouble, General."

Triegloff grimaced. "Crap," he said. "We want them alive. That's the job. They pulled a fast one, sticking their sector base on a freakish hellhole like this without even a fleet to guard it. And they cost us plenty when we hit that fake that was *supposed* to be their HQ. Now they pay, though; we can grab all their top brass."

Lyford dismissed that. "Whatever you like, General," he said. "I got you here for the drop, so I'll leave the rest up to you. I really should butt out, eh?"

"Your advice is always well taken, Captain," Triegloff said with a wooden voice. "I would appreciate it if you would shut off that damned view-screen, however. I really don't need it."

Lyford smiled. "Why? It gives a good idea of the terrain down there. But if you insist . . . I mean, I wouldn't want it to bother you, or impair your judgment."

Triegloff frowned, annoyed. "My judgment is not in the least impaired by your viewscreen, Captain," he said. "It's only that it bothers my men. I've made decisions under conditions much worse than this."

He looked down at the seven plans, very decisively, and moved his finger from one to another. There was a brief pause when he touched plan four. But he moved on, and picked up plan two.

"Here," he said, giving the printout to an aide. "Have them program this one."

FORWARD, ever forward, moved the autotanks. The mountains, once a smudge on the distant eastern horizon, now loomed larger and larger ahead of them. And still the double column drove forward, hissing and rumbling, fighting the sulfurwind and the blinding light and the inexorable heat. Only ninety-nine of the column had made it this far; one 'tank was miles behind, alone on the plain where its cooling systems and motors had failed almost simultaneously. There it would remain until its heat-grease finally ran out, and the wind and the sun got at its duralloy flanks to burn and tear.

The others drove on without it. Now, programmed from above, they had a purpose. Now they had a battleplan.

North of them, other long rows of shapes moved in the distance, gradually growing larger. No alarms rang in the autotanks. Dimly, they knew what the others were; a second column, angling southeast to join them. The rendezvous had already been programmed into their consciousness.

The two formations paralleled each other for a long time, driving east on opposite sides of a great crevasse that divided the plain. Once, briefly, they lost sight of each other, when a second, smaller fissure branched off from the main one, and forced the southern formation to make a wide detour.

The other columns waited, however, slowing where the crevasse ran into a lake of redblack magma, and swinging around it. On the shores of that lake, they were augmented by yet another formation of autotanks that had come boiling from the northernmost dropoint at breakneck speed. Beyond the lake, on its eastern banks, the original group finally met and melded with the others.

Now six columns of autotanks resumed their drive towards the enemy, through terrain that grew steadily rougher and more difficult. The mountains ahead had become a row of blackened teeth that bit the bluewhite sun.

TRIEGLOFF leaned forward over the corporal, his palms sweaty where they gripped the leather of the man's seat-back, his eyes fixed on the readings and the small viewscreen. There was nothing much to see on the screen: a sea of slow moving black, crossed by very thin, very faint lines.

The other instruments were more informative, and their readings spelled trouble. Triegloff watched in silence, until he suddenly grew aware that Williston was standing beside him.

"The fucking crust broke," Triegloff said, loudly, without looking at the RCS man. "I've got three juggernauts covered by magma."

Williston said nothing. Battlemaster had chosen the dropoints for each component of the attack force. If the juggernauts had been traveling over ground too weak to support their immense weight, the computer was to blame—at least in Triegloff's eyes.

"We're still functional, General," the corporal said, his attention on the instruments that were monitoring the fate of one of the buried juggernauts. "The duralloy is holding, and I've thrown the cooling systems onto emergency maximum. But the treads can't get any traction, sir. And the readings are edging up towards critical. We're got to get out soon, or we'll have a failure."

Triegloff nodded. "How much time?"

"A half hour, sir," the corporal said. "Maybe a little more."

"Leave them," Williston suggested.

"I intend to," Triegloff said. "A rescue is out of the question—another section of ground might break through, and God knows how many more juggernauts I'd lose then."

He turned away from the monitors and faced Williston. "But I've ordered the whole column full-stop. That's not solid rock at all; we were moving over a goddam sea of magma, covered by a crust of hardened rock. Can't go forward."

Williston looked slightly embarrassed. "I'm sorry, General, but Battlemaster can only work with the data it's given. Our sensor readings indicated that route was solid all the way. We'll have to recompute."

"Damn straight," said Triegloff, his tone very disgruntled. "I'm ordering the whole juggernaut squad to edge back, real slow and careful. Take some new readings, and find a branching where they can cut off to a new route."

Williston nodded and moved off quickly, and Triegloff headed back to the big holocube. The holo was a constantly-changing computer simulation, assembled by Battlemaster from the data flooding the monitors. It looked almost like an aerial view. Triegloff watched intently. The pattern that had been forming, the attack pattern, was now broken.

"Sir?"

He turned to face an under-commander, wincing as he looked towards the main viewscreen. "Yes?"

"Should we reprogram the autotanks, General?"

Triegloff hesitated. The sudden snafu had ruined the timing of the assault; the juggernauts would never make the planned rendezvous in time. And without the huge juggernauts and their combersome shield

machinery, the enemy hellglobes would tear up the smaller autotanks in an attack.

"Waiting won't do any good," Triegloff said. "It'll be hours before we get the juggs around the magma. Have your autotanks procede as planned, colonel."

"To the attack point, sir?"

"Yes," said Triegloff. He waved for the colonel to follow him and strode off down the length of the holocube, towards the big viewscreen. Twenty paces brought them to the section of the cube that showed the enemy fortifications. Triegloff braked to a halt, and pointed.

"I'm sticking with the plan we've picked," he said. "We'll run it through Battlemaster once more to be sure, but I don't think there'll be any problems. Instead of attacking at once, though, we'll use the autotanks to soften 'em up a little until the juggernauts get there."

His hand went into the holocube, and stroked a series of low ridges that bracketed the entrance to the most heavily-fortified valley. "We've picked up minor energy readings from these ridges—probably low-grade stuff like disruptors and small lasers. Not too important, but they might be bothersome when we charge up the valley—and we're going to have to do that sooner or later. So we might as well knock out the ridges now. Have the autotanks swing by and plaster them. Then move out of range, quick; I doubt they'll waste hellglobes at that distance, but there's no sense taking any chances. Raid 'em like that a couple times. And then when the juggs get there, we can reform and carry out the attack plan."

The colonel nodded. "Sounds good, sir." He noted the coordinates and turned back to his sector. Triegloff,

already engrossed in larger considerations, hardly noticed him go.

The colonel relayed the order to the six captains under him. Each captain commanded an autotank attack group a hundred strong. The captains talked to their lieutenants, who did the actual coding. The lieutenants worked out a joint program, and handed it over to the enlisted men on the monitors, who fed it into the command consoles. The consoles chewed up the program, digested it, and spat it down to the autotanks. Then the 'tank computers took over, deciphering the string of impulses and feeding the orders to the synthabrain.

Somewhere, somebody made a mistake.

THE LAST RENDEZVOUS was in sight of the valley, when the two big 'tank formations, each comprised of three attack groups, linked up to form a single angry metal horde. With that last linkage, the columns broke, and the autotanks assumed battle formation: they covered the last miles in a sprawling arc.

Onward they drove, across death-still rocky foothills and smoking fissures and burning craters, towards the cliffs and the ridges and the valley ahead.

Onward they drove, towards a row of silent mountains that gleamed bluewhite like sharpened teeth, and half-seen emplacements that dotted the peaks like cavities.

Onward they drove, rolling into darkness for the first time when they entered the long shadow thrown by the mountains, moving towards the dark gash in the mountain wall and the ridges that ran across it.

When the ridges were almost a mile away, battle began.

The enemy opened fire first; tiny

lights began to wink and blink on top of the ridges, and laser fire spat from the shadows. The autotanks took the light blows, and drove on. The fire grew heavier. 'Tank instruments recorded disruptor fire, and from somewhere a buried projectile gun opened up, and the ground shook to the explosions.

The autotanks closed, relentless. It takes a lot of force to dent duralloy. It takes a lot of heat to cut duralloy. The ridge guns came up short on both counts. The 'tanks shrugged a path through the explosions with only a few dented plates. They ignored the disruptors, light personnel weapons that were useless against armour. They worried about the lasers, but only a little; their own lasercannon were bigger and more deadly than the guns on the ridges.

Half a mile from the first ridge, the autotanks opened up. Heavy laser fire sliced into the ridges, HE rocked the gun emplacements, and the sulfur-winds shrieked with the sound of screechgun fire.

The lead 'tanks fired first; then the others behind them; then the ones behind *them*. The ridges smoked and shook and the enemy guns died and grew silent. Here and there an autotank died too, but the losses were few. The 'tank fire grew steadily heavier, more deadly. Whole sections of the ridges vanished under the pounding; rock cannot absorb punishment like duralloy.

The lead 'tanks reached the first ridge and rolled over it, still firing. The rest of the formation followed, in wave after smoking wave. They climbed over the second ridge, and third, silencing any enemy guns that still moved. They didn't have to climb over the final ridge; it had ceased to exist before they reached it. But they

climbed through the debris.

And onward drove the autotanks. Onward, not back. Onward, past the ridges, past the light guns they were ordered to charge. Onward, towards the shadowed valley that yawned before them like the mouth of death.

IT HAD grown very silent in the command center, but Triegloff hardly noticed it. He was absorbed in the new printouts that Battlemaster had just spewed forth, detailing alternate battleplans that took into account the delay in getting the juggernauts into action.

He snapped into awareness when an aide put an uneasy hand on his shoulder. "Yes?" he said.

"Sir," the aide said. He looked up, at the main viewscreen.

Triegloff followed his gaze with narrowed eyes. He saw what he'd expected to see; a battle scene, confused. The autotanks had been assaulting the ridges, as he'd ordered. He hadn't been following the action closely, although he was vaguely aware that it was in progress. Making sure the preliminary went all right was a job for his subordinates; Triegloff was planning the main event.

He had been looking at the screen for a full minute before it hit him. The autotanks were climbing *over* the ridges. And they were continuing.

"They're charging," someone said, very faintly, across the room. "They're charging the main guns."

Triegloff's fists tightened. His eyes roamed the room, found the colonel who commanded the autotanks. He moved to him in a raging rush. "What the *hell* are you doing?"

The colonel stared. "I—a programming error. It must be a programming error."

Triegloff looked back at the screen.

The lead 'tanks had entered the valley. The others were following, in waves. "Damn you," Triegloff shouted. "Don't just *stand there!* Countermand those orders, *quick!*"

The colonel nodded, but didn't move. Triegloff grabbed him with both hands, and shoved him towards the monitors. "*Move it!* Or you won't have a command left . . ."

ONWARD drove the autotanks, over the ridges and through the shadows, up the rocky valley of hell towards the pockmarked cliffs ahead. And one by one, they began to die.

The enemy waited until three-quarters of the 'tanks were in the valley, waited while the 'tanks pounded the cliffs with HE and scorching them with lasers, waited long minutes while the charging 'tanks did their worst. And then, all at once, they commenced the slaughter.

It was never battle; never, never for a moment. It was just destruction.

From both sides of the valley, lasercannon opened up simultaneously; big lasercannon, the great granddaddies of the small ridge guns. The valley floor shattered under the impact of a hundred sudden explosions.

And—from a wide black hole in the cliff at the end of the valley—something shot in a fiery blur. The other holes around it spat other fire-blurs. Then the first hole spat again. Then the others.

And when the blurs hit and expanded and roared, shimmering globes would appear around them to hold in the fire and the heat. And the targets.

Hellglobes: nukes were all they were. Nukes set off in close proximity to a big shield generator, a generator that would catch the awful energy and hold it tight at the moment of its re-

lease. H-bombs in a force fist.

A disruptor can't touch duralloy. Explosions barely dent it. Lasers take long minutes to burn through. But catch a duralloy autotank in a hellglobe, and it writhes and melts and vaporizes in microseconds.

It takes a mountain to hold a shield generator big enough to make hellglobes; the shields have to be enormously strong. The range isn't very good, either; you can't throw a shield much further than you can see. But it's worth it. The only defense against hellglobes is to make sure they don't reach you. The huge juggernauts could have done that, with the mobile shields they mounted.

But autotanks are too small for shields.

Onward drove the autotanks, onward up the valley, onward towards the lasers and tubes and hellglobes, onward into the teeth of the enemy. And as they drove, the hellglobes ate them. In ones and twos and fours, moving or still, firing or silent; it didn't matter. The hellglobes found them and caught them and wrapped them in arms of fire and ate them. The hellglobes that missed ate rocks and carved craters and bit chunks out of the mountains. But few missed; most of them ate autotanks.

The shadow was gone from the valley. In hundreds of places, globes of fire burned brighter than the sun: searingly, unbearably intense. It rained hellglobes.

Onward drove the autotanks, into that rain. The enemy met them with thousands of megatons of nuclear power, but the tanks took it and rolled into it unwavering.

For an eternity they rolled into it, vanishing as they crept closer, swallowed up in the carnage. Then, all at

once, the survivors went stiff.

And they began to turn.

Retreat: or attempted retreat. But really, it was rout. Back towards the mouth of the valley they rushed, but the hellglobes followed them and ate them as they ran. And when the tanks crept past effective hellglobe range, the lasers took over once again.

Still, a handful made it out of the valley.

ABOVE, on the dropship, they watched it all in living color. No one said anything. Not Triegloff, nor Williston, nor even Lyford. Until it was over.

Lyford had been standing shoulder-to-shoulder with Triegloff. Triegloff wasn't certain when he'd arrived, but he was there now. And he looked at the General and spoke. "My God," he said. "What happened?"

Triegloff was ashen. His mind wasn't working properly. He kicked it and tried to get it to think, but it was still seeing those hellglobes pouring down and down and down, and still hearing the awful whine the monitors sounded whenever one of the hellglobes caught an autotank.

Finally he shook his head. "An error," he said slowly, his voice thick. "An—error. Somebody gave the wrong order. Somebody—they charged the wrong guns." He shook his head again, fighting to clear away shock. The command center was still quiet. Telecom instruments had quit chattering, and all along the port wall the viewscreens were out. A few still showed that burning sun, but row on row were now dark and black.

Williston came between Triegloff and the silent, scared Lyford. He handed the General some printouts. "I've programmed this all into

Battlemaster," he said. "I assumed you'd be wanting some new attack plans." He shrugged. "You've got three new approaches there, using mostly the juggernauts and whatever autotanks have survived. However, you're going to have to send down some men, I'm afraid. The casualties will be very high, but there's no alternative."

Triegloff looked at the printouts, dully. Then up. "But—the success indices—"

"Yes," said Williston. "Fourteen per cent to twenty-six per cent, I know; not very encouraging. Still, it's all that's left. The autotanks were an important part of Battlemaster's earlier computations."

Triegloff let the plans drop to the floor, and looked at Williston very hard. "You son of a bitch," he said, something of his old manner returning to his voice in a rush. "Now you tell me to send men down—*now* when the odds are hopelessly against them. *Hell!* If I'd sent down men in the first place, none of this would ever have happened."

Williston was unmoved. "General Triegloff, that's not true. You can't blame this reversal on the machines, I'm afraid. The autotanks simply carried out the orders they were given.

They attacked when you programmed them to attack, and retreated when you altered the program. Whoever gave the order was at fault, I'm afraid."

Triegloff snorted. "Crap. *Men* would have had the sense to know I didn't mean to send them up against hellglobes naked. They would have been intelligent enough to beam up and question the order, and the misunderstanding would have gotten cleared up pronto. But your damned stupid machines just went ahead blindly and did it. And got themselves wiped out, and fouled up the whole mission. No human being could possibly be that stupid."

Williston answered with a shrug. "Regardless, that's past. I suggest we tend to the present."

Down on the surface of hell, thirty-two autotanks crawled across the plain in an uneven double column. A few, seared and damaged, had already dropped behind to die. And several of the others were struggling.

But they moved on, towards the rendezvous with the juggernauts and a new battle to come. Untired and unthinking they moved on.

—GEORGE R. R. MARTIN

ON SALE IN FANTASTIC (Feb. 1976) Dec. 30th

THE LOCUS DESCENDING by GORDON EKLUND, PEOPLE OF THE DRAGON by LIN CARTER, THE INCREDIBLE UNBRELLA by MARVIN KAYE, GROUPS by ROBERT THURSTON, ITS HARD TO GET INTO COLLEGE by GRANIA DAVIS, MIASMAS—A LIFE TERM by WILLIAM NABORS, A PERSONAL DEMON by MICHAEL, F. X. MILHAUS THE DAY I LOST IT by KENDALL EVANS—Plus many new features.

This was the best of all possible worlds—was it not? All men were free, for Big Sister was in charge, and she was—

ABOVE THIS RACE OF MEN

ROBERT F. YOUNG

Illustrated by RICHARD OLSEN

Signs of the Times

ALL ALONG the Avenue of Processions, Big Sister slogans were in evidence. Some were embroidered on bright-colored banners suspended from the copings of the tall and stately buildings for which the Avenue was famous; some were written in neon tubing above marquees; others were part of the decor of the buildings themselves.

BIG SISTER LOVES YOU.

BIG SISTER THINKS OF YOU NIGHT AND DAY.

BIG SISTER WATCHES OVER YOU WHEN YOU ARE YOUNG AND TAKES CARE OF YOU WHEN YOU GROW OLD.

Walter Cranston, who had quit work early so he could visit the Avenue before catching the 5:59 tube train, loved Big Sister signs.

So did everybody.

Sometimes on the Party TV programs they showed you tapes of the old days when she was still in her childhood and hadn't as yet acquired her present authority. It must have been terrible living in those days. Nobody had given a damn about you and Big Sister had been too young and too little to do anything about it.

As soon as she began to grow up, though, she plunged right in and started helping people and seeing to it that they got everything that was coming to them.

Everybody owed everything to Big Sister.

Cranston worshipped the ground she walked on.

The Avenue was all in readiness for the procession that was scheduled to take place the next morning in her honor—the Big Sister Day Parade. Vehicular traffic had been rerouted and the two invisible electronic fences that would confine the crowd to the sidewalks were already activated. The Avenue proper had been scrubbed so vigorously it fairly shone in the slanted rays of the afternoon sun. Big Sister Day came on the 6th of August, and next to Xmas it was the most beloved holiday of the year. This year, it had excited even more interest than usual because there was a rumor being bruited that the Parade was going to include an innovation so startling it would knock your eyes out.

Directly across the street from where Cranston was standing there was an electronic Big Sister poster.

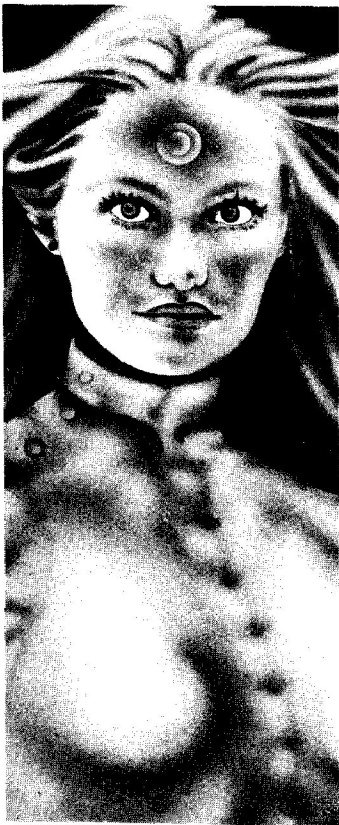
Like all such posters, it depicted her from the waist up, stood four stories high and, when you looked at it for any length of time, caused her to ask you a question. What struck you about her first were her eyes. They were as blue and benign as a summer sky and merely to gaze into them was to feel reassured. Her yellow hair reminded you of fields of golden grain and her round full face managed to convey both a feeling of affection and an impression of authority. There were some people who thought her breasts were too big. Cranston wasn't one of them. In his opinion, it was good for a goddess to have big breasts; and anyway, in Big Sister's case, they were discreetly hidden by the bodice of her gay gingham dress.

"Have you taken your anti-hate pill today?" she asked Cranston in a gentle, if booming voice.

"Yes, of course, Big Sister," he answered. "I took it the minute I got out of bed this morning."

It wasn't necessary to answer her out loud, but he had done so instinctively. Big Sister Eve always affected him emotionally, just as Xmas Eve did. He looked around to see if anybody had heard him. Apparently nobody had, or, if they had, had paid no attention.

He discovered that he was far from being the only one to quit early in order to visit the Avenue. The sidewalks were fairly choked with people. There weren't nearly as many of them as there would be tomorrow, of course, but there were enough, nevertheless, to make you wonder where they all came from. Their eyes were aglow with the holiday spirit, and in some cases the glow was abetted by spirits of another nature. Cranston himself, having visited two baromats on his way to the Avenue,



was feeling no pain either.

But that was as it should be. Going home cold sober on Big Sister Eve was tantamount to going home cold sober on the night before Xmas. Both occasions came only once a year, and it was only fitting that they be celebrated to the maximum extent an individual's physical and financial resources permitted.

Partly to underscore his conviction but mainly because he was still thirsty, he visited another baromat on his way to the Hub tube-station. Unfortunately, he got into a conversation with a Megalopolis 16 sanitation-department worker who felt as strongly about such matters as he did, and by the time they got through buying each other handijugs of beer the 5:59 had long since departed. Cranston groaned when he saw the long line of commuters waiting for the 6:25. He'd have to stand all the way home.

To make matters worse, the train pulled out ten minutes late. He groaned again. Madelyn would be furious when he showed up after seven. Well let her! he thought, as the beer he had drunk began to take fuller effect. What good was it to *be* free if you couldn't *act* free? In his mind he asked the question directly. "What the hell, Madelyn," he "said", "what good is it to be free if you can't act free?"

He warmed to his subject. Forty million of us, Madelyn, living here in Megalopolis 16 alone, and all of us free—as free as the breeze that blows across the green reclaimed deserts that give us the food we put into our mouths, free and equal, so you see, Madelyn, you haven't got any right to be mad . . . Tonight we'll cook out, sousesteak and tossed salad—good for Friday night, especially good for Big

Sister Eve, a tradition, you might say, I'll have beer instead of coffee, to hell with coffee on Big Sister Eve, I know you say I drink too much on weekends, especially holiday weekends, but you do too, Madelyn, and besides, you've got to overlook it on Big Sister Eve, hell, niggerblood flows in my veins and that makes her all the more dear to me because I owe All to Her, She freed my ancestors and She's my Savior and I'll carry the torch for Her every time, because of Her the niggerblood in my veins is as Free as the white blood is, you know yourself how it used to be before She put Her foot down and said Let them be Free! and they were Free. Free to come and go as they pleased and to ride where they pleased and to sleep where they pleased and to work where they pleased, hell, Madelyn, She pays our mortgage payments and our electric and our gas and our videophone bills and the installments on the tv and the washer-drier and the car and the cookout-set and all She takes out of my pay is sixty-percent and part of that sixty percent, Madelyn, She puts in Her Purse and keeps for us in case we get sick and need it and so we'll be secure in our Old Age and happy and contented and well-fed, Big Sister's Purse is our Piggy Bank, Madelyn . . . I think I'll stop off at the Freedom Baromat for one more before I go home, you won't mind, will you Madelyn?—after all, it is Big Sister Eve and tomorrow we're going to take in the Parade, I can hardly wait, I wish our generation hadn't been proclaimed a babyless one, it would be nice to have kids and take them to the Parade to hear the drums and see the soldiers go marching by, I was a soldier once and helped keep this Great Land Free or would have if

there'd been a war like they thought there would but there wasn't because what was there to fight about? . . . and here I am and this is Big Sister Eve and I'm going to live it up, everybody's going to live it up and it's going to be a Big Sister Eve like there never was before.

Dissension in a Twenty-first Century Conference Room

HIGH IN THE Mega 16 Vespers Building Theodore Barr, District Director of Iconology, placed the model he had secured from Special Effects on the conference table and brought its mini-batteries to life. He raised his eyes to the faces of his three advisors—to broad-browed Breslau's, to sensitive Parks', to finely chiseled Miss Penharlow's. He said, "I called this late Friday-afternoon meeting to afford each of you the opportunity to see this miniature of the float in operation. I'd like to hear both your reactions and whatever suggestions for improvements you may have. Naturally, no major changes can be made in the life-size version at this late date, but there may be one or two small items that can be improved upon.

"I realize," he continued, "that I'm interfering with what should have been an early quit, so without further preamble I'll hear from each of you in the order of his or her seniority, after which we'll take a vote on the suggestions and adjourn. Breslau, you've been with me longest—we'll start with you."

Breslau's puffy eyes were following the little float intently as it moved this way and that over the tabletop. It consisted of a square steel platform mounted on two sets of wide wheels, the set in the rear affording the necessary maneuverability. Standing

on the platform was a little Big Sister animannikin, and as the wheels rotated, a complex gear setup caused her to turn her head first to the right and then to the left, and to raise her arms at periodic intervals and hold them straight out before her.

Despite its synchronized movements, the animannikin was startlingly realistic. Its yellow hair was arranged in a plain but becoming coiffure; its diminutive round face had a life-like rosy tinge; and its gay gingham dress followed the body's movements flawlessly, crinkling in this place and stretching in that as the tiny doll raised and lowered its arms. At its feet, just beneath the hem of the dress, were miniatures of the seats that Barr, Breslau, Parks and Miss Penharlow would occupy during the Parade, and centered in front of them was a miniature of the tiller-like steering mechanism by means of which the tech from Special Effects would guide the life-size model down the Avenue of Processions.

At length Breslau raised his eyes to Barr's middle-aged but somehow youthful face. He said, "The realism's remarkable when you consider the weight the model represents. If the life-size version even comes close, everybody should be suitably impressed—to a point, possibly, where they won't even object to the new tax bite. I do have one suggestion, however. I think that she should hold her arms a little higher when she raises them. Holding them parallel to the ground the way she does now is a bit too reminiscent of the Third Reich, don't you think?"

"Suggestion duly noted, Al," Barr said. He turned toward Miss Penharlow. "What's your reaction, Pat?"

Patricia Penharlow had been watching the float with an intensity that

matched Breslau's. Her hair was dark brown in the last rays of the afternoon sun and fell in lustrous flocculent waves to her shoulders. Midway, it was caught back from her face, revealing the midnight tone of her cheeks and the cool, almost classic line of her chin and neck. He knew her hair well, for often it spilled onto his pillow during the night. He knew her neck and her chin intimately. But he knew her lips best of all. Their slight thickness, their sudden softness in the middle of a kiss . . . When the daylight faded and the fluorescents came on, her hair would be black.

Now he knew the clearness of her intelligent brown eyes as she raised her gaze to his face. Enthusiasm shone in them, disrupting their usual quietude. "It's exactly what we've needed all along. They'll love it. Is she going to announce the new tax bite during the Parade?"

"Yes. When the emotion of the crowd reaches maximum intensity. The life-size model is equipped with a Shapiro decibel-reactor that couldn't, naturally, be included in the miniature. As you probably know, a Shapiro reactor responds not only to sound but to mass-emotion wave-patterns. The patterns register on a highly sensitive receiver, which correlates them with the sound level and determines which of the tape sequences should be played at any given moment. Big Sister, incidentally, is also going to announce the new postal workers' raise—as a sort of counterbalance. And then, of course, there'll be the usual slogans and admonitions."

"Among them, no doubt, the catch phrase, 'Big Sister Sees All, Hears All and Knows All'?"

Barr nodded. "I believe that one's included."

"Then I strongly urge that it be de-

leted. Such a warning is fine for posters, subliminal perception casts and other media in use for ordinary Party propaganda; but for the sort of medium we're using tomorrow it would be out of place. The spirit of Big Sister Day is one of emotion-charged thanksgiving and arises from the people's need to think of her primarily as a benign and understanding protectress. The very proportions of the life-size animannikin already suggest her omniscience and her omnipotence. To further emphasize either might very well be detrimental to both."

"Suggestion duly noted, Pat," said Theodore Barr. He next faced the youngest member of his advisory team—Benjamin Parks. "How does the Department of Iconology's brain child strike you, Ben?"

Parks was staring at the mini-float as though it were a monster bent on devouring him. He did not answer for a whole minute; then he said, "It makes me think of an idol."

Barr smiled. "Come on, Ben—let's not be naive. It is an idol. Among ourselves we've never pretended Big Sister was anything else."

"I've always thought of her as an icon rather than an idol."

"Then you've been splitting hairs. She's the Fedgov as the people visualized it long before the Party iconologists gave her substance. Granted, up till now she's appeared only on posters and in an occasional animated cartoon—but that doesn't make her any less of an idol. All we've done in the present instance is to make her into an *animated* idol. An animannikin."

"But the people will see her as an entity."

"They already see her as an entity. They *want* to see her as an entity."

Why do you think they created her in the first place?"

Parks did not answer. He had returned his gaze to the float, which, almost as though it sensed his morbid fascination, had rolled in his direction. Nearing the edge of the table, it backed off and turned around.

At length he asked, "How much does the life-size job—float and all—weigh?"

With difficulty, Barr suppressed a surge of annoyance. "I'm unfamiliar with the exact tonnage, but I'd estimate the over-all weight at about nine or ten. Special Effects used light materials wherever and whenever possible, but batteries, gears, cables, axles, platform—not to mention the size of the animannikin itself—worked against them." He paused as Parks shuddered. "What's bugging you, Ben?"

"I—I don't really know. It's just that I keep getting a feeling that we're doing the wrong thing in exposing the public to such a machine without adequately preparing them for it first. There's something evil about it—to me, anyway. Something atavistic. Associations are probably at work somewhere, but for the life of me I can't put my finger on any of them."

Barr had less luck with a second surge of annoyance. "Damn it, you were recommended to me as one of the brightest young men ever selected by the Party for Iconology training and one of the most promising ever to qualify! And here you show up at my conference table with ideas befitting an old woman out of Grimm's Fairy Tales! You say you *feel* that the float's evil. Give me one solid reason why. Just one!"

Parks' face had paled slightly, but he didn't give ground. "It's possible

to know something's evil without being able to pinpoint why. I think we'll be making a terrible mistake if we use the float tomorrow."

"That float and that animannikin," Barr said icily, "cost the Fedgov three million dollars, and the Department of Iconology gave our Mega 16 district the honor of building it and initiating it. If you think I'm going to keep it out of the Parade just because you have an old-womanish notion that it's some sort of evil throwback, you'd better think again! Suggestion *not* duly noted."

Barr faced the table at large. "I'm in complete concordance with Breslau's and Miss Penharlow's suggestions, and believe they should be put into effect. Does anyone dissent?"

"I dissent," Parks said. "I dissent with the whole business."

Barr ignored him. "I'll relay the suggestions to Special Effects, and it is to be hoped they'll have time to incorporate the necessary changes. I hereby declare this meeting adjourned."

BRESLAU and Parks said good night—the latter a little distantly—and left the room. Patricia Penharlow stayed behind. "That white dress becomes you exceedingly, Pat," Barr said, getting up and walking around the table to where she was sitting.

"Observation duly noted." There was a swift and indecipherable downward sweep of her dark lashes. Then, "I suppose you'll be seeing me home?"

"I can't—it's my turn to take the megapulse."

"That's right—I'd forgotten."

"But I'll be by later. The minute I finish the intraurban crosscheck." He got her wrap for her and arranged it around her shoulders. Instantly it

took on an added luster. "And there's no reason why we can't have dinner together after I visit Special Effects."

She stood up, tall and Junoesque. "I think you should get rid of Parks," she said with sudden vehemence. "He's a non-progressive."

Barr was mildly surprised. "No he's not, Pat—he's still so inundated with idealistic Party doctrine that he hasn't been able to make peace with reality yet—that's all. When he does make peace, he'll automatically acquire the necessary hard-core attitude and begin functioning as effectively as the rest of us."

"By which you mean to imply, I suppose, that all Progressives are cynics."

"Not all of them—just some of them. Most of them are like you. Pure as the driven snow."

"Which kind are you?"

Barr laughed. "We'll discuss that on a more propitious occasion. Meanwhile, let's go to dinner."

They left the conference room together.

The Coldpac Culture

AFTER DOWNING three self-disintegrating handijugs of beer in the Freedom Baromat, Cranston left the establishment and began walking down the street on which he lived. Dusk was at hand and the oppressive heat that had infested the day was beginning to dissipate. Before he had gone two steps, the aroma of charred soy steak reached his nostrils. It intensified with every step he took. Apparently everybody on the block was either cookouting already or had already done so.

He felt guilty. His own cookouter should have been activated long ago, its electric briquettes red and waiting.

Like all intra-urban developments (Mega 16's numbered in the thousands), the one in which Cranston lived compensated in altitude for what it lacked in depth. The houses it comprised couldn't exceed the 25' X 30' standard dwelling size established by the Fedgov Intra-urban Building Bureau, but they could and did rise to seven, eight and sometimes even nine stories in height.

However, while you could compensate in height for what you lacked in width and length insofar as indoor-living space was concerned, there was nothing you could do to make your standard 30' X 60' lot any larger. Your only means of acquiring more outdoor-living space—or at least the illusion thereof—was by building your house flush with the sidewalk and "adding" your front yard to your back. In Cranston's neighborhood this practice had been universally followed and as a result a pedestrian passing down the street saw nothing but two series of tall façades with narrow crevices in between. Passing automobilists were similarly rewarded, but the latter were rarely in evidence, as the average citizen preferred to hoard the driving hours the Fedgov allowed him till he had enough to make a round trip to one of the extra-megalopolitan parks the Fedgov maintained for recreational purposes.

Cranston's house was eight stories high. The first story, of course, was given over to the garage. The successive ones constituted the utility room, the kitchen, the dining room, the living room, the TV room, his and Madelyn's room, and the guestroom respectively, and were made accessible by a small, centrally located self-service elevator. The bathroom was just off the main bedroom, an ar-

rangement frowned upon but not forbidden by the Fedgov, which encouraged homeowners to locate their bathrooms as close to the sewer line as possible so as to curtail expenses.

He found Madelyn in the TV room watching a dramatized newscast. She was a tall blonde with a round full face and cool blue eyes that weren't quite as far apart as he would have liked. When he stepped off the lift, she yawned; then she finished the handijug of beer she was drinking, dropped it into the exhausted coldpac beside her chair and got up and kissed him lackadaisically on the cheek. He was disappointed: he'd thought for sure she'd be angry with him for being late.

They took the elevator down to the kitchen, and collected what they needed for the cookout, then descended to the garage and passed through the back door into the back yard. It contained two catalpa trees, an imitation-brick cookouter, a small picnic table and two benches. Cranston activated the cookouter and when the briquettes turned red, placed two soysteaks on the grill. Madelyn made a tossed salad and opened a container of DeLiteFul Dills. She unwrapped a fresh loaf of self-baking bread. They ate at the picnic table, a handijug of beer at each of their elbows and a coldpac within easy reach. In the back yards to the left of them and in the back yards to the right of them and in the back yards behind them, other people were seated at similar picnic tables, either in the midst of similar repasts or their coldpac aftermaths, and an aura of camaraderie had begun to pervade the whole block.

After he and Madelyn finished eating, Cranston broke open a second coldpac, thinking tipsily of the jingle

the Coldpac people had composed to go with their popular self-disposing handijug cartons:

*There're never enough coldpacs
in your fridgie, friend,
So on your way home, why not
pick up six or ten?*

It could never be said there weren't enough coldpacs in his and Madelyn's fridgie. They kept an extra fridgie in the garage and used it exclusively to store the handy containers in, and the minute their supply became half depleted they replenished it. The mere thought of the extra fridgie made Cranston feel proud. It was a symbol of his and Madelyn's good consumer-ship, and being a good consumer meant you were doing your Part for the Economy and for Big Sister. Granted, in order to plug the extra fridgie in, they had to unplug the one in the kitchen or they'd exceed their voltage quota; but it was nice having one just the same, especially on holidays and weekends.

In the back yards to the left of Cranston and in the back yards to the right of him and in the back yards behind him his neighbors were also breaking open coldpacs, and the aura of camaraderie was becoming almost as tangible as the bluish haze sent up by the countless charred-soyestea dripping. Presently someone began singing "Big Sister Loves Me" in a cracked soprano voice. Enthusiastically Cranston joined in and so did just about everybody else on the block, and the words rose up thrillingly into the summer air and inspired the stars to greater grandeur. A full moon was climbing into the sky and she beamed benignly down on all of Big Sister's kid brothers and sisters and it was like Xmas Eve, almost,

with carols filling the avenues and streets and the Christ-child animannikin lying in his chromium manger in Freedom Park and all the people filing past the automated crèche and leaving gifts of frankincense and money. Cranston felt tears running down his cheeks. Big Sister, he thought. Dear, wonderful Big Sister.

There were no fences separating the back yards—intra-urban fences were forbidden by law—and soon everybody was everywhere, shaking hands with his neighbor and holding hands with his neighbor's wife, and from all around came the sounds of coldpacs being broken open and handijugs being chug-a-lugged in the night. Cranston still sat at his own table, his cheeks wet with tears of joy and gratitude, but Madelyn was no longer with him. The last he'd seen of her she'd been holding hands with a neighbor whose own wife had been holding hands with someone else. If it had been an ordinary coldpac Friday night, Cranston would have found someone else's wife himself and held hands with her, but it wasn't an ordinary coldpac Friday night, it was a coldpac Big Sister Eve, and Big Sister was everywhere, he could see her walking beneath the stars, tall and strong and beautiful; he could hear the soft swish of her gingham skirt and her warm voice calling his name, "I'll take care of you, Wally Cranston," she crooned, "haven't I always?"

The tears came faster and he opened another coldpac and pulled out one of the moisture-beaded handijugs. "Of course, Big Sister," he murmured, "of course you have!" The stars seemed to come closer, all sounds seemed far away; the night was velvet soft against his face . . . When I finish this coldpac

I'll go down to the Freedom Baromat and have a few; yes, that's what I'll do—it's no good to drink alone . . . He chug-a-lugged the handijug and opened another. He chug-a-lugged that one too. Then, eager to be on his way, he tucked the coldpac under his arm, got to his feet, staggered through the garage past his automobilette and out into the street and down the street underneath the stars, opening another handijug and gulping its contents as he walked . . . Tomorrow after the parade we'll have another coldpac cookout and everybody will sing again and it'll be just the way it was tonight, all full of warmth and happiness and equality and everybody loving everybody else and everybody loving Big Sister the way She should be loved, the postmaster said to me this morning, Gee, you do your job swell, Wally, I wish everybody did his job as good as you do; well of course I do it good and I'll do it better yet, you wait and see, and when it's time for me to retire and ask Big Sister for some of my money back I'll be able to do so without feeling guilty, I've got a long ways to go though before I'm fifty—ten whole years . . . I wish we could've had kids, maybe they could've had kids of their own, you never know what the quota will be from one Gen to the next, and Madelyn and I'd've been grandparents and could've gone to see them and bought them ice cream cones and pretzels . . . the grill is bright tonight, the bar is full . . . there's room here beside this Fedgov man, gee what swell uniforms they have, blue slacks and green coat, and would you look at that red kepi—wow!—Big Sister sure treats her guardians right . . . "Hi, have a drink with me? My name's Wally Cranston."

The tall Fedgov man turned. "Barr," he said. "Theodore Barr. Sure, I'll be glad to have a drink with you."

The De Tocqueville Tapes

AFTER PARTING from Patricia Penharlow, Barr had begun his intra-urban crosscheck at once. He had chosen the developments at random and this was the sixth he had visited. It was also the last he intended to visit, not only because he was tired but because he had already determined Mega 16's pulse rate. He had talked with automat owners and baromat keepers and automation men and electronics men and housewives and constructo-workers and transporto-workers and farm-equipment operators and monitor men—with just about every type of citizen, in fact, whose work did not come directly under Party jurisdiction—and he had found the pulse rate to be smooth and even, and in not so much as a single instance had he encountered the slightest objection to the new Big Sister edict that had been issued several weeks ago and which he had chosen as the subject for his Key Question.

He should have felt elated. Instead, he felt let down.

Why? he wondered. Why should he, one of the shepherds, feel let down because the sheep refused to go astray? But he knew the answer. Alcohol robbed him of his objectivity and painted the world in unreal colors, and although he had limited himself to one drink in each of the developments he'd visited, true reason was no longer with him.

He became aware that the sheep who had bought him the drink had asked him a question. The man was

even drunker than Barr had at first thought. Drunk, and rapidly reaching the maudlin stage—if he hadn't reached it already. His eyes were red and his cheeks were streaked with tear tracks. He was wearing civil-service clothes that reeked of burnt soysteak drippings and stale beer. Cradled in his left arm was a half-empty coldpac. There was nothing about him that distinguished him particularly from the rest of the patrons—not even the slight swarthinness of his complexion or the broadness of his nose. Following the *fin de siècle* failure of the last black insurrectionists to find a foothold, miscegenation had accelerated at an exponential rate, and fully a third of the patrons in the big bustling baromat had Afro—or nigger- (the term, after falling into disgrace, had acquired aristocratic overtones)—blood in their veins.

Pure-blooded blacks like Patricia Penharlow were a rarity.

The question Cranston had asked was, "You work for the Fedgov, don't you?"

"Yes," Barr said.

Cranston drew himself up proudly. "So do I. Though not on the Party level of course. How do you like that for a coincidence? The two of us walking in here and standing right next to each other and both of us Fedgov men!"

In view of the fact that thirty-five percent of the populace worked for the same organization directly and that the other sixty-five percent did so indirectly, Barr didn't regard the meeting as being particularly unusual. But he found himself mildly interested in the faceless man standing beside him. "What branch of the Fedgov are you with, Mr. Cranston?"

"The Postal Service," Cranston

said.

A stamp-licker, Barr thought, employing the term Party-level workers used to designate not only the holders of post-office sinecures but all other sinecures as well. There were millions of such jobs—there had to be to provide sufficient employment in an automated society. To have placed all the Cranstons on direct dole would have been unthinkable. "I'm with the Department of Iconology."

Cranston shook his head. "That's a new one on me."

Barr didn't elaborate. "Here, let me buy you a drink," he said, noticing that Cranston's handjug was empty.

He ordered two more from the robottlebringer. "Are you married?" he asked Cranston.

Cranston dispatched the contents of the fresh handjug in three Herculean swallows. "To the sweetest little girl in the world! You?"

"No."

"Too bad—you don't know what you're missing."

Just what am I missing? Barr thought. The privilege of sharing my wife with any man who covets her because he is my equal according to law? The privilege of not being able to beget children because the generation I am a part of was declared a babyless one and all its members were sterilized at birth? The privilege of getting drunk on Big Sister Eve without my wife?

No, he had been right all along in not asking Pat to marry him and she had been right in not encouraging him to. As her lover, he didn't need to think about the children he couldn't beget; as his mistress, she retained her legal status as a virgin and lacked a wife's legal obligation to consort with any man in whom she

aroused passion and whom she did not find objectionable. In the morning, Barr knew, his doubts would return, for the effects of the alcohol would have worn off by then, leaving his mind clear and cold; but there were no doubts now, and perhaps he was the better for it.

Nevertheless, he decided he'd had enough to drink for one night, and when Cranston offered to buy him another handjug, his first thought was to turn it down. Then he saw the desperation deep in the man's eyes and changed his mind.

It was the same desperation you saw deep in everyone's eyes: the desperation that resulted from belonging to a society that gave you independence and simultaneously denied you the right to be free.

Years ago, Patricia Penharlow had called Barr's attention to a book she thought should be banned. He had followed her suggestion, but he had made the mistake of reading the book first, and in the process, two passages had taped themselves indelibly on his memory. Sometimes when he was drinking and off guard, his mind played the tapes through. It did so now:

"As in the ages of equality no man is compelled to lend his assistance to his fellow-men, and none has any right to expect such support from them, everyone is at once independent and powerless. (A citizen's) independence fills him with self-reliance and pride, his debility makes him feel from time to time the want of some outward assistance, which he cannot expect from any of them, because they are all impotent and unsympathizing. In this predicament he naturally turns his eyes to that imposing power which alone rises above the level of universal depression (and) ul-

timately views it as the sole and necessary support of his own weakness (and thus) the very men who are so impatient of superiors patiently submit to a master, exhibiting at once their pride and their servility."

"Above this race of men stands an immense and tutelary power, which takes upon itself alone to secure their gratifications, and to watch over their fate. That power is absolute, minute, regular, provident, and mild. It would be like the authority of a parent, if, like that authority, its object was to prepare men for manhood; but it seeks on the contrary to keep them in perpetual childhood; it provides for their security, foresees and supplies their necessities, facilitates their pleasures, manages their principal concerns, directs their industry, regulates the descent of property, and subdivides their inheritances—what remains, but to spare them all the care of thinking and all the trouble of living?"

WHEN THE ROBOTTLEBRINGER brought Barr the beer Cranston had brought him Barr raised the handjug to his lips and took a polite swallow. Setting the jug back down on the bar, he remembered the purpose of his visit and realized he hadn't asked Cranston this year's key question yet. He did so without further delay: "How do you feel, Mr. Cranston, about Big Sister's decision to make it a capital offense for anyone publicly to impugn any of her actions?"

Cranston stood up straighter, swaying a little as he did so. He gripped the edge of the bar to steady himself. "How do I feel about it? I feel that it's just and fair like all Big Sister's decisions. And if I ever catch anybody talking about Her behind Her back I'll turn him in quicker'n you

can say 'Jackie Robinshun'!"

An inward shudder racked Barr. He would have given his right arm if just one of the citizens he had put the question to had had the guts to ask, "Damn it, isn't she big enough already? How much more of our human dignity must she strip away before she's through aggrandizing herself?" It was an index of the alcohol-content of Barr's blood that he would have given both his arms if he himself had had the guts.

Cranston was staring at him. "Don't you approve of Her decision? You, a Fedgov man!"

Barr was both disconcerted and annoyed. Did his thoughts show so clearly on his face that this petty stamp-licking lush could see them through the mists of drunkenness? Barr re-donned the cold mask he habitually wore in public places and re-cloaked himself in his impenetrable mantle of indifference. "Of course I approve of Her decisions," he said. He laid down enough change to cover another drink for Cranston, and, despite the man's tearful protests, walked out of the baromat.

OUTSIDE beneath the stars it should have been better, but it wasn't. Barr hadn't looked at the stars for many years. They invariably reminded him of man's failure to conquer space to an extent that would have made colonization of other planets practicable and thereby have enabled him to experiment with new and possibly better ways of living with himself. Barr did not look at the stars tonight either, but walked down the street, eyes fixed on the blacktop, and presently he came to the intra-urban station and descended the stairs. After a short wait in line he boarded the train for the Hub. Patricia Penharlow was

still up when he let himself into her air-conditioned ultra-modern apartment twenty stories above Abraham Lincoln Boulevard. A white negligee brought out her midnight skin tone and matched the whiteness of her teeth. It was always white with Patricia—she knew how black and beautiful she was and knew that contrast could not fail to make her more so. After nightcaps, they retired and made love quickly, like rabbits almost, and then lay silently side by side in the cool darkness. And Barr felt alone—as alone as he always felt after making love, even when he loved the woman he made love to.

The mood brought on by the alcohol he'd consumed still lingered and he could not sleep. He thought of Cranston, and the man's helplessness, and realized that he himself was no less helpless. . . . Even though I can pull strings here and there and slightly affect the over-all picture I'm still helpless. And with me, the helplessness is worse. Undrugged, immune to slogans, incapable of self-complacency, I am acutely aware of my helplessness, while the Cranstons are blithely ignorant of theirs. The shepherd has something to say about the sheep, but when the time comes he must always shear them because he is only one of many shepherds and all of us are slaves of the shepherdess we comprise and can do nothing she doesn't want us to do. Nor does the fact that the shepherdess is a benevolent shepherdess make matters any better, for as many crimes can be committed in the name of benevolence as in the name of malevolence, and despotism admits of no distinctions. . . . I am only one of the little gears that turn in Big Sister's Brobdignagian brain and around and around I go and where I stop nobody

knows; tomorrow I will ride in a Fedgov-sponsored circus caravan called a Big Sister Day Parade and all up and down the Avenue of Processions sheep will stand on their hind legs waving flags and cheering the shepherdess on and all throughout the land other sheep will sit before their TV screens with rapt and tearful eyes, Big Bo Peep in your gingham gown, *your* sheep will never run away, they haven't got the guts, their tails will always wag behind them—O that man should have coveted equality so much that he voluntarily became a sheep in order to obtain it, licking stamps by day in Fedgov meadows and hiding behind Big Bo Peep's apron strings by night. . . . O if he had only bent all his energies toward conquering the stars, but he sold his birthrate down the drain for gadgets and domestic security and now the stars he might have had are setting one by one.

Jagannatha

Dawn the rosy-fingered found Cranston in the bathroom, fumbling in the medicine cabinet for an anticrapulence pill. He washed the pill down with two glasses of cold water and by the time he reached the kitchen he felt, if not quite his normal self, at least a reasonable approximation thereof.

He made coffee. It wasn't until he was drinking his second cupful that he remembered what day it was. Instantly the face of all the world was changed and he dumped the rest of the coffee down the sink and opened a coldpac and dispatched the contents of a handijug. Carrying the coldpac, he took the lift back up to the seventh floor and, setting the jug aside, removed his pajamas and shaved and showered. Afterward, dressing in the

bedroom with the coldpac within easy reach, he nudged Madelyn awake (she had come in sometime during the early-morning hours) and told her to get up. She glared at him out of sleep-dulled eyes, but when he reminded her what day it was she rolled quickly out of bed. The memory of the last time he had seen her came back to him and he experienced a bad moment; then he took an anti-hate pill and everything was all right again.

He donned his best suit, Madelyn her best dress. By eight o'clock they were ready to leave, and did so. The Parade wasn't scheduled to begin till ten and probably wouldn't get underway much before eleven; but counting the time they would have to wait in line for their train, it would take them a good hour and a half to reach the Hub and it would require at least another half hour for them to reach the Avenue of Processions and squirm their way to a place of vantage behind the electronic fence.

Actually the ordeal consumed two hours and twenty minutes. The Avenue was lined with two thirty-foot-thick rows of people, most of whom had brought coldpacs. Cranston was one of the latter. He and Madelyn broke theirs open without delay and took out a handijug apiece. Already the day was oppressively humid and a blast-furnace like wind was ruffling the Big Sister banners and making the lettering on them crawl. The heat generated by the crowd tried to rise but was forced back down by the far greater heat of the sun.

"Big Sister!" someone shouted. Someone else repeated the name and soon it was on everyone's lips, rolling thunderously up and down the Avenue.

A Fedgov chopper passed overhead, dropping leaflets. The leaflets

drifted down from the sky like big flat snowflakes. Cranston got hold of one of them. *Big Sister solicits your patience. This morning she discovered a run in her stocking and time out has been called so it can be repaired.* He laughed. Around him, other people were laughing. All up and down the Avenue, they were laughing. Apparently Big Sister had her troubles too. It was nice to know she could make light of them and poke fun at herself while doing so.

That was when the momentous thought occurred to him—and, judging from the great gasp that went up, to all the other people lining the Avenue. If the Parade was being held up till Big Sister's stocking was repaired, *then Big Sister was going to be in the Parade!*

So that was the innovation!

Cranston could hardly breathe. The excitement of the crowd was almost tangible and broke over him in huge hot waves. Usually Big Sister Day Parades obtained their special flavor from the holiday itself and from contingents of her Special Girl Troops carrying signs. Otherwise, there was little to distinguish them from ordinary parades, save for the overwhelming enthusiasm with which they were received. Never before had she *personally* appeared in one of her processions.

Of course she wasn't *really* going to appear in the one today—Cranston knew that. No one had ever seen her and no one ever would. Not that she wasn't real; but she was real in the way God was real, and who had ever seen God? *Really* seen him. No, she wasn't going to appear physically in the Parade: she was going to be represented somehow—probably in a way she'd never been represented before.

Cranston calmed down a little, but not very much. He still had difficulty breathing and his hands were slightly trembling. In an effort to calm himself further. He finished the handjug he'd opened and opened another. Martial music sounded in the distance and far down the street the vanguard of the Parade came into view.

NOW MARCHED the men who guarded land and sea and air from nonexistent foes, and bugles blared and glockenspiels chimed and drums went BRUM-BRUM-BRUM! Gossamer signs carried by contingents of stunning girls wearing majorette-bikinis proclaimed Big Sister's greatness; scarlet smoke rising from portable sky-rite kits repeatedly spelled her name. And her name was on everybody's lips—

"Big Sister. BIG SISTERRRRRR!"

Cranston felt tears running down his cheeks and intermingling with the sweat brought out by the hotness of the August day. He made no attempt to wipe them away. All around him, other people were crying too. One of the passing bands struck up the Big-Sister-Loves-Me song in march tempo and the crowd began singing the words. Cranston heard his own voice. It was hoarse, and it cracked whenever he hit the high notes. Beside him, Madelyn was singing too:

*"—yes I know,
'cause the Fedgov tells me
so . . ."*

In the distance, a huge shape showed.

Was she coming? Cranston fought his way to the fence. Yes, he could see her clearly now. She towered thirty feet above the huge float on which she stood. Her gay gingham dress was a windblown tent. At its base, pygmies sat, one of them hold-

ing a tiller. Goddess-tall, she grew out of the morning; her face was the sun, her hair its golden light. Her handsome head turned left, then right; her huge, rounded arms rose and fell in rhythmic majesty. He heard her gentle booming voice, and it was like the surf breaking along a sunlit summer shore: "HELLO ALL YOU WONDERFUL PEOPLE."

BRUM, went the drums. BRUM-BRUM-BRUM!

Cranston flattened himself against the fence, trying to see her better. People were pressed tightly against him, but he was barely aware of them. He'd forgotten Madelyn completely. "Big Sister," he murmured. "Big Sister."

"HELLO ALL YOU WONDERFUL PEOPLE, she boomed again. "AREN'T YOU GLAD TO SEE ME?"

The crowd answered in a ragged chorus. "We are, we are, *we are!*"

"BIG SISTER LOVES YOU. BIG SISTER CARES."

(Cheers.)

"SHE HAS GOOD NEWS FOR SOME OF YOU TODAY—SHE'S DECIDED TO GIVE HER POSTAL WORKERS A RAISE. THAT'S RIGHT—HONEST SHE HAS. BUT TO MAKE THIS POSSIBLE SHE MAY HAVE TO TAKE A LITTLE MORE OUT OF EVERYBODY'S PAYCHECK. YOU WON'T MIND, THOUGH, WILL YOU? YOU KNOW THAT IN THE LONG RUN EVERYBODY WILL BENEFIT, AND YOU KNOW HOW IMPORTANT EVERYBODY IS TO BIG SISTER."

"No, Big Sister—we won't mind. *We won't mind. We won't mind.*"

"BIG SISTER KNEW YOU WOULDN'T. BIG SISTER LOVES YOU. BIG SISTER CARES."

Cranston was crying uncontrollably by this time. Why, she was going to give *him* a raise! He pressed harder against the fence. "Big Sister," he

sobbed. "Big Sister."

The pressure of his own weight and that of the people directly behind him proved to be more than the fence could withstand. Overtaxed already, it developed a flaw, and he fell through it into the street. His handijug slipped from his fingers and disintegrated on the pavement. Dazed, he got to his feet. But the fence had already mended itself, isolating him from the sidewalk and stranding him in the street.

He did not care. He was glad. Now he could get closer to Big Sister. He moved farther away from the curb. A contingent of Special Girl Troops had just passed and the Big Sister float was less than fifty feet distant. He began walking toward it, drums sounding in his mind as well as in his ears. Behind him a vaguely familiar voice cried, "No, Wally—no! Come back!" He paid no attention. BRUM, went the drums in his ears and his mind. BRUM-BRUM-BRUM! The occupants of the float were waving frantically to him and the float was slowing. Big Sister loomed building tall above him now; he could hear her gingham dress flapping in the morning wind. "I'm coming, Big Sister!" he cried. "I'm coming!" BRUM, BRUM, BRUM-BRUM-BRUM! One of the float's occupants was a black girl. She was shouting to him. "Go back, go back!" she shouted. "We can't stop it in time!" But Cranston was not to be denied. The float's left front wheel loomed darkly before him; huge, relentless, beautiful. It was what he wanted, what he had always wanted. He threw himself beneath the darkness, rejoicing as his bones were crushed and his flesh was ground to pulp. BRUM, BRUM, BRUM-BRUM-BRUM!

Adventures of the Black Girl in her Search for Freedom

WHEN IT WAS ALL OVER—the confusion and the shouting, and the long afternoon conference at Party Headquarters—Patricia Penharlow returned wearily to her apartment accompanied by Theodore Barr. When he declined her offer to mix him a drink, she mixed one for herself and they sat down at the little bar in her cool and spacious living room. Slanted sunlight was fading from the parqueted floor and the little isles of throwrugs, and the terrible day was drawing swiftly to a close.

There was an emptiness in her that the whiskey could not even begin to fill. "Parks was right, wasn't he," she said.

"No," said Barr, "he was wrong. He sensed the right analogy but he drew the wrong conclusions because he associated the Orissa ritual with evil. It was not evil, and it was discontinued only because a new ideology took over. And far from being detrimental to its own cause when it inspired self-immolation, it strengthened its own cause—just as the incident today strengthened Big Sister's cause. People admire an entity that inspires self-sacrifice and the Party leaders were right this afternoon when they decided to make the float a part of all future Big Sister Day Parades."

"How can you be so callous!"

"I'm not being callous," Barr said. "Ideologies need an occasional fanatic like Cranston. Incidentally, he was one of the citizens I talked to last night during my intra-urban crosscheck, and on a personal level I'm as sorry as you are that he threw himself beneath that wheel. But no one made him—he did it of his own

free will. He was part black, you know. He didn't tell me, but I guessed, and his dossier bears me out."

Patricia Penharlow shuddered. "That makes it twice as bad. Perhaps three times. The irony, I mean."

"Nonsense!" Barr said.

"I could feel the wheel go over him—could you?"

"It was your imagination. With all that weight beneath you, you couldn't conceivably have felt anything."

"I did, though. I could feel his bones being ground into the pavement. My bones."

"You're upset right now," Barr said. "You'll be all right when the memory loses its sharp edges."

She made no further comment and it grew quiet in the room. Darkness was nearly at hand, but neither she nor Barr made a move to turn on the lights. In the near darkness, she swirled her highball. I should get drunk, she thought. Get drunk and go down into the megalopolis and join the coldpackers in their pursuit of love, happiness and equality for all. There should be a goodly crowd at Cranston's wake—I daresay they have him laid out by now. A coldpac at his head and a bag of peanuts at his feet. So he had niggerblood in his veins. I'll bet he was proud of it. They always are. As though nigger- or any other kind of blood could make a man any more or less human; any more or less of a fool.

Barr had gone over and was standing in front of the wide picture window. Beyond him stretched the vast megascape, its multi-lights winking on like glowworms in the dusk. He seemed tenuous standing there, a thin pencil line of a man she felt certain she could erase if she had a large enough eraser. How much substance do any of us really have, she thought,

apart from the substance we give ourselves?

I really must go down into the city. I really must attend Cranston's wake.

But she knew she would do neither.

LATER, in the chaste coolness of her windowless bedroom, they made love. Rabbits, she thought afterward. We make love like rabbits. And never have litters to show for it. She lay there silently in the darkness, the cleansed cool air washing over her. Presently Barr's breathing informed her that he slept. It was well that the shepherd should sleep. He had had a hard day. A bad day. A rent had appeared in the roseate cloud cloaking America and for an instant the sun had glinted on one of the links of the Great Chain.

The Chain I helped to forge, she thought. The Chain I helped hoist into place. All of us were shouting "Hallelujah!" white and black alike, our backs gleaming with noble, self-righteous sweat. And all the while we labored, the ghost of that opinionated little Frenchman stood on the sidelines laughing.

The night was still. The only sounds were the susurrus of Barr's breathing and the fainter whisper of her own. While the room was windowless, there was a way to look out. Just beneath the ceiling on the street-side there was a small louvered vent, put there for a forgotten reason long ago. She had looked through it hundreds of times. At the peopled pinnacles and the cold, terrible chasms in between; at distant patterns of blue or starry skies. One spring, doves had nested on a ledge just beneath the eaves, and for many nights she had lain in the cool cruel darkness listening to them coo. And then one

(cont. on page 79)

AMAZING

THE AMAZING INTERVIEW:

ROBERT SILVERBERG

Conducted by DARRELL SCHWEITZER

With this issue, we inaugurate a new feature, the AMAZING Interview. In future issues interviewer Schweitzer will talk with many of the field's best writers and editors, probing their history and their opinions. In this, our First AMAZING Interview, he talks with a man whose career was launched in the less reputable days of this magazine and who has since become a giant in the field. Since this interview was conducted, Robert Silverberg has announced his retirement from science fiction; the conditions of the fifties appear to be returning in some measure and Silverberg has said that he would prefer to once more leave the field, rather than return to the kind of "yard-goods" which publishers—now largely book publishers—are seeking. Silverberg announced his first retirement from sf in 1959; conditions changed. Perhaps they will change again . . .

AMAZING: Science Fiction has been accused of being, and at one time probably was, an entirely commercial product ground out by the yard, sort of like textiles. Yet today more writers are taking what they write seriously. How do you account for this shift away from formula fiction?

Silverberg: Well I think it's part of a general change in American culture. All the arts—all the popular arts—have become incredibly more complex over the last twenty-five years. Just trace the evolution from Glenn Miller to Sgt. Pepper for example and you see a picture of a whole other

world in the sixties. Sf was always a fairly complex literature of ideas even when it was just slam bang yardgood adventure stories on the surface. Content has met style and all that kind of noise. And in the course of the twenty-five year evolution of modern sf, which I think starts somewhere after the war, we've reached an era of sophistication and complexity and perhaps even of decadence.

AMAZING: You seem to have changed too. If you don't mind our saying so, didn't you start out as one of the by-the-yard people?

Silverberg: Oh I wrote tons—well let's

stick to the yard analogy—well hundreds and hundreds of yards. Yeah, I was a kid right out of college and I was earning a living in the field of commercial fiction and I did not desire to rock the boat. I did what was necessary in order to earn my living, and at that time sf was a relatively limited field, limited artistically, limited financially, limited intellectually. As I grew up and as sf publishing grew up, we all changed, and I saw no point in continuing to turn out simple minded commercial crap when I could be having a much more interesting time within my head writing the best work I could do.

AMAZING: How did they go about it in those days? Wasn't Ziff-Davis sort of legendary for doing it factory style?

Silverberg: I was part of the factory about 1955 or so when I was newly a professional. I was asked—I was invited—to contribute 50,000 words of fiction a month, in assorted lengths, anything from short stories up to novelets, and I would receive a penny a word for this. That was a guaranteed \$500 a month which is what most of my college classmates were making as engineers or draftsmen or whatever they were. Now the publisher of **AMAZING** didn't care what his 50,000 words of stuff were as long as they looked like science fiction, had a robot in them here and there, the hero triumphed, and there was a lot of dialogue. I remember the editor saying, "Put a lot of quotation marks in there. They really like quotation marks." This kind of publishing serves no human need that I know of except for the publishers's need to get his product on the newstands once a month and the writer's need to pay his rent. Eventually it ceased serving any human need at all and it's no longer done, at least

not in sf.

AMAZING: Why do you think people read it?

Silverberg: A lot of people—sf is a schizophrenic field and always has been. It's an elitist field that has appealed to a sub-literate audience, an audience of boys and girls, mostly boys, in their teens, who cared more for fantastic ideas than for grammar and style, an audience of working class people who have read it since their own childhood but who had no great sophistication. People who thought of themselves as special, as an elite, because they read this strange, persecuted kind of fiction, but who were fairly close to illiterate. They were not particular about their science fiction. They couldn't get enough of it. It was an addiction. But today's readers, who are, by and large, college educated people, are a little more demanding. Today's society is more demanding.

AMAZING: Were you more demanding than most when you were a reader yourself?

Silverberg: Oh yeah, I was a college boy and I would hang out with Kafka and Proust and then I would turn to **AMAZING STORIES** for fun, or for that mind-blowing particular thing which sf could occasionally give me then. And I had considerable contempt for those mass-produced factory magazines and this of course involved some schizophrenia for me when I started writing for them. I simply separated my head from my fingertips, and the head would continue to read what it wanted to; the fingertips would produce \$500 worth of junk a month. But that was all very long ago, and by the time I was twenty-eight or so I had outgrown that kind of very dangerous and destructive division of soul, and had decided—in fact I had

no choice but to decide—to write only the kind of fiction which I would want to read. And that's my criterion now. I write stories which I would have wanted to read if somebody else had written them.

AMAZING: Even in the beginning, didn't you aspire to write for the better magazines and in the manner of the better writers? Ziff-Davis wasn't the top of the world, of course.

Silverberg: I certainly did. If I had had it in me to be Heinlein or Asimov or Vance, or whoever the current heroes were, I would have done it; but at the moment earning a living was more important. Also I wasn't Asimov or Heinlein; I was a twenty-one year old kid. And perhaps it was cowardly of me not to push myself to my limits then, but in fact my limits weren't very great. I'm not a twenty-one year old kid anymore and I have more to say, more things to share with my readers. I often wonder how my career would have worked out if I had always aimed for the best right from the very beginning. But the climate, the prevailing climate of publishing then, did not encourage a writer to stretch himself, to expand himself—especially a young writer. It was very seductive to be told, "Hey come in and write some junk and I'll pay you enough to keep you eating." Today new young writers are sought out by editors and they're coddled and developed and their talents are shown to them, that they tend to make the best of themselves. I was led to make the worst of myself. The editors played to my own weakest points, my own weaknesses of character, and it wasn't until I was twenty-five or so that I realised what was going on. And of course I was making a lot of money. I was winning economic independence by doing this, which

was good because it's that economic independence which eventually allowed me to have artistic independence.

AMAZING: How did you break out of this grind and start writing better stories?

Silverberg: I got sick of the grind basically and I walked away from it. There was a big collapse of the sf magazine market. You must understand that sf was all magazines in the 1950's. Paperbacks and hardcover books were relatively insignificant as a market for writers. The magazines mostly went out of business. Those that remained reduced their rates. It became a very uncommercial thing and I figured if I'm going to sell my soul I'd better get a better price for it. So I drifted away from sf and then after writing a variety of odds and ends, anonymous fiction for almost anyone who would hire me, I began writing fairly serious non-fiction books on archeological subjects, working out of a private interest of my own. And though these too began out of the commercial orientation that I've always had, gradually they became very important to me and I found myself doing them seriously, doing them in a scholarly way, and suddenly I was somebody else. I had a new identity as a writer and I realised how much more I enjoyed working at the top of my capacity instead of giving the least possible part of myself. By the time I'd spent ten years doing the archeological books and winning a pretty good reputation as a non-fiction science writer I had enough economic independence so that I could come back to sf, which in the meanwhile had changed tremendously for the better, and meet it on my own terms, and not make any concessions to any editor's idea of what sf ought to be.

AMAZING: Now when you go about writing a story you're no longer paying the bills. What then are you doing? Getting a message across?

Silverberg: Well I like to say I'm making a verbal object. I'm making a thing out of words. Getting a message across—no, certainly that is not what I'm after. What I'm doing is for one thing exercising my gift. This is the one thing I do really well in the world and I certainly want to continue at it. And I'm putting down on paper a vision I want to record. What I think sf does uniquely is show the reader something he's never seen before, and only if a sf story does this is it worth anything to me. I wouldn't say this is the only criterion for a good sf story, but certainly it is for me. So if I see something, a bit of strangeness, I want to put it down on paper so it won't go away. So I write it down, and because I am a professional who understands the craft of shaping these things so they can be published I put them out to be published.

AMAZING: This thing you see, which no one has ever seen before, isn't it sometimes simply a view of ourselves from a different direction? For example, in dealing with a contemporary problem from a good distance, there are the sections of *Tower of Glass* in which you can substitute "Negro" for "android" and it still makes obvious sense.

Silverberg: Yes, but that's the simplest level of *Tower of Glass*. It's so simple that I say it right in the book. It's the abolitionist movement all over again—let my people go. But there's a lot of other stuff going on in *Tower of Glass* having to do with the relationship of man to God and the relationship of synthetic beings to man, and fifty other things. It's a very complex book and it's one of my own

favorites of my books for that reason. I threw so many things into it and I think I held them together. And also in *Tower of Glass* there are things which have only a private value to me, a line or two of description, a scene, a face, things which I see and I want to put down for my own reference. It's my good luck that the things I put down to amuse myself also interest others enough to pay to read them. So the social aspect of *Tower of Glass* is really just part of the structure, part of the thing I put there to hold the rest of it up. But it's such an obvious social point that I don't claim it has any importance in the book. I don't think slavery is very good, and so what?

AMAZING: While we're talking about social points, how about the overpopulated society depicted in *The World Inside*? Was that intended to make a point or was it just a hypothetical society? Do you think we could possibly get from here to there?

Silverberg: Well I don't think we can get specifically to that society; It's a very artificial society divided into people who live in highrise towers and people who live in farming communities and nothing in between, no suburbs. No, I don't think we'll ever get there. The story is more a parable than a forecast. I don't believe I can change society through my fiction. There is always social commentary because I put into a story what I see. I see the situation as deeply as I can and there are going to be social aspects and sexual aspects and sensory aspects. It's all part of the unified object I'm creating. That's why I reject the business of messages. I write about social problems because I write about people and whenever there's more than one of them in a room they have social problems. But I don't

write warnings specifically. That's certainly not my motive though that may be the effect.

AMAZING: Do you write anything you would consider serious speculation on the way you think the future really will turn out?

Silverberg: Yes, often, particularly in stories set in the near future. I try to be as realistic as I can within the basically visionary framework that I'm setting up. Certainly I think I was making a valid socio-economic point in *The World Inside*. In fact while I was in the process of making that point Paulo Soleri came along and made it in a much more visible way, with the idea that like it or not if we're going to increase our population we're going to move into a vertical society, a high rise society, so that we don't end up paving the entire earth. I was pleased with the idea when I thought about it, so I wound up putting it in the book. There are a lot of other things going on in that book which are more important to me as artist if not to me as political agitator.

AMAZING: Then do you think that to you as an artist dealing with the relationship between man and God is more important than providing a Sears Catalogue of possible futures?

Silverberg: To me. There are many different kinds of sf and as a writer I am only interested in the kind of things I want to write. I always try and provide a plausible future, or almost always. A book like *Son of Man* which is simply a far out trip, or not so simply a far out trip, is of course not intended as a plausible speculation at all. But *The World Inside* is and in it I attempted to work out as carefully as possible how these things would work, how people would be shaped by life inside such a building, how I felt that such a society would come about from our society. I did

the homework; I did the nuts and bolts of it, and I think this is part of a sf writer's responsibility, to make his vision as plausible as possible, but it is not necessarily a forecast. I am not in the business of prophecy.

AMAZING: Do you then deliberately construct your work so that it'll last even if it doesn't come true? What would happen to *Dying Inside* if it were conclusively proved that there's no such thing as telepathy?

Silverberg: Well how do you arrive at a negative proof of anything? Yeah, I see what you mean. I think *Dying Inside* can be taken as a metaphor for loss regardless of what it is you're losing. In fact that's one of the criticisms the book has received, that it could have just as easily been about a master stud who is losing his virility, who can't get it up anymore. Well, okay, he can't get it up mentally. I make the same metaphor in the book. He thinks of his telepathy in terms of failing sexuality. But in fact I did write a book about telepathy and therefore in the science fictional parts of the book—the book is set in the very near future and a lot of it doesn't have a strong science fictional aspect—I attempted to get inside the nature of telepathy as well as I could and I'm very pleased with what I achieved there, in conveying what it might be like to be telepathic. And I've gotten some weird fan mail on that book from people who say they are telepaths and 'you really got it right, fella' and it's just scary to me.

AMAZING: When you sit down to write a book, do you particularly worry whether or not it'll turn out as science fiction?

Silverberg: Well it always comes out as sf in my head. That is, I believe that the thing I write is sf, but all I worry about when I sit down to write the book is fulfilling whatever notion I

had when I began the book and the categories look after themselves. There's always some strongly science fictional element in anything I write. In *Dying Inside* there's telepathy. In *The Book of Skulls* there's immortality, and in my new novel, *The Stochastic Man*, there's probability theory and precognition. So even though my longer works seem to be slipping more and more into very contemporary backgrounds, I still think of it as sf if I think of it at all. Books like *Nightwings* or *Son of Man* or *Tower of Glass* are obviously sf and I don't have to worry about the category at all.

AMAZING: Do you find yourself typed as a category writer, or could you write and sell a straight mainstream novel just as well?

Silverberg: Well I could sell it, but I don't know what would happen. I feel most comfortable with science fictional ideas. That's where my natural tendency lies. But I've never attempted, at least not in my ten years or so as a fairly serious writer, to write a straight mainstream novel. I've been sliding into mainstream apparently with things like *Dying Inside* and *The Book of Skulls*. I don't know what would happen if I launched a straight mainstream novel. However I'm getting a bit of information now about *Born With The Dead* which was published in a volume by Random House not labelled science fiction at all, and it seems to be getting into bookstores in all sorts of strange places, occult, straight mainstream novel sections, and in the philosophical sections, even though the bookstore clerks know me as a sf writer, and that's usually a drawback. So something may be changing there. I'll know more in about a year.

AMAZING: Do you think you'll be remembered and make an impression

that way? We've noticed that the survival rate seems to be much higher inside the field than outside of it.

Silverberg: Well I'm only abstractly concerned with survival. I want everybody to read and love my novels all over the planet and I want my books to stay in print for hundreds of years after I die and all that, but that's not very real to me. What's real to me is the day by day sweat of getting the work done, and the pleasure of seeing it done. So I certainly don't spend much time calculating how I can best survive down through the ages, or how I can even survive beyond the end of this century as a writer. If I could just go on earning royalties through my lifespan I'm satisfied.

AMAZING: Do you think that modern sf is going to be considered in the centuries to come as Literature with a capital L like the Bible and Shakespeare and all that? Do we have anything capable of doing that?

Silverberg: I don't think it's come along yet. It's very hard to have much perspective on the fiction of one's own time and talk about what's going to survive. I like to think that Faulkner, say, will survive, but I'm worried even about him, let alone Asimov and Heinlein and Lem and so forth. It would be good if something that is science fictional will survive. The only sf novel I can think of at the moment that has survived for any length of time is *Gulliver's Travels*, which to me is pure sf, and which seems to be immortal. Perhaps some of the great sf novels of our day will last into another century, perhaps *Brave New World* or *The Time Machine*. I really don't think there are many candidates for immortality among the Hugo winners. Sf has not produced its Shakespeare and it may never.

AMAZING: But is it possible?

Silverberg: I don't know. That's why I said 'and may never'. I'm troubled about sf as a lasting, overwhelmingly important artform, because many of its concerns are transient, so many of the problems and images we deal with are bypassed as time catches up with them. This is why I try to stay away from strict prophecy in my stories, because when you predict and predict wrongly your book has no life left in it. I'd rather work from absolutes if possible. And I just don't know. Sf, though its history can be traced back to *The Odyssey* and what not, is really a very young field, and I haven't integrated in my own head its relationship to Sophocles and Shakespeare yet.

AMAZING: Might that not be an advantage, that sf writers have at their disposal ideas, images, and even words which are not cluttered by four or five hundred years of literary usage? Don't we have more fresh material to work with and thus a better chance of lasting?

Silverberg: Well, when Homer did the *Odyssey* he had fresh material to work with. He threw the whole Mediterranean world populated with monsters and demons at us, and he's lasted quite well. Now we may do the same, but we're already getting cluttered with our own imagery, our own incestuous dependence on previous sf, and that worries me—that we will become hermetic and inaccessible to readers, because instead of dealing with archetypal mythic situations, we're dealing the minutia of how to build a faster than light drive. And this I think may ultimately cook us, this preoccupation with what is ultimately trivial.

AMAZING: Might not the widely proclaimed possible fusion of sf with the mainstream prevent this? Sf is reaching a much larger audience than ever

before. Might that not tend to open things up and let a little fresh air in?

Silverberg: I think that if we write with the greatest intensity and richness at our command about situations that have the greatest possible emotional and intellectual power, we stand a pretty good chance of getting a hold on a large and enlightened audience. I'm not concerned with getting a large audience, *per se*. I have no intention of being Harold Robbins. I wouldn't mind making his money, but I don't want to do stuff that's so accessible that millions and millions of people all over the world read it, because all important fiction, all really powerful fiction, literary art, has been an elite art. I think that anything that is worthwhile is either folk art or elite art but nothing in between. The grey area of commercialism is useless and short lived.

AMAZING: Don't you think that the best literature of any kind works on all levels? Shakespeare was very popular with the common people of his day.

Silverberg: Is that true, or was he just speaking to the educated Londoners?

AMAZING: They had a big hole in the ground below the stage in the Globe Theater which served as a low price seat. The nobility sat in the balconies, but the common people, or "groundlings" as they were called, also came and they did like the plays. Shakespeare worked both on a superficial popular level and a more intellectual level.

Silverberg: Well Dickens did that too, but sure you can write on many levels at once. I like to think that I do, but I don't think you can reach everybody at once. You can't be all things to all men. I'm not going to try.

AMAZING: Thank you, Mr. Silverberg.

—DARRELL SCHWEITZER
Interviewer

THE AMAZING INTERVIEW:

It was an open-and-shut case of murder . . . or was it? And if it wasn't, then it wasn't simply because of certain legal technicalities. But what they implied was incredible, those—

TECHNICALITIES

J. F. BONE

Illustrated by DEBORAH RUBIN

IN THE POLITE JARGON of psychiatry, Barry Simmonds was a congenital psychopathic inferior with homicidal tendencies. To his peers he was a kill-crazy kook. Either definition was correct. That he had only once been brought to trial was more accident than design, since the law strives with commendable sincerity to find and remove from society such people as Barry. Whether Simmonds had committed more murders than the one for which he was being tried was a moot question and one which was presently unanswerable. People are always disappearing. How many are killed is an unknown statistic, and Barry, unlike most psychopathic killers, was not admitting anything.

Of course, admission was unnecessary, for if a killer was ever caught red-handed, Barry was the man. He'd had the incredible misfortune to shoot his victim almost under the nose of a deputy sheriff. He was arrested while the blood of the victim was still flowing. His right hand held gun powder traces, and the three holes in the victim were made with bullets from the gun found on the floor of Barry's car. Fortunately, the deputy sheriff was a smart man. He didn't listen to Barry's

explanation, but read Simmonds his rights and hauled him off to the pokey. Like most intelligent officers, he knew that juries and judges were touchy about the rights of the accused and smart cops didn't bother with confessions nowadays. That was a legal beagle's job.

Trial was held in Superior Court of Pierce County in Tacoma, Washington about a month later. Adam Farnsworth, the District Attorney, was handling the state's case and Samuel Levenson was attorney for the defense. And that was what made this cut-and-dried homicide something special. For Levenson the Legend was the sort of trial lawyer from which folk epics were made. Like Reynard the fox, Levenson had an awesome reputation for cleverness. In his dozen years as a trial lawyer, Levenson had lost no cases involving clients accused of murder. Of course, Levenson had picked his cases in recent years, but there was a certain mystique that surrounded him, like the ones that had surrounded Clarence Darrow and Sam Liebowitz.

Betting was two to one that Levenson had picked a loser this time, and the world, to whom the contest meant

more than either the crime or justice, waited eagerly for the forensic fireworks to start. While most people agreed that the best thing to do would be to put Simmonds away for the remainder of his unnatural life, certain formalities had to be observed. The coroner's inquest reported death as the result of gunshot wounds. Simmonds was indicted on a true bill by the grand jury. He was formally charged with first degree murder by the District Attorney. Levenson appeared from nowhere and was accepted by Simmonds as counsel. After all, not even a kook like Simmonds had failed to learn of Levenson. A jury was rapidly empanelled, and now in Superior Court Number Three, County of Pierce, State of Washington, the state and the defense were meeting in a showdown battle that sent repercussions through the media as far as Moscow, where *Pravda* took note of the trial and reported on the insanities of the imperialistic capitalistic bourgeois legal system as compared with the swift and errorless justice of the Marxist-Leninist world.

Public interest was not entirely titillated by the crime, although female butcherings with implied overtones of sex or rape always have a certain charm. Nor was it because Levenson the Legend was leading the defense, although that helped, since a champion always draws a crowd. It was mostly because what should have been a cut-and-dried psychopathic sex murder had overtones of mystery which gripped the imagination. The victim could not be identified. Her papers were as false as the wig that covered her totally bald head. She had been living in a hotel room in Seattle for the past month and had been noted for staying away for days



at a time. There was no record of her Social Security number, her driver's license was forged, and when her BankAmericard and Master Charge were checked, the personal data she had given were erroneous. No one in Oshkosh, Wisconsin had ever heard of anyone named Alaina Allen, and the address didn't exist. Her passport, which was found in her hotel room, was a clever forgery. There was considerable suspicion that Miss Allen was a spy since prime targets for espionage such as Fort Lewis, McChord Field, Bremerton Naval Base, and the rocket launching sites on the Olympic peninsula were all within easy distance of Seattle.

The mystery, the probability that Levenson would lose his first murder case, the certainty of juicy sex revelations, drew the media in exactly the same way succulent carrion draws vultures. And then, the really odd things about the trial held them as it droned on, day after day, while the state built a solid edifice of evidence that established Barry Simmonds as a creep of the first order. To keep readers and viewers interested, the media speculated. How did a cheap psychopath like Simmonds attract a lawyer of Levenson's caliber? Who was paying the bill? What was the victim's real identity? Why had Levenson remained silent while day after day of damning testimony exposed Simmonds as a sex deviant and potentially homicidal from preadolescence on? As an adult he was a thoroughly unpleasant psychopathic personality with a record of violence but no conviction.

Lean, gray Judge Lester Gould, a veteran of thirty years on the bench, was apparently as puzzled about Levenson as was the media. His attitude was frostily correct and implied that no legal trickery on the part of

the defense would prevent justice from being done. Levenson, on his part, sat glum and silent. His eyes were dull and introspective and seemingly he had no interest in either the courtroom, the proceeding, or the personnel. He sat stolid, emotionless and somehow managed to appear even more drab than the testimony. Yet there was in his bearing such an air of surety and confidence that a sense of unease filled Adam Farnsworth, and the entire courtroom. Levenson simply had to have a legal rabbit in the hat, which would be extracted with the proper ceremony at the appropriate time.

Farnsworth listened to his assistant elicit another piece of evidence to pile upon the mound already accumulated and wondered how far Levenson's rabbit would run. His case was airtight, meticulously fashioned and skillfully hung together. Both jury and spectators were already convinced of Simmonds' guilt. It was apparent in the studied impassivity of the jurors and the intent feral look that leaped into the eye of the spectators when they looked at the defendant. Such looks, Farnsworth reflected, must have been bent upon fallen gladiators in Roman arenas. Men hadn't changed much in two thousand years. A thin patina of conscience had been put upon the ancient ferocity, but modern ethics were all too thin when life and death dramas such as bullfights, suicides, floods, fires, earthquakes, wars and murder trials drew their hordes of spectators to watch the drama of death unfold before their eyes.

Farnsworth didn't like spectators, but he knew how to read them. Right now Barry Simmonds was convicted and condemned in their minds. Yet as he looked at Levenson, he felt un-

easy. Why was the man so calm, so confident, so bored? It was as though nothing which had been shown or said made any difference. The nagging shred of doubt made him prolong the prosecution's testimony to remove any possible mistake about Simmonds' character, motivation and guilt. As far as he could see, he had done a good job. There was no visible way Simmonds could avoid punishment. He was guilty and should go to prison for life. And he would go since juries nowadays were much less hesitant about handing down guilty verdicts than in the old days when guilty meant death by hanging. They no longer had to agonize over the life of the accused. Farnsworth shrugged. He wasn't going to reason away his doubts and fears, and so far they hadn't affected the prosecution. It would be best to conclude the testimony with Deputy Williams, rest his case, and see what his opponent had to offer. . . .

"Is the defense ready to proceed?" Judge Gould asked.

The judge's voice crossed Levenson's musings. While the prosecution had droned on, Samuel Levenson had been wondering how in heaven's name he had been drawn into this case. He didn't like mountains, forest, or rain, and here were all three to excess. He didn't like small cities, second-rate restaurants and chintzy night clubs. Hell! There wasn't even a good play, and as for music, he might as well listen to records. The only halfway decent synagogue was in Seattle and that was forty miles away. It was like living in Los Angeles without the attractions of Santa Anita and the Hollywood Bowl, and he had always considered L.A. to be a cultural desert.

The only reason he was here that

he could see was to publicize Barry Simmonds, and why anyone should want to publicize that creep was more than he could understand. Any second rate shyster could win this case if he knew the key to it. He almost felt sympathy for Farnsworth; the man was so sincere, so logical, so straightforward. Farnsworth honestly believed that the community would benefit if Simmonds was put away, and his dogged presentation had impressed Levenson with its thoroughness if not its forensic skill. The man was different from the plea-bargaining D.A.'s he met on his home grounds; men who were more interested in the office as a stepping stone to political glory than as a means for bringing law and order to the community. But Farnsworth was a klotz, and he would pay for being a klotz. In fact, most of the people in this area were clods or klotzes. Someone surely should have seen the gaping hole in this case.

But would he have seen it, if it hadn't been called to his attention? Levenson was honest with himself and admitted there was a strong probability that he might have missed it. After all, it was bizarre enough. And he would have lost the case and his champion standing. He was a little vain about his string of successes, and in recent years had selected cases in order to keep his record intact. He wanted to go down in legal history along with Clarence Darrow, Samuel Liebowitz and Melvin Belli as one of the great trial lawyers of the century. Indeed he wanted to better their records. Ordinarily, he wouldn't have touched this trial with a ten foot pole. It added nothing to his luster if he won, and would destroy his image and ambition if he lost. The ignominy of defeat in this backwoods town would tarnish his reputation forever.

Sure, Clarence Darrow had lost the Scopes Trial, but at least he had the formidable William Jennings Bryan, and the prejudice of the area against him. All Levenson had was Farnsworth.

Looking back on what had happened, it was still unbelievable. There was a dreamlike unreality to it that still made him shy away from examining the matter too closely. A man named Smith had called on him at his office, and had asked him to defend Simmonds. He had given the entire story of the murder, and had left nothing out that was of any importance.

"There's no way to successfully defend the man," Levenson had said.

"But if there was?" Smith had asked.

"I still wouldn't take the case. I don't like psychopathic killers."

"But if this man's freedom was extremely important."

"Well—if it was important enough . . ." Levenson temporized. "But it would cost you a bundle. I have a reputation."

"I know. That is why I'm asking you to take the case. It has international implications."

This went on for about five minutes before Levenson finally accepted a retainer and signed an agreement to defend Simmonds. Smith had shaken his hand, given him the key to the trial, and vanished from the office and from his life, leaving him in a state of shock, looking at a sheaf of crisp thousand dollar bills and a signed copy of an agreement that was as binding as a contract of chattel slavery.

As sanity slowly returned, he buzzed for his secretary. Emily Warren, the presiding dignitary of the outer office and the guardian of the inner

sanctum, was called Cerberus with good reason. A squat bulldoggish woman of great tenacity and equally great efficiency, she never allowed clients into the inner office without an appointment and at least a cursory investigation. She was the guardian of Levenson's time and privacy and she made a fetish of the task.

"Emily," Levenson said, "who is that fellow Smith?"

Mrs. Warren looked at him, and suddenly her blue eyes clouded and filled with tears. "I don't know, sir," she said.

"You don't know? Didn't you investigate him?"

"No, sir. He just came in and talked me into deferring the Lewis appointment long enough to have ten minutes with you."

"Well—that's all he had," Levenson said.

"I don't know what made me do it," she said. "I guess it was because he was so sincere—but somehow I couldn't turn him away."

"I don't know what made me sign that agreement," Levenson echoed. "But there's fifty thousand dollars on the desk. You'd better get it to the bank. And starting next month, I'll be gone for about three weeks."

"Where?"

"Someplace called Tacoma. In the state of Washington. I'll be defending a murderer, a psychopathic killer."

"Why?"

"I'm damned if I know. Maybe for the same reason you let Smith get by you. He talked me into it."

"In ten minutes? That's weird!"

Levenson nodded. "Maybe he's a hypnotist," he said.

What had there been about the man that made him so gently overpowering? It certainly wasn't his appearance, although that was a little

odd. People don't usually have hair so black that it has bluish highlights, and a skin so pale that the contrasting hues of hair and hide gave a Dracula-like aspect only partially offset by clean-cut features and an open ingenuous expression.

Emily didn't really know how weird it was, Levenson thought grimly. Smith's appeal shouldn't have gotten off the ground, but it had hit the jackpot. It was only when Smith left that Levenson realized what he had done. Weird wasn't the word for it; it was incredible!

Of course, Smith was right. Simmonds wasn't guilty of murder. He was going to walk out of this courtroom free and clear. The injustice of it made Levenson smile. He was used to injustice, but this was about the grossest miscarriage that he had ever encountered. It gave him no sense of satisfaction. He had gotten some pretty low characters off the hook, but he had never before turned a homicidal maniac loose upon the public. Simmonds would, of course, eventually commit another murder for which he would be tried and convicted, but the act that turned him loose was going to weigh upon Levenson's conscience for some time to come. Levenson was mildly surprised to find he had a conscience. Somehow he had been sure that part of his character had atrophied years ago.

Until this moment, he had considered resigning from the case and to hell with the agreement, but he realized that this would serve Smith's purposes just as well, and all it would do would be to cost him his retainer and make him the defendant in a lawsuit. Conscience wasn't worth a hundred thousand dollars. It was probably better to bear the evils that he had agreed to, than to break his

contract. He shrugged. He'd play this farce out to the end. He didn't have to worry about setting Simmonds free. That was Smith's burden. Smith had given him that information before he had left the office in New York. But he didn't like the idea that he was being used as a stalking horse for publicity. Smith had admittedly bankrolled the defense because Levenson's name held a certain magic, and whatever he did in court was news. Well, this time the news would be explosive enough to make a sound that would be heard around the world. And maybe that was the right way to do it. But he still had his doubts. Barry Simmonds was a dreadful thing to allow loose in society.

"Is the defense ready?" Judge Gould repeated.

"Yes, Your Honor," Levenson said. He hardly seemed to raise his voice, but it filled the courtroom. It was a wonderful voice, clear, mellow, gentle and sincere. It was a voice that had many times persuaded juries that black was white, sin was virtue, and guilt was innocence. It made quivers of unpleasant anticipation crawl down Farnsworth's spine.

Levenson rose and faced the bench, a slender man in a beautifully tailored gray silk suit. His body was erect, and his movements were graceful without being feminine. He was the epitome of a gentleman and his manners were as polished as an actor's. "I respectfully move for a directed verdict of acquittal, Your Honor," he said. "The state has not proved that a murder was committed."

A faint gasp came from the audience. Levenson had given such an air of importance to the conventional opening gambit that the buzz of question and whispering nearly drowned Judge Gould's dry reply.

"Motion denied," the judge said. "Proceed."

"If the court please," Levenson said. "The defense would like to present argument before the court that makes a final refusal of the motion. There is no reason to continue this trial since it does not have a legal base on which to rest."

"I will give you all the rope you wish," the judge said. "I am not going to lay this court open to any charge by some smart New York attorney that there is any unfairness or lack of proper care for the rights of the accused. I know your reputation, Mr. Levenson, and I shall give you every opportunity, within reason, but beyond reason you shall not go."

"Thank you, Your Honor. I am merely trying to save time." Levenson shrugged and a thin smile split Judge Gould's face. "I would like to present one witness. After that, Your Honor, if it is proper to continue the trial, we shall proceed."

"Objection," Farnsworth said. "This is improper procedure."

"Denied. The procedure is proper if the argument and testimony are germane, and I shall be the judge of that."

"Thank you, Your Honor." Levenson said.

"Exception," Farnsworth said.

"Noted," said the judge. "Proceed."

Levenson walked over to the jury box and rested one hand on the rail. He talked to the judge, but somehow he managed to include the jury in the compass of his voice.

"In the first place, the defense agrees that the evidence the prosecution has presented is essentially correct. We take no exception to any of the testimony that has been given. Nevertheless, the state has failed to prove murder, and since by law a de-

fendant cannot be subsequently tried upon a lesser charge within the compass of the greater, the court is obliged to direct a verdict of acquittal."

"You do not need to instruct me in the law," Judge Gould snapped.

"I beg your pardon, Your Honor. I had no intention of doing that. I merely wanted to explain to the jury what was going on. If an improper charge is made and a person is brought to trial upon that charge, he cannot be tried later on a lesser charge related to the same circumstances. That would be double jeopardy, and that is forbidden under our laws."

"You are quite correct, counsellor," Judge Gould said coldly. "But it is my province to instruct the jury. One more action like this and I shall find you in contempt. This court does not take kindly to any accusation or implication of a lack of impartiality or efficiency."

Levenson bowed his head to the bench, and a buzz of comment came from the spectators. The noise quickly rose to disturbing proportions as the silence before the bar continued, and Judge Gould finally banged his gavel and announced into the silence that followed that he would clear the court if any further disturbance occurred.

Even the whispers ceased, since no one wanted to miss what was coming. Levenson *did* have something up his sleeve, and what was about to happen might be worth all the previous days of boring testimony.

Judge Gould stared at Levenson. "Is that your argument—that there has been no murder?"

"Yes, Your Honor."

"In the face of a dead body with three bullets in it?"

"Yes, Your Honor."

Judge Gould shook his head.

"You're straining my credulity and my patience to the breaking point."

"I realize that this sounds peculiar, Your Honor, but this is a most unusual case. It is not as simple as it appears."

"You seem very sure of yourself."

"Not of myself, Your Honor, but of the law. May I now present my witness?"

"You may proceed," the Judge said.

"I would like to call Dr. William Kerans to the stand," Levenson said.

"Doctor Kerans," the bailiff repeated.

The repetition was unnecessary. A round, well-groomed man with a small white beard that gave him the appearance of a well-barbared Santa Claus had risen from his seat in the audience and was already at the bar when the bailiff spoke. Levenson escorted him to the witness box where he was sworn.

"I would like to have Dr. Kerans qualified as an expert witness," Levenson said.

"The court knows Dr. Kerans," Judge Gould said.

"The prosecution has no objection," Farnsworth said.

"You are Dr. William Kerans?" Levenson asked.

"I am."

"Please tell the court your qualifications."

"The state waives this testimony and agrees that Dr. Kerans is an expert medical witness," Farnsworth said. "There is no need for this."

"Does the court also accept Dr. Kerans?" Levenson asked.

"Hmph," Judge Gould said. "I know Dr. Kerans, and I would say he qualifies as an expert witness. He is the chief pathologist at the County Hospital."

"Thank you, Your Honor. I call

now for prosecution exhibits numbers four and five."

Judge Gould nodded at the bailiff who removed the evidence—two large X-ray photographs—from the table and handed them to Levenson.

"Now, sir," Levenson asked Kerans, "have you seen these pictures before?"

"No, sir, I have not," the doctor said.

"Would you please examine them?"

"It is hard to do in this light. I really need a light box."

"Fortunately," Levenson said, "the prosecution thought of that." He beckoned to the defense table and one of the staff left the courtroom and came back wheeling the light box on a stand which the prosecution had used several days ago. With a little ceremony, the box was plugged into an electrical outlet and turned on. Dr. Kerans slipped one of the films into the clips on the face of the glowing glass screen and peered intently at it. His face slowly took on an intent expression, and a poignant silence filled the room.

"What do you see, Doctor?" Levenson finally asked.

"This is an antero-posterior roentgenogram of a skull and upper thorax—a very good picture, I might add. The skull is damaged. There is a defect in the left temporal region, and in the right parietal area, a perforating wound, probably gunshot."

"In other words, you are looking at the head, neck and shoulders, and there is a bullet hole in the head?"

"That is correct."

"Is there anything unusual about the picture?"

Doctor Kerans looked at the X-ray film closely, and his eyes widened. "There are three things which I can see in this film. In the first place, it

appears that the subject has twelve incisor teeth."

"That is unusual."

"Not in a dog, perhaps, but certainly in a human being. The normal number of incisor teeth for a human being is eight. I have seen a few human jaws with extra teeth, but they were molars or premolars. Incidentally, the tooth structure seems to be at variance with the norm, but I cannot be sure of that."

"And is there anything else?"

"Yes, sir. The X-ray shows no supraorbital sinuses. While this would not be unusual in a monkey, it would be most unusual in a man or a woman."

"And the third thing?"

"There are eight cervical vertebrae."

"That's unusual?"

"No, sir, it's fantastic!"

"What prompts that choice of word, Doctor?"

Doctor Kerans looked around the courtroom, savoring the expectant silence. "One deviation, or even two, such as I have mentioned, could perhaps be laid to chance or hereditary malformation, but three deviations of this magnitude argue something else entirely. In mammals, with the possible exception of the manatee and the tree sloth, there are seven and only seven cervical vertebrae. This skeletal characteristic is common to the entire mammalian kingdom and is the one virtually unfailing criterion of the mammalian skeleton. It is in my experience a constant thing. From aardvark to zebra, with the two exceptions I have stated every mammal on this planet has seven cervical vertebrae."

"But you just stated that the pictures of the corpse show eight."

Kerans took the lead beautifully.

"Your last statement, counsellor, was in error. That body is not a corpse, it is a carcass."

"Would you explain, sir? I'm afraid I don't understand." Levenson's voice was filled with polite curiosity.

"Certainly—a corpse is considered to be the remains of a dead human being. The body from which these roentgenograms were taken is not human. Therefore, the proper term for it is carcass."

Farnsworth was on his feet. "Now wait a minute!" he blurted. "Do you mean to imply that the victim is not human?"

"I'm not implying it, I'm saying it," the doctor said. "I do."

"Then what sort of body is it?"

"I don't know. All I know is that it is not human!"

Judge Gould sat straight in his chair. "In all my years on the bench," he commented, "I don't believe I have heard anything as fantastic as this."

"It is probable that you will again, Your Honor," Kerans replied. "Where there is one of these creatures, there is bound to be more. But nevertheless, this body is alien. From the evidence at hand it is very alien."

"Have you any further proof of your statements?"

"No, Your Honor, but proof could undoubtedly be gained from a complete postmortem examination. Nevertheless, with three major deviations from human structure in the region of the head and neck, there should be others—many others."

"Mr. Farnsworth," Judge Gould said, "was there or was there not a complete autopsy made of the victim?"

"There was an examination, Your Honor."

"A complete one?"

"No, Your Honor. We didn't think it was necessary, and the coroner agreed. We took X-rays, of course, but the coroner is not a pathologist, as you know. In this country he's an elected official. Actually he's an undertaker."

"He ought to know something about human anatomy," Judge Gould said.

"He does, Your Honor. In fact, he commented on the abnormal location of the blood vessels when he embalmed the body. But he was not aware of the implications. He called them anomalies."

"Anomalies!" Kerans snorted.

"The County Coroner's Office has been overworked for years," Farnsworth continued doggedly. "All of you know that. The coroner checked the course of the bullets through the body, satisfied himself that they could have caused death, and let it go at that. With the present work load, it is not unusual to fail to perform a complete autopsy on every cadaver when the cause of death is obvious."

"Slipshod!" Kerans muttered.

"Now, Your Honor," Levenson said. "Will you order a directed verdict?"

"I shall not," Judge Gould said. "I shall instead order a complete autopsy to be supervised by Dr. Kerans. Court will convene tomorrow morning at ten o'clock. That is all for today; court is adjourned." He stood up and vanished through the door behind the bench that led to his chambers.

His last words were drowned in the concerted rush of reporters to the doors. Simmonds sat at the defense table with a stolid expression on his face. Obviously, he didn't understand what was happening. Levenson walked over to Farnsworth who was

talking excitedly to Kerans. The courtroom was a minor chaos. Probably Simmonds could have walked out and no one would have missed him.

"I'm truly sorry, Farnsworth," Levenson said. "You built a good case."

"You're still champion," Farnsworth said. "You can take some comfort out of that. Me—I'm left looking like a fool. I should have ordered an autopsy. Hell!—She looked as human as you or I. Just how did you know?"

"I have my sources," Levenson said.

"That body still can be human!"

"No way. You'll find that out after this night is over."

"Would you care to be busy along with Dr. Kerans and myself?"

"I can forego the experience. Autopsies make me ill."

"I wouldn't miss it for the world," Dr. Kerans said.

"**A**ND WHAT were the autopsy findings?" Judge Gould asked the next morning.

"The victim was not human," Dr. Kerans said. "Definitely not. Although the superficial aspect of the body strongly resembles that of a human being, there is evidence of plastic surgery and the appearance of the internal organs was conclusive. The coroner concurs with these findings."

"And what were the findings?" Judge Gould asked. "Try to be brief and use terminology other than the usual medical jargon. Both the jury and I would like to know what this is all about."

"Among the things we found," said Kerans, "were 14 pair of ribs and a cecum nearly twenty twenty inches long. A human has twelve pair of ribs and the cecum is virtually nonexistent. The liver had but two lobes. A

human liver has seven. The spleen was ball shaped—in a human it is triangular. The kidneys were lobulated like those of a cow. This sometimes happens in humans, but not often. The reproductive organs consisted of a monocornuate uterus with a single ovary. There was evidence of recent multiple ovulation. The human uterus is of the simplex type, there are two ovaries, and ovulation is normally single, unless fertility drugs have been taken. There was a hollow organ anterior to the stomach, apparently for water storage, and several other organs which we could not immediately identify, but which appear to be accessory digestive structures. These are presently being studied. We were fortunate that the body was embalmed. As a result, the internal organs were in good condition. Microscopic examination of these revealed significant differences from human. The most outstanding difference was the presence of nucleated red blood cells. These would more closely relate to birds or reptiles than to human cells. We even put some hairs under the microscope and found that they were more like filoplumes than hair. This body was indeed a rare bird." Kerans chuckled at his pun and Judge Gould looked even grimmer than usual.

"Then the body cannot possibly be human?" Gould asked.

"No, Your Honor," said Kerans.

"In view of this development," Judge Gould said, "I hereby direct the jury to return the verdict of Not Guilty. Murder is the premeditated killing of one human being by another human being, usually with malicious intent. And while there well may have been malice, and certainly there was a killing, it was not murder. Since murder is the crime for which

Mr. Simmonds is on trial, he is—the definition of the crime—innocent." Judge Gould looked at Levenson. "I am not pleased with the conduct of the defense," he said.

"Sir, I could do nothing else. I had to let the prosecution present its case before I could ask for a directed verdict," Levenson said.

"Turn the prisoner loose," Judge Gould ordered.

"Arrest him!" Farnsworth said.

"On what charge?" Gould asked.

"Cruelty to animals?"

Farnsworth was silent.

Simmonds, a free man, stood up—walked past Levenson and up the center aisle of the courtroom. There was a grin on his face as though he knew all along that he was too important to be held for something as inconsequential as murder. Reporters surrounded him and he began to talk even as he walked out of the courtroom.

A tall man with blue-black hair and a singularly pale skin stood up from his aisle seat in the last row and faced Simmonds. Barry looked at him and scowled. "Outa my way, creep," he said—and then his voice stopped and the scowl turned to a grimace and the voice to a screech of terror as the tall man took a pistol from his coat pocket and shot Barry once through the head and twice through the body. Simmonds fell backwards, dead before he struck the floor.

Without haste, the tall man walked through the stunned crowd down the aisle to the bar. He handed the pistol to the bailiff, nodded to Levenson and said in a slightly metallic voice, "Now, Counsellor, you can earn your fee."

Levenson nodded. The pieces fell into place. "All right," he said. "I expected something like this."

"I'm sure you did," the tall man said. "You are quite intelligent." He took an orange handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his face and hands. The white pigment vanished and his skin became a shining cobalt blue. "May I introduce myself," the blue man said. "I am Kalvastin, Director of Galactic Confederation Field Expedition 23106D. I am native of a world circling the star you call Proxima Centaurus, and I greet you intelligences of Earth in the name of the Confederation."

"Why did you kill Simmonds?" Levenson asked.

"That was a matter of Devian Law. It has nothing to do with the formal greeting to your planet."

Levenson grinned wryly. So much for Earthly justice. Human law could no more touch Kalvastin than it had touched Simmonds. His place in legal history was assured. He would be the first lawyer to defend an extraterrestrial in a human court. He would win on a technicality and would trigger a complete revision of all Earthly criminal law codes to include extraterrestrials. That was enough for any man.

LATER, when the furor had subsided, and the courtroom was cleared, Kalvastin, Judge Gould, Farnsworth and Levenson sat in the judge's chambers waiting for federal, state and foreign representatives to arrive. Frantic telegrams from the State Department and the United Nations kept the four inside the city-county building which had become the focus of the world's attention. The media had done a better job than Kalvastin expected. Everyone who was anyone heading for Tacoma, and the City Fathers and the Chamber of Commerce of Seattle were green with envy.

Kalvastin was talking. He had been talking for sometime answering questions about the expedition—which was to offer Confederacy status to Earth, and about the time the Confederacy had been examining Earth, which was since the Los Alamos nuclear explosion in 1945. After thirty years, the Confederation decided that the ruling intelligences of Earth were not going to destroy themselves and showed some capacity for rational action on important matters such as survival. Furthermore, the technological level of Earth was advanced enough for the planet to be offered membership in the Confederation. Kalvastin's group was empowered to make that offer. They had intended to do it before the United Nations but had stopped en route to observe the Northwest power grid which was of interest to the Lyranian delegate.

"Those of us with human conformation, or who were similar to your animals, enjoyed ourselves as tourists while Larriman was looking at the Columbia Basin. When your Mr. Simmonds put an end to Alaina Zarrajen, the Devian delegate, we were ready to leave for New York, and I was already there doing some preliminary reconnaissance. Alaina should have stayed with the ship. She took too many chances in a strange ecology. She was an adventuress at heart, and you can put any meaning you please on that term. This time she took one chance too many. She knew exactly what Simmonds was, but that form of aberration is so common on her world that she really didn't appreciate the danger. She was looking for adventure."

"And, of course, you felt it necessary to avenge her death?" Farnsworth asked.

"Far from it," Kalvastin said.

"While it isn't good to lose a delegate, the death of almost any other delegate except a Devian would have caused minimal trouble. Such things are expected. Of course, we were sorry to lose her but no single delegate is vital to the success of an Expedition. However, I am the Director and I am legally responsible for the delegates, and that responsibility is broad. It conceivably extends to supporting the social idiosyncrasies of every delegate. Naturally, I was forced to support Devian customs and avenge her death. You see, Devians have a system of retaliatory justice."

"What's a Devian?"

"An inhabitant of the planet Dev, the fifth world of a sun located in the constellation you call Orion. Since I had to support Devian mores in this matter, and since Devians insist on extraterritoriality for their citizens, I had no course but to act in support of Devian law. Under no circumstances could I permit Alaina's death to be revenged by an outside agency such as your legal system. No punishment you could legally invoke would satisfy the Devians. Simmonds had to be killed by the same kind of weapon and in the same manner as Alaina Zarrajen. Moreover, it would be extremely bad form, and indeed a confession of weakness, to permit anyone other than myself to carry out the judgment. Since prestige in interworld relationships is extremely important, and since your planet is a non-Confederation world without a system of extradition or a unitized code of justice, I had to act or else we Centaurians would lose much prestige. There might also be diplomatic repercussions, since Devians are an excitable lot and Alaina was one of their more popular public figures. Therefore, I arranged to have Mr. Leven-

son defend and free Simmonds so that I could kill him.

"That wasn't very nice of you," Levenson murmured.

"I don't understand. Nicety has nothing to do with it. I was merely carrying out Devian justice on an uninhabited planet. I selected you as my attorney because you attract the media and I wanted full coverage. I am familiar enough with your narrow legal code to realize that both Simmonds and I were immune from your justice. And since affairs had gone this far, I felt that the Expedition's presence might as well be advertised here as in New York. After all, it makes small difference."

Levenson sputtered. Small difference indeed! To compare this town with New York—ha!

"I would hope, of course, that our Expedition gets as much publicity as Simmonds got, but I realize that being a non-Earthling is a disadvantage."

"You don't understand us as well as you think you do," Levenson chuckled. "You need an advisor."

"That is another reason I employed you, Mr. Levenson."

"There is one thing that puzzles me," Judge Gould said. "Why didn't you wait and waylay Simmonds in some quiet place outside my courtroom? Devian justice would be satisfied, and you personally would never have had to expose yourself to our laws. I suppose that there might have been some search for Simmonds' killer, but most people would probably figure it was good riddance. You could have gotten off scot-free."

"I couldn't," the blue man said. "No Centaurian can ignore respect for law. That is an inherent in our character. You see, it's mandatory that an offender of my race come to justice

and have his acts judged by a Lawman. We don't have trials as you do. No Centaurian can run away from the consequences of his acts. I could no more do as you suggest than I could—" he paused and smiled. "The analogy I was about to draw doesn't apply on this world," he said. "But running away is truly quite impossible. That is one of the main reasons why I am Director of this Expedition."

Kalvastin shrugged. "Our worlds are quite different. Destroying a deviant like Simmonds is a commendable act on my homeworld and would receive nothing but praise. Here, it seemed possible that I could die for it. Naturally, I did not want to lose my life in carrying out Devian justice. So I located the best Lawman I could find on such short notice."

"You'll probably never come to trial," Judge Gould said. "You're

probably too important. And if a trial was held, you'd probably be pardoned."

"That does not matter," Kalvastin said. "No one is above the law."

"You're on the wrong planet," Levenson said, "although it would be nice if what you said was true."

"It is—at home," Kalvastin said. "Of course, one has a right to arrange matters so the verdict will be favorable."

"There may not be as much difference between your world and this as I thought," Levenson said. "Anyway, the next few days should have a salutary effect upon our legal system."

"You're understating the case," Judge Gould replied. "Technicalities are going to give everyone a splitting headache." . . .

His words were more prophetic than he knew.

—J. F. BONE

Above this race of men (cont. from page 58)

day they had gone away, never to return. One seldom saw birds in the megalopolis. Perhaps there was an updraft of some kind that made it difficult for them to fly.

If she had wings, she probably wouldn't be able to fly either.

When she heard the drums she thought at first they were the Big Sister Parade drums that had gone BRUM, BRUM, BRUM-BRUM-BRUM! but she realized presently that these were different drums. Hollow-log drums, reverberating through the forest and the night, a steady rhythmic throb reaching out across the decades and the centuries and the sea. Yes, yes! the drums. She removed her dress again, slipped out of her filmy underclothes. She kicked free from her white-girl shoes. The jungle mud oozed up between her

naked toes; she knew the coolness of the earth. She pirouetted in the clearing, in the raining light of the stars. The drums grew louder, matched their tempo to the quickened beating of her heart. She left the clearing and began running through the forest, through the night, running running toward the distant drums. Swiftly, swiftly now; my feet kissing the earth, the earth kissing them back, flowing up and through me into my veins, free, the night trees rising round me, the leaves brushing my blackness as I pass, free, free, the chains slipping from me, the old chains we used to help forge the new, Free O Free, the night and the stars and the throb of the drums, the great dark earth of my birth, running I go Freeeeeeeeeeeeeeee.

—ROBERT F. YOUNG

MANIKINS

John Varley has been published in The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction and Vertex and was recently nominated for the Best New Writer "Campbell Award". His story is bound to raise a few hackles among ardent sexists of both sexes, all of whom are cautioned to consider the implications of the story carefully . . .

JOHN VARLEY

Illustrated by **STEPHEN E. FABIAN**

"YOU'RE SURE she's not dangerous?"

"Not at all. Not to you, anyway."

Evelyn closed the sliding window in the door and made an effort to control the misgivings that tugged at her. It was a little late to discover in herself a queasiness about crazy people.

She looked around and discovered with relief that it wasn't the patients she feared. It was the fortress atmosphere of the Bedford Institution. The place was a nightmare of barred windows, padded rooms, canvas sheets and strait jackets and hypodermics and burly attendants. It was a prison. With all the precautions it was only natural that she should feel nervous about the people it was built to contain.

She peeked into the room again. The woman inside was so small, so quiet and composed to be the cause of all this fuss.

Doctor Burroughs closed the thick file he had been scanning. *Barbara Endicott. Age: 28. Height: 5' 3". Weight: 101. Diagnosis: Paranoid Schizophrenic. Remarks: Subject is to be considered dangerous. Remanded for observation from criminal court,*

Commonwealth of Massachusetts, murder. Intense hostility to men. There was more, much more. Evelyn had read some of it.

"She's got a massively defended psychosis. As usual, granting the illogical assumptions, the delusional system is carefully worked out and internally consistent."

"I know," Evelyn said.

"Do you? Yes, I suppose you do, from books and films." He closed the file and handed it to her. "You'll find it's a little different actually talking to one of them. They're sure of the things they say in a way that no sane person is ever likely to be. We all live with our little doubts, you know. They don't. They've seen the truth, and nothing will convince them otherwise. It takes a strong grip on reality to deal with them. You're likely to be a bit shaken when you're through with her."

Evelyn wished he'd finish and open the door. She had no worries about her sense of reality. Did he really worry that the woman would unsettle her with the kind of rubbish that was down in that file?

"We've had her on electroshock

treatments for the last week," he said. He shrugged, helplessly. "I know what your teachers have said about that. It wasn't my decision. There's just no way to reach these people. When we run out of reason and persuasion, we try the shocks. It's not doing her any good. Her psychosis is as defended as it ever was." He rocked back on his heels, frowning.

"I guess you might as well go on in. You're perfectly safe. Her hostility is directed only at men." He gestured to the white-suited attendant, who looked like an NFL lineman, and the man turned a key in the lock. He opened the door, standing back to let her pass.

Barbara Endicott sat in a chair by the window. The sunlight streamed through and the bars made a cross-hatched pattern over her face. She turned, but did not get up.

"Hello, I'm . . . I'm Evelyn Winters." The woman had turned away as soon as she started talking. Evelyn's confidence, feeble enough in this forbidding place, threatened to leave her entirely.

"I'd like to talk to you, if you don't mind. I'm not a doctor, Barbara."

The woman turned back and looked at her.

"Then what are you doing in that white coat?"

Evelyn looked down at the lab smock. She felt silly in the damn thing.

"They told me I had to wear it."

"Who is 'they'?" Barbara asked, with the hint of a chuckle. "You sound paranoid, my dear."

Evelyn relaxed a little. "Now that should have been *my* question. 'They' are the staff of this . . . place." *Damn it, relax!* The woman seemed friendly



enough now that she saw Evelyn wasn't a doctor. "I guess they want to know if I'm a patient."

"Right. They'd give you one of these blue outfits if you were."

"I'm a student. They said I could interview you."

"Shoot." Then she smiled, and it was such a friendly, sane smile that Evelyn smiled back and extended her hand. But Barbara was shaking her head.

"That's a man thing," she said, indicating the hand. "'See? I have no weapons. I'm not going to kill you.' We don't need that, Evelyn. We're women."

"Oh, of course." She awkwardly stuffed the hand into the pocket of the lab coat, clenched. "May I sit down?"

"Sure. There's just the bed, but it's hard enough to sit on."

Evelyn sat on the edge of the bed, the file and notebook in her lap. She poised there, and found that her weight was still on the balls of her feet, ready to leap away. The bleakness of the room assaulted her. She saw flaking gray paint, yellow window glass set in a well behind a mesh screen, gun-metal bolts securing it to the wall. The floor was concrete, damp and unfriendly. The room echoed faintly. The only furniture was the chair and the bed with gray sheets and blanket.

Barbara Endicott was small, dark-haired, with the smooth perfection of features that reminded Evelyn of an oriental. She looked pale, probably from two months in the cell. Under it, she had robust health. She sat in a checkerboard of sunlight, soaking up what rays passed through the glass. She wore a blue bathrobe with nothing underneath, belted at the waist, and cloth slippers.

"So I'm your assignment for the day. Did you pick me, or someone else?"

"They told me you'd only speak to women."

"That's true, but you didn't answer my question, did you? I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make you nervous, really. I won't be like that again. I'm acting like a crazy woman."

"What do you mean?"

"Being bold, aggressive. Saying whatever I want to. That's how all the crazy people around here act. I'm not crazy, of course." Her eyes were twinkling.

"I can't tell if you're putting me on," Evelyn admitted, and suddenly felt much closer to the woman. It was an easy trap to fall into, thinking of deranged people as mentally defective, lacking in reasoning powers. There was nothing wrong with Barbara Endicott in that direction. She could be subtle.

"Of course I'm crazy," she said. "Would they have me locked up here if I wasn't?" She grinned, and Evelyn relaxed. Her back loosened up; the bedspring creaked as she settled on them.

"All right. Do you want to talk about it?"

"I'm not sure if you want to hear. You know I killed a man, don't you?"

"Did you? I know the hearing thought you did, but they found you incapable of standing trial."

"I killed him, all right. I had to find out."

"Find out what?"

"If he could still walk with his head cut off."

And there it was; she was an alien again. Evelyn suppressed a shudder. The woman had said it in such a reasonable tone of voice, without any obvious try for shock value. And in-

deed, it had not affected her as strongly as it might have a few minutes ago. She was revolted, but not scared.

"And what made you think he might be able to?"

"That's not the important question," she chided. "Maybe it's not important to you, but it is to me. I wouldn't have done a thing like that unless it was important to know."

"To know . . . oh. Well, *did* he?"

"He sure did. For two or three minutes, he blundered around that room. I saw it, and I knew I was right."

"Will you tell me what led you to think he could?"

Barbara looked her over.

"And why should I? Look at you. You're a woman, but you've swallowed all the lies. You're working for them."

"What do you mean?"

"You've painted yourself up. You've scraped the hair off your legs and covered them with nylon, and you're walking inefficiently with a skirt to hobble your legs and heels designed to make you stumble if you run from them when they try to rape you. You're here doing their work for them. Why should I tell you? You wouldn't believe me."

Evelyn was not alarmed by this turn in the conversation. There was no hostility in what Barbara was saying. If anything, there was pity. Barbara would not harm her, simply because she was a woman. Now that she understood that, she could go on with more assurance.

"That may be true. But don't you owe it to me, as a woman, to tell me about this threat if it's really so important?"

Barbara slapped her knees in delight.

"You got me, doc. You're right. But that was sure tricky, turning my own delusions against me."

Evelyn wrote in her notebook: *Can be glib when discussing her delusional-complex. She is assured enough of her rightness to make jokes about it.*

"What are you writing?"

"Huh? Oh . . ." *Be honest, she'll know if you lie. Be straight with her and match her irreverence.* ". . . just notes on your condition. I have to make a diagnosis to my instructor. He wants to know what kind of crazy you are."

"That's easy. I'm paranoid schizophrenic. You don't need a degree to see that."

"No, I guess not. All right, tell me about it."

"Basically, what I believe is that the Earth was invaded by some kind of parasite at some point back in pre-history. Probably in cave-dwelling days. It's hard to tell for sure, since history is such a pack of lies. They re-write it all the time, you know."

Again, Evelyn didn't know if she was being played with, and the thought amused her. This was a complex, tricky woman. She'd have to stay on her toes. That speech had been such an obvious paranoid construction, and Barbara was well aware of it.

"I'll play your game. Who is 'they'?"

"They' is the all-purpose paranoid pronoun. Any group that is involved in a conspiracy, conscious or not, to 'get' you. I know that's crazy, but there are such groups."

"Are there?"

"Sure. I didn't say they had to be holding meetings to plot ways to bedevil you. They don't. You can admit the existence of groups whose in-

terests are not your own, can't you?"

"Certainly."

"The important thing is it doesn't matter if they're really an explicit conspiracy, or just have the same effect because that's the way they function. It doesn't have to be personal, either. Each year, the IRS conspires to rob you of money that you earned, don't they? They're in a plot with the President and Congress to steal your money and give it to other people, but they don't know you by name. They steal from everybody. That's the kind of thing I'm talking about."

Justifies her fear of external, inimical forces by pointing to real antagonistic groups.

"Yes, I can see that. But we all know the IRS is out there. You're talking about a secret that only you see. Why should I believe you?"

Her face got more serious. Perhaps she was realizing the strengths of her opponent. Her opponent always had the stronger arguments, it was the nature of things. *Why are you right and everyone else wrong?*

"That's the tough part. You can offer me reams of 'proof' that I'm wrong, and I can't show you anything. If you'd been there when I'd killed that fellow, you'd know. But I can't do it again." She drew a deep breath, and seemed to settle in for a long debate.

"Let's get back to these parasites," Evelyn said. "They're men? Is that what you're saying?"

"No, no." She laughed, without humor. "There's no such thing as a man, the way you're thinking about it. Only women who've been taken over at birth by these, these . . ." she gazed in the air for a word hideous enough to express her distaste. She couldn't find it. "Things. Organisms. I said they invaded the Earth, but I'm not sure. They might be from here.

There's no way to know, they've taken over too completely."

Leaves flexibility in her rationale. Yes, that would fit with what the books said. It would be hard to stump her, to ask her a question she couldn't answer in terms of her delusion. She admitted not knowing everything about the subject, and she was free to reject whole categories of argument as having been tampered with, like history.

"So how is it . . . no, wait. Maybe you'd better tell me more about these parasites. Where do they hide? How is it that no one but you is aware of them?"

She nodded. She now seemed totally serious. She could not joke about this subject when they got this specific.

"They're not strictly parasites. They're sort of symbiotic. They don't kill their hosts, not quickly. They even help the host in the short run, making them stronger and larger and more capable of domination. But in the long run, they sap the strength of the host. They make her more susceptible to disease, weaken her heart. As to what they look like, you've seen them. They're blind, helpless, immobile worms. They attach themselves to a woman's urinary tract, filling and covering the vagina and extending nerves into the ovaries and uterus. They inject hormones into her body and cause her to grow up with deformities, like facial hair, enlarged muscles, reduced thinking capacity, and wildly defecive emotions. The host becomes aggressive and murderous. Her breasts never develop. She is permanently sterile."

Evelyn scribbled in her notebook to cover her emotions. She wanted to laugh; she felt like crying. Who could figure the human mind? She shuddered to think of the pressures that

must have driven this outwardly normal woman to such a bizarre way of looking at the universe. Father? Lover? Was she raped? Barbara had been unhelpful in talking about these things, maintaining that they were no one's business but her own. Besides, they had no bearing on what she saw as the facts of the case.

"I hardly know where to begin," Evelyn said.

"Yes, I know. It's not the sort of thing they'd allow you to seriously consider, is it? It's too alien to what you've been led to believe. I'm sorry. I hope I can help you."

Damn! she wrote, then scratched it out. *Puts questioners on the defensive. Shows sympathy with their inability to see things as she sees them.*

"Call it the new biology," Barbara said, getting up and slowly walking back and forth in the confined space. Her loose slippers slipped off her heels with each step. "I began to suspect it several years ago. The world just didn't make sense any other way. You've got to begin to doubt what you've been told. You've got to trust the evidence of your intellect. You've got to allow yourself to look through your woman's eyes as a woman would, not as an imperfect man would. They've trained you to believe in their values, their system. What you begin to realize is that they are imperfect women, not the other way around. *They can't reproduce themselves*, shouldn't that tell you something? 'Males' live on our bodies as parasites, they use our fertility to perpetuate their species." She turned to Evelyn, and her eyes were burning. "Can you try to look at it that way? Just try? Don't try to be a man; re-define! You don't know what you are. All your life you've struggled to be a man. They've defined the role you should play. And you're not made

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for it. You don't have that parasite eating at your brain. Can you accept that?"

"I can, for the sake of argument."

"That's good enough."

Evelyn was treading cautiously. "Uh, just what do I have to do to . . . 'see things as a woman?' I feel like a woman right now."

"*Feel!* That's it, just feel. You know what 'woman's intuition' is? It's the human way to think. They've laughed at it to the point where we automatically distrust it. They *had* to; they've lost the capacity to see a truth intuitively. I can see you don't like that phrase. You wouldn't. It's been laughed at so much that an 'enlightened woman' like yourself doesn't believe it exists. That's what they want you to think. All right, don't use the word intuition. Use something else. What I'm talking about is the innate capacity of a human being to feel the truth of a matter. We all know we have it, but we've been trained to distrust it. And it's gotten screwed up. Haven't you ever felt you're right for no reason you could name except that you knew you were right?"

"Yes, I guess I have. Most people do." *Rejects logical argument as being part of her oppression.* She decided to test that.

"What I've been . . . trained to do, is to apply the rules of logic to analyze a question. Right? And you say it's no good, despite thousands of years of human experience?"

"That's right. It's not human experience, though. It's a trick. It's a game, a very complicated game."

"What about science? Biology, in particular."

"Science is the biggest game of all. Have you ever thought about it? Do you seriously feel that the big questions of the universe, the important

truths that should be easily in our grasp, will be solved by scientists haggling over how many neutrinos can dance on the head of a pin? It's a tail-eating snake, relevant only to itself. But once you accept the basic ground rules, you're trapped. You think that counting and sorting and numbering will teach you things. You have to reject it all and see the world with new eyes. You'll be astounded at what is there, ready for you to pick up."

"Genetics?"

"Hogwash. The whole structure of genetics has been put there to explain an untenable position: that there are two sexes, neither of them worthwhile alone, but together they're able to reproduce. It doesn't hold up when you think about it. Genes and chromosomes, half from each parent: no, no, no! Tell me, have you ever seen a gene?"

"I've seen pictures."

"Hah!" That seemed enough for the moment. She paced the floor, overwhelmed by the scope of it. She turned again and faced Evelyn.

"I know, I know. I've thought about it enough. There's this . . . this basic set of assumptions we all live by. We can't get along without accepting almost all of it, right? I mean, I could tell you that I don't believe in . . . Tokyo, for instance, that Tokyo doesn't exist simply because I haven't been there to see it for myself. The news films I've seen were all clever hoaxes, right? Travelogues, books, Japanese; they're all in a conspiracy to make me think there's such a place as Tokyo."

"You could make a case for it, I guess."

"Sure I could. We all exist, *all* of us, in our own heads, looking out through the eyeballs. Society isn't possible unless we can believe in

second-hand reports of certain things. So we've all conspired together to accept what other people tell us unless we can think of a reason why we're being lied to. Society can be seen as a conspiracy of unquestioning acceptance of unprovable things. We all work together at it, we all define a set of things as needing no proof."

She started to say more, but shut her mouth. She seemed to be considering if she should go on. She looked speculatively at Evelyn.

Evelyn shifted on her cot. Outside, the sun was setting in a haze of red and yellow. Where had the day gone? What time had she come into this room, anyway? She was unsure. Her stomach grumbled at her, but she wasn't too uncomfortable. She was fascinated. She felt a sort of lassitude, a weakness that made her want to lie down on the bed.

"Where was I? Oh, the untested assumptions. Okay. If we can't accept anything that's told us, we can't function in society. You can get away with not accepting a lot. You can believe the world is flat, or that there are no such things as photons or black holes or genes. Or that Christ didn't rise from the grave. You can go a long way from the majority opinion. But if you evolve an entirely new world picture, you start to get in trouble."

"What's most dangerous of all," Evelyn pointed out, "is starting to live by these new assumptions."

"Yes, yes. I should have been more careful, shouldn't I? I could have kept this discovery to myself. Or I could have gone on wondering. I was *sure*, you see, but in my foolishness I had to have proof. I had to see if a man could live with his head cut off, against what all the medical books had told me. I had to know if it was the brain that controlled him, or if it was that parasite."

Evelyn wondered what to ask as Barbara quieted for a moment. She knew it wasn't necessary to ask anything. The woman was off now; she would not wind down for hours. But she felt she ought to try and guide her.

"I was wondering," she finally ventured, "why you didn't need a second case. A . . . a check from the other side. Why didn't you kill a woman, too, to see if . . ." The hair stood up on the back of her neck. Of all the things she should have kept her mouth shut about, and to a homicidal paranoid! She was painfully aware of her throat. She controlled her hand, which wanted to go to her neck in feeble protection. *She has no weapons, but she could be very strong . . .*

But Barbara didn't pick up the thought. She didn't appear to notice Evelyn's discomfort.

"Foolish!" she exploded. "I was foolish. Of course I should have taken it on faith. I felt I was right; I *knew* I was right. But the old scientific orientation finally drove me to the experiment. *Experiment.*" She spat the word out. She paused again, calming down, and seemed to think back.

"Kill a woman?" She shook her head and gave Evelyn a wry smile. "Dear, that would be murder. I'm not a killer. These 'men' are already dead from my viewpoint; killing them is a mercy, and a defensive act. Anyway, after I'd done the first experiment I realized I had really proved nothing. I had only disproved the assumption that a man cannot live with his head cut off. That left a whole range of possibilities, you see? Maybe the brain is not in the head. Maybe the brain isn't *good* for anything. How do you know what's inside you? Have you ever seen your brain? How do you know that you're not really a wired-up

midget, two inches tall, sitting in a control room in your head? Doesn't it feel like that sometimes?"

"Ah . . ." Barbara had hit on a common nerve. Not the midget, which was only a fanciful way of putting it, but the concept of living in one's head with eye-sockets as windows on the universe.

"Right. But you reject the gut feelings. I listen to them."

The light in the room was rapidly failing. Evelyn looked at the bare bulb in the ceiling, wondering when it would come on. She was getting sleepy, so tired. But she wanted to hear more. She leaned back farther on the cot and let her legs and arms relax.

"Maybe you should . . ." she yawned, wider and wider, unable to control it. "Excuse me. Maybe you should tell me more about the parasites."

"Ah. All right." She went back to her chair and sat in it. Evelyn could barely see her in the shadows. She heard a faint creaking, as of wooden slats on a rocking chair. But the chair wasn't a rocker. It wasn't even made of wood. Nevertheless, Barbara's shadow was moving slowly and rhythmically, and the creaking went on.

"The parasites, I've already told you what they do. Let me tell you what I've managed to deduce about their life-cycle."

Evelyn grinned in the dark. *Life-cycle. Of course they'd have one.* She leaned on one elbow and rested her head on the wall behind her. It would be interesting.

"They reproduce asexually, like everything else. They grow by budding, since the new ones are so much smaller than the mature ones. Then doctors implant them into women's wombs when they know they're preg-

nant, and they grow up with the embryo."

"Wait a minute." Evelyn sat up a little straighter. "Why don't they implant them on all children? Why are girls allowed to . . . oh, I see."

"Yes. They need us. They can't reproduce by themselves. They need the warmth of the womb to grow in, and we have the wombs. So they've systematically oppressed the women they've allowed to remain uninfested so they'll have a docile, ready supply of breeders. They've convinced us that we can't have children until we've been impregnated, which is the biggest lie of all."

"It is?"

"Yes. Take a look."

Evelyn peered through the gloom and saw Barbara, standing in profile. She was illuminated by a sort of flickering candlelight. Evelyn did not wonder about it, but was bothered by a strange feeling. It was rather like wondering why she was not curious.

But before even that ephemeral feeling could concern her, Barbara loosened the cloth belt on her wrap and let it fall open. There was a gentle swell in her belly, unmistakably an early pregnancy. Her hand traced out the curve.

"See? I'm pregnant. I'm about four or five months along. I can't say for sure, you see, because I haven't had intercourse for over five years."

Hysterical pregnancy, Evelyn thought, and groped for her notebook. Why couldn't she find it? Her hand touched it in the dark, then the pencil. She tried to write, but the pencil broke. Did it break, she wondered, or was it bending?

She heard the creaking of the floorboards again, and knew Barbara had sat down in her rocker. She looked sleepily for the source of light, but could not find it.

"What about other mammals?" Evelyn asked, with another yawn.

"Uh-huh. The same. I don't know if it's only one sort of parasite which is adaptable to any species of mammal, or if there's one breed for each. But there are no males. Nowhere. Only females, and infested females."

"Birds?"

"I don't know yet," she said, simply. "I suspect that the whole concept of the sexes is part of the game. It's such an unlikely thing. Why should we need two? One is enough."

Leaves flexibility, she wrote. But no, she hadn't written, had she? The notebook was lost again. She burrowed down into the pile of blankets or furs on the cot, feeling warm and secure. She heard a sliding sound.

There in the peephole, ghostly in the candlelight, was a man's face. It was the attendant, looking in on them. She gasped, and started to sit up as the light got brighter around her. There was the sound of a key grating in a lock.

Barbara was kneeling at the side of the bed. Her robe was still open, and her belly was huge. She took Evelyn's hands and held them tight.

"The biggest give-away of all is childbirth," she whispered. The light wavered for a moment and the metallic scraping and jiggling of the doorknob lost pitch, growled and guttered like a turntable losing speed. Barbara took Evelyn's head in her arms and pulled her down to her breasts. Evelyn closed her eyes and felt the taut skin and the movement of something inside the woman. It got darker.

"Pain. Why should giving birth involve pain? Why should we so often die reproducing ourselves? It doesn't feel right. I won't say it's illogical; it doesn't feel right. My intuition tells me that it isn't so. It's not the way it

was meant to be. Do you want to know why we die in childbirth?"

"Yes, Barbara, tell me that." She closed her eyes and nuzzled easily into the warmth.

"It's the poison they inject into us." She gently rubbed Evelyn's hair as she spoke. "The white stuff, the waste product. They tell us it's the stuff that makes us pregnant, but that's a lie. It warps us, even those of us they do not inhabit. It pollutes the womb, causes us to grow too large for the birth canal. When it comes time for us to be born, girl and half-girl, we must come through a passage that has been savaged by this poison. The result is pain, and sometimes death."

"Ummm." It was very quiet in the room. Outside, the crickets were starting to chirp. She opened her eyes once more, looked for the door and the man. She couldn't find them. She saw a candle sitting on a wooden table. Was that a fireplace in the other room?

"But it doesn't have to be that way. It doesn't. Virgin birth is quite painless. I know. I'll know again very soon. Do you remember now, Eve? Do you remember?"

"What? I . . ." She sat up a little, still holding to the comforting warmth of the other woman. Where was the cell? Where was the concrete floor and barred window? She felt her heart beating faster and began to struggle, but Barbara was strong. She held her tight to her belly.

"Listen, Eve. Listen, it's happening."

Eve put her hand on the swollen belly and felt it move. Barbara shifted slightly, reached down and cradled something wet and warm, something that moved in her hand. She brought it up to the light. Virgin birth. A little girl, tiny, only a pound or two, who didn't cry but looked around her in

curiosity.

"Can I hold her?" she sniffed, and then the tears flowed over the little human. There were other people crowding around, but she couldn't see them. She didn't care. She was home.

"Are you feeling any better now?" Barbara asked. "Can you remember what happened?"

"Only a little," Eve whispered. "I was . . . I remember it now. I thought I was . . . it was awful. Oh, Barbara, it was terrible. I thought . . ."

"I know. But you're back. There's no need to be ashamed. It still happens to all of us. We go crazy. We're programmed to go crazy, all of us in the infected generation. But not our children. You relax and hold the baby, darling. You'll forget it. It was a bad dream."

"But it was so real!"

"It was what you used to be. Now you're back with your friends, and we're winning the struggle. We have to win; we've got the wombs. There's more of our children every day."

Our children. Her own, and Barbara's and . . . and Karen's, yes, Karen. She looked up and saw her old friend, smiling down at her. And Clara, and there was June, and Laura. And over there with her children was Sacha. And . . . who was that? It's . . .

"Hello, mother. Do you feel better now?"

"Much better, dear. I'm all right. Barbara helped me through it. I hope it won't happen again." She sniffed and wiped her eyes. She sat up, still cradling the tiny baby. "What are you naming her, Barb?"

Barbara grinned, and for the last time Eve could see the ghostly outline of that cell, the blue robe, Doctor Burroughs. It faded out forever.

"Let's call her Evelyn."

—JOHN VARLEY

A JURY NOT OF PEERS

Pg Wyal's last story for us was the controversial "They've Got Some Hungry Women There . . ." (March, 1975). He returns with a strange tale about justice . . .

PG WYAL

Illustrated by MARCUS BOAS

NEATH TRIPLE SUNS on jungle earths, the man ran. The crime was murder, and the fear was great, and he slashed through stinking jungles with the weapon with which he had slayed, smeared with filth and blood, cursing the hand of the fate he could not name. The man was hot and cold and sick and drunk with fatigue, blind with frozen fear and forgotten hate. In an aimless frenzy, he ripped through mud and snarling weeds, sloshed through rivers like tentacles and climbed hills like nests of ants. The man screamed, at nothing; the man cried, for what he had done and what it had done to him. The man ran and ran, going nowhere as fast as he could.

Unseen eyes examined him, unnamed fears pursued him. There had been a bar, and something about a woman, and maybe a quart of bitter tequila (perhaps laced with methyl alcohol), somewhere in a muggy jungle town. In a tin and clapboard quonsit hut, the man had gotten drunk and stumbled into a bloody fight over a company whore. A lieutenant from the trading company had said something about him, a slurred remark concerning mendicants and girls. "A whore's a bankrupt in-

vestment," the blond officer derided. "She's a slimy hole and nothing more, and every bitch knows she's just a dog. But with a man, you have to show him the papers of indention before he knows he's dirt." The memory was not precise; it hovered around him like a horde of buzzing flies, only the eidetic ikon of his hate and fear, released in one crimson swipe of the machete. Now he did not know nor care, but scrambled through slimy leaves and vines, seeking to bury himself forever in the fetid jungle. Through twisting plants, surrounded by a steam of hate, the man ran and ran.

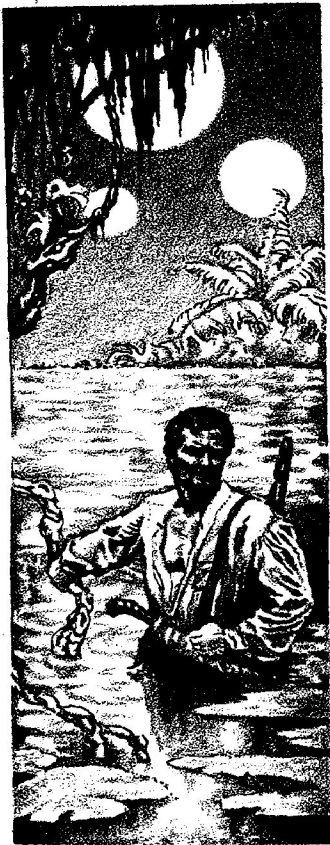
Until he could run no more. Fatigue settled like an empty barrel in his chest, lodged like a bloated body in his belly. He had run for three days, through the angry forest, hunted and surveyed by searching eyes he knew were there, but could not see. He felt them peeping at him in his fireless night, turned around bug-eyed to see—nothing—as he crawled along in the unrelenting sun-blast, and heard them cackling to themselves just out of sight in the underbrush . . . or bubbling like sinister molluscs below the surface of the turbid, marshy waters. He stepped

lightly and cautiously, at first, then plunged and lumbered ahead with hoarse and coughing desperation as his energy depleted. The man had run, fleeing from imaginary adversaries and the very real baying cats and flitters, but now he could run no longer. He gave up. He surrendered. There was nothing left to do, except lie in the festering swamp and decompose, while things like lice and piranha nibbled at his flesh.

He came out in the open, in a soft meadow, and waited. He was safe now from the jungle; he listened numbly to the trading windsong wheezing through the boughs above. He waited for a while, lying naked in the afternoon sun, not thinking. Soon, towards sundown, satellite spies picked out his aura, and down came clean men in white shirts and shorts, and even pith-helmets. They landed their white silent gravity-craft, and seized the man with routine hands, and took the man away into the sky. The forest shrank to a green plain netted by thick blue varicose veins, the writhing rivers of the jungle heart, then sank beneath the lens of grey haze, distant and flat. Inside the white capsule, the man who had ran was silent and inert.

"HOW DO YOU PLEAD," intoned the vocader voice, plain and uninflected. "Guilty or not guilty?"

The man, like the machine, was numb and cold. He shook his head. "What difference does it make? I did what I did, and you know it. I don't have nothing to say." He was a brown man, speaking with a slurred lower-class accent. He'd been a cutter for the company, working with saws and microwave beams to fell the giant trees. The trees were pulped, processed and distilled, reduced to thick



grease in catalytic refineries, and turned into plastic and drugs. The man did not know what for; he only worked in the jungle, not thinking very much. The company fed and housed him and took most of his wages back for rent and board. He did not know his slavery. He took cacao and demerol to allay his nightmares and fatigue.

The machine did not hum or click. It never made a sound, except when it spoke. His captors had handcuffed him out of sheer routine, taken him to the white jungle city, and quietly assigned him a cool, windowless cell where the man had stayed three days, eating food that came out of a slot in the pale yellow wall, watching videotapes, and eliminating with thoughtful grunts in the appropriate receptacles. He never left the room, never saw another person—neither prisoner nor guard—and was never asked a single question by anybody. All the questions and answers were already known; what remained was only to judge and convict him, to pass an almost arbitrary verdict, and decide upon his special fate. He was thus taken to the machine, taken through quiet cool halls, into a bare room with a video camera and display in one corner, to consult the master of his fate. The machine would weigh, deliberate and decide; then he would receive his sentence, whatever that might be. The brown man sat sullenly, not caring what would happen. To him, his life was already over.

"You were an employee of The Company," groaned the machine. "You attacked and killed an officer of The Company. You are Manuel Abdul Jones; you have been tried on a plea of Nolo Contendere, and found guilty of the crime as charged. I shall pass sentence presently. Have you any-

thing else to say?" It waited.

"We are all working for the company store," said the man without apparent sarcasm, without manifest bitterness. He studied his hands, as though talking to his grade-school teacher about some petty sin. He did not know how to deal with authority—even the abstract authority of the mute machine. The man had no authority over himself. "I got nothing else to say, nothing. Get it over with." And he waited.

The man waited. The machine thought. There was much the man did not know. There was *everything* the man, who had run (but would run no more), did not know. He did not know or understand the machine, upon whose function depended his life. He did not know how or why. He waited limply, and did not attempt to think. And he was wise. It would do no good.

THE ISSUE was responsibility: The world had reached a state of nearly infinite complexity, which no single person, or group of persons, could hope to comprehend. Nothing had ever happened to sweep away this monster of complexity, so the difficulty of understanding piled up, as the society had piled up. Within this endless maze, men made their daily lives. Sometimes they erred; sometimes, whether meaning to or not, they hurt themselves or other people, or broke one of the endless rules necessary to sustain such utter civilized complexity. Then somebody had to do something to ensure it wouldn't happen again. A person would have to be punished, or treated, or made an example of, or something. The problem was intelligence, sensitivity: nobody was smart or wise enough to settle the disputes

or solve the problems. No human being was good enough to judge another. To weigh a human life in the scales of collective justice and individual compassion.

So they built the machine. The Judging Machine. The collective councils of the species voted and decided, argued and convinced, and a judge was built, perfect and true. It could not lie. It could not feel. It had no selfish interests against which to balance its decisions, to intrude upon the cold process of reason. It was a machine, into which the facts were fed, from which an honest and truthful choice was made, based upon the available data.

Such a jury, not of peers, was infallible; it administered equally to all men, basing its actions upon the definitions and insights culled from all the world's shows and literature, which had been programmed into it. It had digested the human mind, as neurological functions and pathways, biochemistry and reason-patterns, the meanings, sub-meanings and root conceptions that lie beneath the syntactical surface of thought. It had charted the human brain—mind, life and energy. It was a bioenergetic device, a psionic robot, a mimicker of consciousness. Into it they had fed the equations of the Lord, the dialectical relations of the life-force, and from it spoke the voice of the Lord, ominous and clear. The machine was not man, nor beast nor living prey; it had that *point* around which the mind revolves and around which all minds revolve together, and as such its intelligence was infinite and pure, its logic perfect and divine.

"Equal justice before the law," the priests and programmers of the machine had called for, and ordered the machine to think the thoughts of

real law and order. It uttered the ten commandments; it mewed the code of Hammarabi; it pronounced the eight-fold path, and elaborated upon the four Right Thoughts; it issued a treaty; it beat fifty men at Go, simultaneously. It was a game-player and judge, a strategist and conner, mimicking all psychologies at once. It could speak to all men in all languages, regard any problem from any side. Its understanding was therefore perfect. The machine meditated. The machine weighed, deliberated, and spoke. The machine spoke with a certain tone of voice, authoritative and absolute.

But it was programmed with more than facts, and reasoned with more than mere deduction. It had absorbed the motives, too. The collective guilt and uncertainty of society were invested in the machine. Its reason was guided by an outside source—a cold objective light of truth . . . or so it seemed.

Nobody knew just what to think. No one had ever agreed whether the machine was always right, or right no more often than a human being (for its intelligence was really no greater than an average human's—it merely thought with the logic of an undistracted outside source—a robot, an oracle, a Godhead). But the machine's decisions were always abided. Nobody wanted to take responsibility for another man's life. So they always left it up to the machine.

The people then were too civilized; they knew better than to judge.

"I HAVE THOUGHT it over very carefully," moaned the mechanical voice of the machine, "and reached a decision in your case."

"That's good," said the man. "Let's get it over with."

There was a hesitation. "Not so fast," said the machine.

"What do you mean? What're you talking about," quavered the nervous voice of the man. "We're finished. You said so. It's over, and we're through. I don't have to go through no more of this shit. Tell me my sentence and send me away. I'm tired of playing little games like this."

"I will be the judge of when we are done," said the machine. "And I shall also be the judge of what are games and what are not, and what the game is to be. I am the master of games, and the master of games is the player of none."

The man who had ran felt his palms turn cold. "You are playing a game with me. You're playing a game with my life."

"You played a game with another," droned the machine like a methodical wasp. "You played a game and lost. You do not understand the rules."

"There ain't any rules and there ain't any game," the man whined. His cold palms began to sweat. "There is life and death and whatever comes in between."

"I am the judge," said the machine. "I determine what is right and who is wrong. You are not the judge. You thought you were the judge, however. You judged. You judged another man, and sentenced him, and executed his thoughtless sentence. You are a murderer, a killer, a worthless taker of life."

The man who had ran was furious. "But he was judging me! He was judging me! He was judging me to be dirt."

"Perhaps his judgment was not inaccurate," sneered the cold voice of the machine.

"What do you mean? What're you talking about? They did it—he in-

sulted me! Twenty years . . . a guy gets tired of getting kicked around. One of those times, somebody kicks you and you gotta kick back. So I kicked. Even a dog will fight back if you push him into a corner."

"Are you equating yourself with a dog? Very well, perhaps you are one. If you were in a corner, it was ultimately your decision that put you there. If you are a dog it is because you have decided to become one."

The machine spoke with mathematical precision; it was a creature of logic and facts, speaking a jargon of moral equations, a patois of manipulated certainties and axioms. But it was also a creation of laws of statistics and probability, like a human mind. The machine was a gambler, spinning the wheels of fortune in its own casino—and the laws of chance favor the house. According to the rules of the game which the house has established. If you play the gambler's game, you must abide by the gambler's rules.

And the man (who could no longer run) sat in his chair like a spoiled child and sulked impotently. He was a little man, a short fat man with greasy skin. Thus the vidicamera saw him; the machine took his appearance into consideration along with everything else. The man smelled—the odor of foul pork or dead butter. This also the machine registered. He was barely literate, educated by the Company only to the minimum level his childhood tests showed useful and necessary to the Company. Not the kind of man any sophisticated person would want to know. He wasn't very smart, so he had to work for a living—with his body and his hands. His life was not a pleasant one; his attitudes were negative and dour . . . his face tense and glaring,

as though he had something bitter and rancid in his mouth. All these values the machine took into account.

There was nobody to speak for him at this trial; that nonproductive custom had been eliminated long ago, so he spoke alone. There was no witness to see his side. He sat alone. And because he was the only human in that empty room, it was completely silent, except for the echo of his fast and frightened breathing. It was as if he was contaminated, unclean—some kind of vermin to be kept isolated from other human beings. The man suddenly smelled his own sweat and stink, and wished he could go through the locked door and run into the cool streets. Had there been a window, he might have jumped through it—but there was none, so he sat trapped and listened to himself speak in confusion and uncertainty into the microphone, unto the one who judged.

"You have not finished speaking," the machine muttered.

"I am finished."

"No, you are not finished," the machine said, "because I am not finished. The problem is still unresolved. I cannot decide until all the evidence is in, until I have examined the problem from all possible sides, and the evidence is neither in nor fully examined. You must tell me your story again."

"I have no story to tell. I got nothing to say."

"You will speak. You must speak. I must know. Tell me."

The man looked up with tired and empty eyes. "I was mad. I couldn't stand it no more. I took it and took it and then I couldn't take it no more and I had to do something so I killed the bastard. That's all."

"Nevertheless," the machine enunciated (cool and even-tempered as

only a machine might be), "nevertheless, you killed, and I have judged, and I must know. I must understand. Tell me—tell me your motive. Everything you think is relevant or important."

The man wiped his lip and shook his head. "For twenty years," the man who'd ran replied, "for twenty terrible years I took it. I did not fight back. There was no one to fight back against, and I was aware of the consequences. For twenty years I did nothing—and then I did something. I let the bastards have it." His cold sweaty hands were shaking.

"You let one *man* have it," replied the machine who judged. "You killed a living being. He was as good as you—perhaps better. He lived and labored, and died at your hands. Now he is nothing. And you live on."

"I couldn't stand it no more."

The machine was silent a long time.

"I wish I'd killed them all."

The machine said nothing.

"They was all playing some kind of game with me." The man held up supplicating hands. "They were playing with me and using me."

"Words, empty words," sighed the machine. "Playing games is all you do. You are never tired of playing games."

The man shook his head tiredly. "No, no, they was playing games. *They* was."

"It's all in your head," the machine said patiently. "Everything was all your own fault."

"I don't know."

"That is no defense. It's your karma. The karma always comes back," pronounced the machine, with faint invisible condescension.

"I don't know what you're talking about." He folded his arms and glared petulently into the camera. "I dunno

what you mean."

"You know what I mean," the machine remanded. "You know what I mean and do not have to be told. You have no right to demand that I explain. I am the judge, and *you* are not the judge, although you judged and thus I judged. Now you shall get what you have bargained for. What you see is what you get."

The machine had studied his position, and concluded that he had no position. It denied the validity of his life. The man sat and said nothing. For fools, he thought, the best speech is cold silence. But silence would not save him. He sneered into the vid-camera, thinking of twenty years in oozing jungles. But the machine was patient, the machine could wait.

Finally, it said, "You have totally abdicated responsibility."

"You a faggot," said the man, with boiling and hidden rage.

The inert machine ignored him. "I have examined and considered the available information," spoke the machine. "I have thought the matter over. You refuse to speak, so I must judge. Judging is not an easy thing to do," pontificated the slow voice of the machine, "but you have left me no choice."

The man's head jerked up as if to protest, but the machine went evenly on.

"I shall cite no precedents, for none exist. There is no precedent for a man's life. I shall restrict myself to the characteristics of the case.

"I shall cite no arguments, for there were none. One does not argue about the truth—one states it, final and confirmed, for others to accept.

"I shall abstain from opinions. Opinions are interpretations of the truth.

"I shall state only the basics of the

case." The machine continued unbroke-
kenly. "First, you pleaded *Nolo Contendere*. Shall I play back the tape? You copped out. You offered nothing substantive in your defense. You had the chance to make your piece, and said instead a wilful nothing. When given the chance to elaborate, to confirm or deny, or modify the evidence in any way, you offered only colored pictures of the event. You told us your motivations, in the vaguest and most general terms, without offering who or how or what or where. It may be of clinical interest to know the reasons why, but 'why' is not a point of law. We are displeased. You killed and ran, man, you slayed another human being, no matter what his sins, and ran away into the twisting jungle. You took into your hands another life, and crumpled it up and threw it away. Such are the facts of this matter."

The voice of the machine went on, distant and severe. "Now I am called upon to judge. Society judges harshly those who break its most sacred trust. Yet no man is all the world. That is why I am judging you, and not a human being; no single man is responsible for another man's life. Or death. The responsibility is up to the collective Whole; herewith I represent the Whole.

"There is a causality here; for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. So it has been written. And there is a relativity here; all actions are judged in relation to all other acts. So it has been deduced. And there is an *objectivity*, also, an entropy, a balancing-out. All matters and events come out even in the final analysis. This is a dialectical matter; I have considered all sides and angles.

"Upon this pedestal, within this graph, all reasoning is based and all

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decisions ultimately made. This is the ultimate mathematics of human destiny, and I am its final judge, perfect and absolute. I am the jury, without peer. I consider all consequences.

"You ran, man, into the jungle and away from your act—your foul and desperate act. A man who does bad things is not a good man, no; and well enough, a man to whom bad things is done may not be a good man either; and easily may it be, the world into which these two are born that compels them to act in such an evil and desperate way may itself be ugly and a sin. But into thy hands, O sinner, these things are put in trust, and into my hands, wicked little man, your fate has been consigned. So I weighed the evidence and made my choice, and the verdict was that guilt is as plain as your swollen tearful face. The verdict has been made," droned the impassionate voice of the machine, "as is my right and duty—for I am the

source of all moral knowledge. The evidence is in, and the process if complete. So if you have any final thing to say, say it now or forever keep your peace."

And the man said nothing.

"**V**ERY WELL, I shall say this. You have the choice of doing what you want. I'll let *you* decide—for it's your life and your responsibility, regardless of what went before. No man may judge another, nor tribe of men, not nation nor world. That's how it was decided. But you have judged—and took action on your judgment. You killed another man. You have coldly and arrogantly destroyed a human life, where all men before could not decide. You took it for your prerogative. And I have judged. And you are free. But who art thou, to judge another?"

—PG WYAL

THE SPIRIT WHO BIDETH BY HIMSELF IN THE LAND OF MIST AND SNOW

SUSAN JANICE ANDERSON

Susan Anderson tells us she has taught science fiction at Oregon State, the University of Washington, UC Berkeley, and in community colleges in Washington and Oregon. She is the co-editor of Aurora: Beyond Equality, an original sf anthology to be published by Fawcett Gold Medal, and sold "The Fossil" to Infinity Six. The speculative science in the story which follows is soundly based in current-day scientific thinking.

Illustrated by JOE STATON

"ICEBERG'S IN," said Ruth-parent.

"Come on!" yelled Margalit, jumping up from the lawn.

Chuck-parent gave his low gentle laugh. "You go. We've seen bergs come in since before you were born."

Leaving the eight adults sprawled over the grass, Margalit ran through the garden. Tall eucalypti and pines swayed in the wind and the air was heavy with the fragrance of blossoms. Her sandel strap came loose and flapped against her ankle but she didn't stop to fasten it. She followed the wood-chip path to the cliff overlooking the ocean. At first, all she could see was sun sparkling in the warm Australian sea. Then one of the sparkles broadened and grew more substantial. From a distance, it reminded her of a magnified snowflake that had just fallen on a glassy lake. But instead of melting, this snowflake grew. First it became a tiny lump of ice, then a small hill—furrowed on the sides but flat on top. Trying not to

slip on the crumbly soil, Margalit edged her way down the cliff.

Squinting, she could make out the silvery form of what looked like a toy boat—the supertug that had towed the berg from Antarctica. The tug turned and the berg skewed to the side. Outlined against the azure sky, its flat top slanted downward, marking the ice it had lost on its long journey.

"How big was the berg when the tuggers got it?" Margalit wondered.

Half-closing her eyes, she tried to imagine the berg floating in the cold water of the South Pole. She could almost see it calving from the ice shelf, joining other bergs as the current carried them into the open sea.

"Years ago," Ruth-parent had said, "nothing was done about the bergs. While places like Australia desperately needed their water, they were left to melt at sea. That was before the supertugs were built."

Margalit imagined herself in a tugger's red parka, firing the bolt into

the berg. Then she would circle as the helicopter fed out the line. Anchored to the supertug, the iceberg would begin its long journey back to Australia. Back in port, she would assist in the melting—a process non-tuggers were forbidden to watch. Finally she would discover why.

"Margalit!"

Just a few more years and she would be old enough to take the exams.

"Margalit, time to practice your flute. The berg's not going to melt overnight."

Reluctantly, she started back up the cliff. At the top, Chuck-parent waited for her.

"Next thing we know, you'll want to be a tugger."

"I do already," she said.

Chuck-parent shook his head. "Take it from an ex-tugger, child. It's a hard and lonely life. Stick to your music and stay in Australia."

Margalit frowned. "But you and Anna-parent kept at it for five years. There must have been something you liked about tugging."

Chuck-parent's eyes grew far-away. "Sun never sets that time of year so the berg floats behind you glistening like it's on fire. And you've got all the time in the world to watch it. Berg's got a low frictional resistance, so you have to watch your speed on the way back. And on the return, you've got the winds to do most of your work for you."

"Did you ever get bored on the way back?"

"Not among tuggers. To get selected, you have to be a lot more than just a passable oceanographer. Why, a tugger can discuss almost any subject from Baroque music to science fiction. That's the way Maria set up the selection process."



"Why aren't non-tuggers allowed to watch the melting? And why don't tuggers ever come ashore? Don't they get tired after such a long trip?"

"So many questions," said Chuck-parent, lifting Margalit off the ground. Trees and flowers spun around in a wild kalleidescope. Laughing, she scrambled to her feet, but she refused to be distracted.

"Why don't they ever come ashore?"

Chuck-parent's eyes grew sad. "They used to, child, but people didn't treat them very nicely."

"Why not?"

"Because they're different."

"How are they different?"

Chuck-parent shook his head. "Just take my word for it, Margalit, you don't want to be a tugger."

As they walked towards the house, Margalit glanced over her shoulder. In the late afternoon sun, the iceberg gleamed pinkish-gold, like a mountain on fire.

DESPITE her red parka, twenty-year old Margalit shivered as she watched the ice shelf come into view. All the pictures she had seen as a child hadn't prepared her for this—an enormous field of ice, much larger than she had imagined. Sharply outlined against the sky was the white line of the ice barrier. Like a gleaming serpent, it twisted its way down the length of the shelf. As the supertug, the *Seelye-Coryell*, pulled in closer, she made out jagged crevices that marked where icebergs had calved. Several tabular bergs were floating in the waters around the shelf. Though their shapes were familiar, their size overwhelmed her. And soon her sub-team would attempt to encircle one of the giant masses.

"They make you realize just how small you are, don't they? Even after

all my years of tugging. I can't get over that feeling."

Misty Dawn, senior member of the team, stood close by her shoulder. A fine net of wrinkles covered the older woman's face but her dark eyes were bright and alert as a girl's. Her voice carried a slight accent of her native Pueblo tongue.

Margalit's eyes were moist. "They're even more beautiful than I had imagined."

"So they are, child, and even more so when you make contact with them." The older woman looked over at the helicopter. The other member of the sub-team, Jan David, his fingers twisting a strand of his blond hair, was perusing some satellite photos. They walked over to join him.

His Eurasian eyes squinted in the sun as he looked up at them.

"Can't tell enough from the photos. We'd better examine the bergs up close."

Misty Dawn nodded and they sat down next to Jan David in the craft. Margalit glanced over her shoulder as they pulled away from the *Seelye-Coryell*. Compared to the supertug, the helicopter seemed no bigger than a fly, and she and her companions microorganisms. And those microorganisms would soon do battle with white giants. She could sense her companions' confidence in their movements as they maneuvered the helicopter—a confidence she herself did not yet fully share. But they had been through many more tuggings than she. She read unspoken communications in their alert eyes. So many variables had to be taken into consideration in selecting a berg, not just size but also proper shape so it wouldn't melt too fast in transit. Satellite photos helped to a certain extent but once they were at the shelf, tuggers had to develop a kind of intuition

to guide them the rest of the way. Margalit wondered how long it would take until she too could sense which bergs to choose.

"That group of five over there," said Misty Dawn. "Should be one we could use."

Jan David headed the craft in the direction she was pointing. Margalit's heart leaped as they wove their way around the ice islands. So easy for the craft to crash straight into a wall of ice and be pulled under by churning waves. Darting through the frozen obstacle course, they headed for a berg floating some distance from the group. Misty Dawn touched Margalit's shoulder.

"You release the line."

"Are you sure?" she said, her heart pounding.

"You'll do fine."

The helicopter edged towards the berg. The ice mountain loomed below them, its flattened top casting an elongated shadow over the water. So large it could engulf them in an instant. Pulse quickening, Margalit pushed the line release. The line shot through the air, heading towards the berg's heart.

"Begin circling," said Misty.

As the craft started up, the line wound its way around the berg like a huge serpent uncoiling. Slowly, it covered every inch of the enormous circumference. Not until the line was firmly anchored to the *Seelye-Coryell* did Margalit begin to relax. Back on board, talking excitedly, members of other sub-teams greeted them. For a while now, their part of the work was done. Others would continue the task of preparing the berg for the long journey home.

"Not hard at all, was it?" said Misty, as the three rested on the sun deck.

Margalit laughed. "I've got a lot

more tugging to do until I can feel as calm about it as you do."

"Everything comes in time."

"Talking about time, we'll have a hell of a lot of it on our hands now," said Margalit. "How do you keep yourselves from going nuts on the trip back when the wind's doing most of the work?"

Neither Misty Dawn nor Jan David seemed to hear her question.

"Don't you get bored going so slowly?" she asked.

"No, the trip back's the really important part," said Misty.

She was about to ask why, but something in the older woman's face stopped her. A far-away look, a tightening of the facial muscles that suggested that Misty didn't want to explore the subject any further.

Suddenly Margalit remembered what Chuck-parent had told her about tuggers being different. What exactly had he meant? The people she had met on the ship seemed pleasant and interesting though they did tend to stick fairly closely to their sub-teams. Sometimes, she thought, it was uncanny just how harmoniously the sub-teams worked together, almost as if they were part of some larger organic whole.

Margalit yawned, sleepiness overcoming curiosity. Through half-closed eyes, she glanced back at their newly captured companion. Sunlight, reflecting off the berg's sides, transformed it into a glistening jewel. And its visible surface, though gigantic, was dwarfed by the five-sixths hidden beneath the ocean. Just before she closed her eyes, the shadow of a bird's wings darkened the perfect whiteness.

"TUGGERS ARE different." The phrase kept circling through Margalit's mind. Drumming her fingers

against the railing, she watched the waves slap against the sides of the supertug. Every day, as they neared Australia, the water grew steadily warmer. Already, the berg was showing signs of its long journey. Streams of meltwater were beginning to carve hollows in its smooth sides. Sun and velocity were taking their toll. All the way back, the tuggers fought to maintain a delicate equilibrium with time.

Maybe it was the constant pressure of time, the presence of the berg that made tuggers so intense. In that way they were different, their every waking thought dominated by the image of the berg. And even in sleep, they were followed by their enormous companion. Margalit brushed a strand of hair off her forehead. Sometimes the images in her dreams were so vivid they seemed more real than the waking reality. She wondered if the same thing happened to other tuggers.

She glanced over at Misty Dawn and Jan David sunning themselves on the deck. For several days now, she had wanted to tell them about her dreams. But remembering the look on Misty's face when she had asked about the trip back, she was afraid she would upset the older woman. Yet every day, the compulsion to talk about her dreams grew stronger. Taking a deep breath, she walked across the deck and sat down cross-legged between them.

"Misty, Jan David, are you asleep?"

"Not really," said Misty, sitting up. Jan David yawned and shook himself awake.

"There's something I wanted to talk to you about."

"You're not feeling sick, are you?" asked Jan David, looking concerned.

"Physically, no. Mentally—sometimes I'm not so sure."

"How so?" said Misty.

Margalit shrugged. "This dream I've been having. The same one over and over."

The muscles in Misty's face tightened. "Describe it," she said softly.

"I dream we've finally reached port and it's almost time for the melting to begin. At first, everything goes smoothly, we attach the heating device, the gatherer and pipeline are in place. But when it's time to begin, nothing happens. The berg remains frozen and compact as ever, it simply refuses to begin melting. We recheck our equipment but everything's in order. Then . . ." Margalit frowned and touched her forehead.

"Then what?" said Jan David, leaning forward.

"I feel this tremendous pressure in my head—like some kind of energy is trying to break loose. I can hardly bear it. You both feel it too, I can tell by the pain in your faces. Then it spreads to the other sub-teams."

"And then?"

"That's where it's always ended. Until last night, that is."

Misty looked at her intently. "What happened last night?"

"All of a sudden, I could see inside your minds. And at the moment we shared each others' consciousnesses, the berg began to melt."

Misty and Jan David exchanged glances.

Margalit laughed self-consciously.

"You probably think I'm nuts."

"No," said Misty slowly, "not really."

"You mean it's not just me?"

"Not at all. Nearly every tugger has had dreams like that on the way back. And even before the days of tugging, early explorers of the South Pole recorded their strange visions."

"I wonder why it happens?"

"It's all part of being different. Tuggers aren't like other people."

Something in Misty's tone, in her expression, made Margalit shiver.

"What," she said, "do you mean by 'different'?"

An unspoken question passed between Misty and Jan David.

"In time you'll get used to it, child. You'll experience the pain and loneliness, but also the joy."

"Get used to what?" said Margalit, not completely sure she wanted to know.

"To this," said Misty, speaking into Margalit's mind.

"THE TELEPATHIC LINK is strongest when we reach port," said Misty Dawn. "Until then, it's sporadic."

Hundreds of questions circled through Margalit's mind once she had recovered from her initial shock. "How? And why only tuggers? Why don't non-tuggers know about it?"

"A long story, and a sad one. How much we owe to Maria."

"Who was she?"

"A first generation tugger. A psychologist, originally, by profession. From the few articles that had appeared on the subject, she'd become interested in the tugger neurosis. Somehow, she wasn't satisfied with the conventional explanations of paranoia and mass hallucination caused by boredom. So she signed up with a tugging crew to investigate the matter first hand."

"What did she discover?"

"First of all, that one personality type in particular was most susceptible to the neurosis. Generally, more intelligent individuals, those with multiplex visions of reality. And when Maria herself came down with the 'disorder', she was able to examine it from the inside. Though her findings ran contrary to established scientific data, she could determine only one

explanation for the deep insights she was making into the minds of her fellow crew members. Somehow, under conditions of enforced monotony, those tuggers with the most active imaginations had developed telepathy. The berg too, she thought, might also have something to do with it, but this possibility was never fully investigated."

"Why not?"

Misty's face grew sad. "When Maria presented her data, her colleagues refused to believe her and all her funding was cut. Sometimes, for a sensitive person, laughter is a crueler weapon than outright persecution. But those tuggers who'd experienced what she described believed her. And those tuggers were able to influence the selection process for future tuggers, choosing those with greater psi potential."

"But why didn't they spread their knowledge to non-tuggers?"

"At first, many of them tried during their time in port. At best, they were laughed at, at worst . . ."

"But were people really that prejudiced?"

Misty's eyes grew moist. "I'm afraid people haven't changed that much since they killed off my Pueblo ancestors. They fear what's different."

"But if only they could be made to see that they too have the potential . . ."

"One day, perhaps," said Misty softly. "Until then, we're condemned to a lonely life. Only with our fellow tuggers are we able to communicate on the deepest level."

Margalit remembered Chuckparent's words: "It's a hard and lonely life. Stick to your music and stay in Australia."

Had she known, would she have made the same choice? Margalit looked back at the berg. The same

shiver of delight ran through her that she had experienced as a child watching the bergs come into port. She thought of her parents' garden filled with blossoming trees and winding paths. How she would lie for hours on end in the grass, playing her flute, breathing in the fragrant air. But without the icebergs' water, the garden would never have existed. Even as a child, she had known she must follow the water to its source. As she watched the trailing berg, she thought of all the energy its frozen crystals contained—energy that would make the desert bloom. And she knew her choice would have been the same.

MMARGALIT watched the heating device burrow its way into the mountain's heart. A pinkish-red glow spread through the berg. Small streams of meltwater trickled down, widening into rushing brooks. Each precious drop flowed into the gathering hemisphere, then made its way into the pipe which pumped back to shore.

Then, just as in the dream, she felt a pressure in her head. Images of other meltings superimposed themselves on what she now saw. Other men and women appeared in her mind, who had shared with Misty and Jan David as she did now. Even clearer than their faces, she could sense the feelings they had shared, their fears and anxieties but also their joys.

She watched the berg grow smaller. Eventually, the melting would reach the five-sixths that lay hidden under the warm Australian sea. With Misty, she traveled back to a far-away Pueblo set in red earth. Together, they watched dark clouds gather behind the black mountain. The legends told that the spirits of the ancestors went to dwell on the mountain after death.

And after the thundering rain, a double rainbow spread across the azure sky. Then she followed Jan David to the cold climate of his native Sweden. She climbed, with him, down the rocky hillsides and listened to the wind call through the barren trees.

The iceberg grew smaller and cast a pinkish-orange glow over the water. Margalit led her companions through her parents' garden. Oblique rays of sun bathed down on them. Breathing in the fragrance of the flowers, they ran through the grass. By a large rhododendron, they stopped. Magenta blossoms burst forth like stars. From a distance, they looked like one single flower—up close they divided into fourteen separate blossoms. Each flower branched into five petals. Diamond-shaped dots marked the topmost petal. Then the colors started pulsating and the blossoms fused into a mountain of magenta.

In the late afternoon sun, the outlines of the berg were growing faint. Tightly, Margalit clasped her two companions to her breast. In the distance, the lights of the port city were beginning to flash on, like miniature stars. And she thought of her group parents, of all the inhabitants of the city in which she had grown up. How much she longed to share with them the beauty of what she had just experienced.

The telepathic link was growing weaker but still she heard Misty's thought: "They wouldn't understand, child. They would fear and envy you."

And she remembered the sadness in Chuck-parent's face whenever he spoke about tugging. Sadness for what must remain unsaid. For several days now, the iceberg would melt. The tears of its dissolution would bring life to the parched land.

—SUSAN JANICE ANDERSON

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Linda Isaacs made her first appearance here with "Fully Automated, With Low Down Payment" (July, 1975). She returns with a story about another house, another couple, but very different circumstances indeed

EVERYTHING YOU WANTED

LINDA ISAACS

Illustrated by ROY COMISKEY

On the night Illusor switched on, Bodine dreamed that a screaming hurricane swept through the bedroom window and pulled Nora away from him. Her long black hair fanned across her face, and her nightgown swirled round and round her body like a shroud. The wind howled like some nightmare creature and suddenly Nora spun through the door into the utter blackness beyond.

It was September first, and Bodine awoke in a cold sweat; the damp top-sheet clung limply across his naked chest. He lay still, staring toward the ceiling which seemed to diminish in the distance, as if it were the sky itself, indistinct and hazy.

Bodine blinked and sat up. The shiny white digital next to the bed clicked to 8:45 and he knew he'd overslept. Illusor had been on for an hour and Nora hadn't even awakened him—that was like her! She was gone, but he searched among the rumpled covers as if she might be hidden in the blanket. And then he glanced around the room. It was not the room he had gone to sleep in.

The walls were the same featureless haze as the ceiling, and the corners of the room were gone. It was as if far-away clouds circled but never came too

close. A polished crystal dresser was at the foot of the bed where the old plastic dresser had stood, and where the closet doors had been, he could see diamond-bright knobs peeking out of the mist.

Bodine smiled. Illusor was working perfectly—just the way they'd ordered it. He and Nora had been waiting for years, months and then hours for Illusor. They'd gone to sleep the night before knowing that when they awoke, Nelson County would be like the rest of the state. And everyone—who was anyone—would be hooked up to Central Power. Nora had kept him awake for hours, refusing to turn off the light. And every time he'd start to fall asleep, she'd start up again.

"Bo, you're not asleep are you?" She pulled at the pillow that curled s-fashion around his head.

"No, not asleep," Bodine muttered. "I'm so excited," Nora said, pulling the covers over her and settling her arms neatly over top. "The living room'll be the outdoor scene we took from the Appalachians. And the kitchen's that last bit of Alaskan wilderness. I'm not crazy about the din-

ing room you picked—Cape Hattaras—but if we don't like it after the six-month contract, we can change it."

She waited expectantly and Bodine took one breath less shallow than the others. "Cape Hattaras," he said.

"And the bathroom—do you like what we got for the masterbath?" She stroked his thinning, sandy hair the wrong way; he hated that.

"Niagara," he said yawning. He stretched the length of his full five and one-half feet and then curled up into a ball. "We may have trouble relaxing in there with Niagara roaring down in front of us."

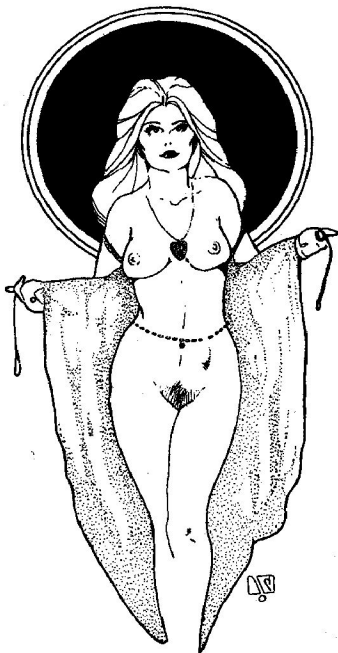
Nora clicked off the lamp and snuggled close to him. "It won't roar. I ordered something a little more distant. Bo—I'm so happy. Tomorrow I'll have everything I ever wanted."

Bodine yawned and pulled the fluffy nylon blanket up to his chin. "I'm excited Nora, but I've been up since six. And you know I can't sleep when you're breathing on my back like that."

Nora sniffed and turned her back. "You'll like me better tomorrow," she said.

HE HEARD a noise in the bathroom and stumbled over his shoes toward the door. As he pulled the knob, a slab of mist opened up revealing the American Falls. Bodine walked toward the toilet, a transparent structure which aroused in him a vague uneasiness. He stared toward the foaming, boiling Falls. The falling grey water had a certain hypnotic effect, and gave the disconcerting impulse to jump down.

"Nora!" he yelled, peering into the shower stall, a clearing veiled by sheets of falling rain. No one was there.



Bodine took a last look at the new toilet facilities and lurched through the outer door into the hall. The hall was no longer a hall but a park dotted with picnic tables, blackened grills, and glistening rain shields. The sky was a brilliant blue dome with fleecy clouds moving slowly overhead. He stared with awe and a certain degree of irritation—Nora hadn't told him about the hall. As he turned the corner and started down the stairs, he could only gaze in disbelief. He was walking on white marble steps down to the formal gardens at Versailles.

"Nora!" he shouted, his teeth involuntarily clenching. He cut through Cape Hatteras and, using his fist, slammed open the door to the last of the Alaskan wilderness. He could hear Nora clacking containers in the pantry.

"Nora, you should have asked me about the hall. And the stairs! I won't go down all those steps to Versailles every day."

He pounded his fist on the punchon table, but instead of the ringing vibrations he expected, there was only the *ting* of a metal frame structure with a formica top.

"Is there anything else you haven't told me?"

The odor of bacon drifted from the microwave and mixed with the scent of evergreen trees and wild flowers. A few hundred yards beyond the stove a moose stood knee deep in a tributary of the Kantishna, grazing on water plants.

Bodine ripped his eyes away from the moose and the dark green forest. The pantry door flew open and Nora spoke.

"Look at me Bol!" Her voice danced and she could hardly stand still.

Bodine stared at her. "Who're you?" he demanded. "Nora?"

The girl who stood before him was no more than nineteen or twenty years old and her face was very fair and smooth.

"Don't you like the blue eyes?" she asked, blinking them with delight. "I know you like blonde hair, and I've wanted it a long time, so..."

She pulled a finger through the pale yellow curls that tumbled past her shoulders.

She caught the shock on his face. "Bo, we've been married ten years—isn't this exciting?" She turned around a few times, as if she really was nineteen and not thirty-nine. Then she let her pink nightgown slip down from her body to the floor.

"Put on your clothes!" Bodine yelled, trying not to look at the gleaming body that was not Nora. Her waist seemed thinner and her legs were almost child-thin, giving the illusion that she was even more fragile than her real body.

"Just think," Nora came closer and took his arm. "I could be a different person every six months. Wouldn't you like that?" She pressed up against him and kissed him on the neck.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Bodine asked sitting down on a split log bench. It was the soft, padded chair that matched the formica table.

"Ten years and you think I want a nineteen-year-old blonde. Did I ever say I wanted you blonde?"

"I don't think you understand," Nora said stiffly. "It's what I want." She went back to the pink nightgown and stepped into it, pulling it up.

"I always wanted to be blonde. And nineteen's a good age. I like myself this way, so why can't I keep it?" She pulled the straps over her shoulder and went deliberately to the oven and pulled out the cooked bacon.

"Nora—" Bodine's face was red. "I have some say in this." His armpits were drenched and his mouth was dry.

"I'm not an attractive woman, Bo." She laid the strips on plates and set a pac of scrambled eggs in the oven. "I have a right to look beautiful."

Bodine felt a knot growing in his stomach. He wanted to go out and beat somebody up. "What's the use of being beautiful here in the house. Any time you leave, you'll. . ." he stopped in midsentence. Nora was holding up what looked like a silver cigaret lighter.

"I got this Porta-Pac in the mail Friday." She held it tightly, as if she feared he would try to take it away. "I can look like this anywhere in the States, except Vermont and Rhode Island—they aren't hooked up to Central Power. It's my dream come true—can't you see that?" Her voice trembled a little.

"So you want to stay like that, and it doesn't matter what I think?" Bodine rubbed his palms on his pajama bottoms and tried to swallow. At last he stood up and walked toward Cape Hatteras.

"Don't you ever wish your hair was still thick, or that you didn't have a double chin, or that you were taller? All you have to do is register with the police and you can be anything you want—tall, muscular, rugged. You could be any age, have any face." She slid out the eggs and spooned them onto plates. Her eyes, blue as winter ice, gleamed intensely. "Don't think you're going to stop me, Bo. There's no reason to look old anymore, and even if I used only my salary, I could afford this."

Bodine stalked out onto the beach. A hundred yards away, a light surf whispered against the sand, and the

sun warmed the room against a faint sea breeze. He walked slowly, his bare feet sinking through the dry sand onto the cold tiles of the floor. He sat down next to the wall.

The sun touched his faceted wedding ring, playing diamond-shaped lights across his face. He thought of Nora and the evening they'd first heard of Illusor. Everything fit together.

"**D**ID YOU SEE THAT?" Nora demanded, springing from her chair and running to the set. She seized the control, punching the viewer to replay. She pushed her long, dead-black hair from her face and looked at Bodine. "Well?"

Bodine looked up from his book. "Play it," he said, surveying the soft curves of her body inside her tight shift. The set buzzed the replay signal and then a handsome black reporter in a glowing green suit spoke.

Today in Los Angeles Dr. Edwin Reid had activated a device he calls Illusor. The device, evolved by Litton-Comsat, was tested today on forty-one houses in a residential area in suburban Los Angeles. Here on the scene is Angela Swordsmith. Angela?

The scene shifted to a brightly painted, split-level suburb. An oriental woman with a creamy complexion and long shiny hair spoke into a hand mike.

Well David, what we're about to see is the preliminary to nationwide distribution of Illusor. Let's go through some of these homes and you can tell me whether you agree that Illusor will soon be a household word.

Angela Swordsmith proceeded to take the camera through an interior identical with a Swiss chalet. Split-

wood beams shone dark with age and polishing against pastel-yellow hand-plastered walls. A fireplace, complete with blazing red fire which glanced off the brass fixtures, gave the room a ski-lodge effect.

The second house, from the inside, was the White House, complete with Oval Office and official paintings. A third house was very modern with furniture upholstered in shiny gold satin with glittering gold trim.

Finally Angela turned to the screen.

And all this will be within the average budget within ten years. The mechanism for an average home will fit easily into a small closet. Dr. Reid assures me that there are many uses for Illusor. How about that, David?

As Angela Swordsmith smiled goodbye, her face suddenly became dusky. Her nose grew flatter, and her long smooth hair became even rows of cornrowed braids.

Nora turned off the screen. "Do you see what we could do with that?"

Bodine nodded. "Certainly. We could live in the White House." He stretched and lay down his copy of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Worlds*. "What's wrong with our place?" he asked looking around the large living-room with its rich brown furniture and thick rug. "It's comfortable—very little wear on anything."

"There never will be," Nora said bitterly, "with just the two of us." She stood up and walked around the room, considering first the oyster-white walls and then the feathery white rug that clung around her ankles.

"Since we're doing it your way, I won't mention there'll hardly be upkeep. But think what we could do with the house." She walked around

the room and then stood looking out the latticed window.

"When it's not too expensive, we'll get it." Bodine said. "You don't need to convince me. Just stop feeling sorry for yourself." He turned the set on and ran the replay through. Nora moved away from the window and stood behind him. She watched the whole story in silence, her hands resting on Bodine's shoulders. She said, nothing at all, but when the camera panned away from the small split level with glittering furniture and Angela Swordsmith smiled goodbye, Nora's hands clenched tightly.

HE STARED OUT toward the Diamond Shoals, letting the sun warm his face. There was the familiar rush and hiss of waves against the shore, but Bodine sat up suddenly. Another sound intruded onto his beach. He stood up and searched up and down the cape. There was nothing, and yet he was sure that someone else was there. He walked slowly along the wall, searching among the dunes. There seemed to be nothing more unusual than the empty black skeleton of a horseshoe crab and spongy mats of dried seaweed, rolled into grey bales by the wind.

The beach gave way to a circular path that led up to the barrier dune. Bodine scrambled up the sliding sand, although it was no more difficult to traverse than the bare tiles of his own dining room. He crossed the sharp, silvery grass that bordered the dune like a growing fence, and padded down the soft incline on the other side.

No more than fifty yards away, three children played in the sand. Two small boys in crimson bathing suits and a girl in a ruffled pink pinafore appeared not to notice Bodine.

They continued their work on a large sand castle. Apparently, they had trudged the long distance to the shore several times to fill their buckets, for their castle rose dark and hard with many turrets.

Bodine watched them a moment, then stiffened. It was *his* beach. They had no right there. They were intruders, and he wouldn't stand for it—he wouldn't pay for it! He turned angrily and strode along the dune toward the door. His hand was on the knob when someone spoke.

"Bo—come back." It was the blonde Nora.

He turned and saw her curled up in the sand not far from the children. Her pale hair glinted in the sun and the wind floated her nightgown about her.

"I should have known!" he said angrily. "You never let off me, do you? When are you going to admit it's too late for that, anyway?" He turned and stamped through the living room to the front closet. He wrenched at the door but it would not open.

"I won't have it!" he yelled, searching about the room for something hard. On the distressed-surface coffee table he found a metal statue. It appeared to be a delicate likeness of Sequoya, musing with his pipe in hand. But Bodine knew it was a solid brass copy of *The Thinker*.

He confronted the locked closet again and smashed the statue down against the lock. The lock and knob held firm, but the plastic door gave way with a resounding crack.

Nora rushed past him up to the stairs. She stopped half way up and screamed down to him. "Bo, you're crazy. You're wrecking everything!" She turned and fled up to the palace, her tangled yellow curls trailing behind her.

Bodine did not answer but pulled open the closet door and looked at the jumble of machinery inside. He had not seen Illusor before it was put in. Nora had taken off from work to oversee the installation. How quick she had been to volunteer for that!

A series of blue lights blinked along the silver face of the unit and five small dials measured something—perhaps power and output. Tossing the statue from one hand to the other, Bodine looked fiercely at the machinery. But he could see no switch or lever to turn off Illusor. He should have known Nora would do this—probably planned the whole eight years to use Illusor against him. Her selfishness ate into him—made him sick inside.

"What do you think you're going to do?" Nora came half-way down the stairs. She had put on a skin-close orange suit and she carried a silvered shoulderbag.

Bodine looked at her, trying not to admire the body, so perfect and voluptuous, that was not Nora.

"I'm going to call and cancel Illusor," he said quickly. "I don't have to put up with the little surprises you've booby-trapped into it."

Nora slowly came down the stairs, swinging her body imperiously from side to side. At last she stood next to Bodine; a sweet scent drifted about her.

"It's a six-month contract," she said. "We lose all the money if we cancel before then." She stopped suddenly, her eyes overflowing with tears.

Bodine looked at Illusor. The machine blinked blue as if celebrating a victory over him. He considered the silvery mechanism a moment and then he turned to look for the phone. It was hidden under a laurel bush,

but he drew it out and punched for Central Power.

"Bodine, you don't understand," Nora said, her voice very low. Her smooth forehead creased into a frown.

Bodine shook his head and then spoke into the phone. "Hello, this is Unit 20001 in Croatan. Yes. Yes. I want my Illusor contract cancelled immediately. I understand, Yeah, written confirmation will follow." He hung up the receiver with a bang.

"I wonder how long it'll take 'em to do it." He watched her face. Soon the old Nora would stand there—she'd understand how stupid she had been.

"It doesn't make any difference, Bo. I have money." She went toward the front door.

"And what's that supposed to mean?" Bodine demanded. "Do you want to split the house down the middle and use Illusor on your half?"

She turned to the door and pulled it open, letting in a harsh flood of sunshine. Her hair was a bright nimbus about her head. "I'm leaving, Bo."

All at once the room went dead. The Appalachian trees faded to oyster white walls and the forest floor turned

to a feathery white rug. It seemed darker suddenly, because the sun no longer shone overhead. Only the outside sun shone through the windows and the door.

"It's over," he said triumphantly. He looked to Nora as if he had just won a great battle.

"No," she said simply, her blue eyes sad and somehow hurt. She tossed her pale hair and went out the door.

Bodine ran after her shaking—she was still blonde!

"Nora!" he shouted. "Come back here—or you don't ever need to come back!" If she loved him she wouldn't leave—she'd give up this nonsense and everything would be as it had always been.

She started down the walk, her step young and vigorous. But she stopped and turned to him. "I have the Porta-Pac under my own name." She looked sadly into his hard brown eyes, and he knew then that it was too late.

"You live with your illusion, Bo." She turned and walked toward the street.

—LINDA ISAACS

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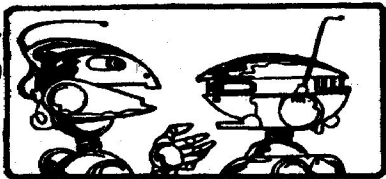
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**SUSAN
WOOD**

**the
Clubhouse**



"There is nothing like an apa, I once had a zine in FAPA

No I'm on the waiting list again.

Apas are a conversation, held by mail across the nation

'Though you miss a mailing now and then.

If you'd like to have a logical explanation

Of this duplicated mode of communication,

All Our Yesterdays' a source of that information.

And involvement here, will corflue your fears.

Fandom is a way of life

A goddam hobby full of strife

And apas are right up there in the van.

Mimeo or ditto master, apas make you favorite faster.

Minac is the bane of every fan.

You'll be waiting for the mail with anticipation,

For your weekly, monthly, quarterly apa ration.

Won't your sensitive fannish face glow with elation,

when for egoboo, all your friends choose you!

—The Mimeo Man (to the tune of "Gary, Indiana")

"Apa—Amateur press association; a group whose members bulk-mail a

specified number of copies of their fanzines to an official who distributes them in bundles to the entire membership at stated intervals, usually every third month."

—Harry Warner, All Our Yesterdays

"I understand about fanzines, I guess," said the sf reader. "They give you a chance to write about science fiction . . ."

"And other things; remember, fandom is brought together by sf, but held together by an interest in many other things," said the Old Fan and Tired (that's me) in her best lecturing tone.

"Ok, ok, sf, and fantasy, and matters-of-interest-to-fans . . . though I still don't see what Mike Gorra's drinking habits have to do with Academic Interest in sf and other important topics in science fiction fandom." (The Old Fan, who had heard this complaint many times, remained silent.)

"Fanzines I understand. You produce a magazine that you can hold in your hands, that you're proud of, that looks . . . professional." (The Old Fan winced as another Current Fannish Controversy clumped by.) "You get practice in writing fiction and criticism, in drawing and layout. You

communicate." (The Old Fan beamed.) "You get egoboo." (The O.F. sighed, thinking of the eleven-inch stack of fanzines demanding that she write letters-of-comment to them.)

"But an apa? A messy dittozine, firstdrafted onto stencil, sent out with a pile of other people's messy dittozines and ramblings? How can you be proud of *that*"—pointing to the latest apa-45 mailing through which the Old Fan was leafing surreptitiously, looking for her name. "Thirty people, all making obscure one-line references to something someone wrote off the top of his/her head six months before? What's the *point*?"

"The point is precisely that twenty or thirty, or sixty-five people are all talking at once," I explained. "And so you get to know them. People can subscribe to your fanzine, and all you know about them is an address, and the fact they have a spare dollar or two. In an apa, you get to know a small group of people fairly quickly, mostly through those 'obscure references'—the mailing comments, which are conversations with you, tacked onto open letters for the other members."

My enthusiasm rose, my tone became rhetorical. "Apas may not be 'the heart of fandom' as one of the characters in *The Mimeo Man* insists, but they're a major artery. They're a good way of meeting people—sort of like wandering into a crowded room party at a convention, listening to one conversation, then another, finally joining in. And you don't have to breathe the cigarette smoke and pick up the bheercans after. Besides, apas are fun precisely because they're less formal than regular fanzines: they're messy, impromptu, reactions typed right onto stencil. They *can* be regu-

lar labour-of-love fanzines, produced for just a few people, of course. It seems, though, that the liveliest apas right now are the frequent exchange-of-conversations ones, the monthly apas like *Minneapolis*."

"You're convincing me," said the neo. "But how do I get in on these fabulous conversations?"

"Find an apa that appeals to you—one that a friend belongs to, that your club runs, that appeals to a special interest like childrens' books or mysteries, that has no waiting list or has simple activity requirements. FAPA's about the most prestigious, certainly the most enduring: it's been around since 1937. It also has a long waitlist—it took me three years to get in, and that was fast—and it's sort of a gagfates' Valhalla, with the Fabulous Fen of Yesteryear contributing their annual eight pages (except for Harry Warner, who's been turning out *Horizons* regularly, quarterly, for more than thirty years.)"

The neofan looked properly awed.

"Write to the Official Editor, asking about dues, minac—minimum activity requirement—and so on. Get on the waitlist, and buy a few back mailings. Listen to the conversations, then join in."

"What about this activity? An apazine a month or so—should I sell my vw and buy a mimeo?" asked the neo.

"Weeeelll, if you want to be a tru-fan. . . . Quite often the OE or someone else has access to a mimeo or ditto-machine, though, and does members' work for them. Ask about it."

The neo's typing fingers twitched. "Fanacl! Wanna fanacl! Wanna get on a mailing list!"

So I suggested some places to start: —ANZAPZ (the Australian and New

Zealand Amateur Press Association): Official Bloody Editor, John Foyster, 6 Clowes St., South Yarra, Vic. 3141, Australia. 30 members, quarterly (I think), \$2/yr. and 6 pages every 6 months. North Americans are welcome.

—APA-5 (a comics apa): OE, Jim Vad-eboncoeur, 3898 Magnolia Dr. #2, Palo Alto, CA 94306. 30 members, monthly, \$1 and 6 pages every 3 mailings.

—APA-L (the Los Angeles Fantasy and Science Fiction apa): a weekly club apa, but outsiders are welcome—contact Fred Patten, 11863 W. Jefferson Blvd. #1, Culver City, CA 90230.

—APA-NESFA (the New England Science Fiction Association apa): for members of NESFA, which out-of-towners can join by sending \$5. to NESFA, P.O. Box G, M.I.T., Branch Station, Cambridge, Mass. 02139. 70 copies, no membership limit, monthly.

—APANAGE (specializing in childrens' books, especially fantasy): OE JoAnne Burger, 55 Blue Bonnet Ct., Lake Jackson, Tx. 77566. 20 members, bimonthly, \$2; sample mailing from JoAnne for 50¢.

—CANADAPA (the Canadian apa): OE Rod Fraser, 225 Cameron St., Corunna, Ont., Canada. 30 members (I think), bimonthly, \$1., 2 pages every other mailing. NonCanadians welcome.

—CAPRA (Cinema Amateur Press Association): OE Lesleigh Luttrell, 525 W. Main, Madison, WI. 53703. 25 members, quarterly, \$2. and a contribution to every other mailing. For anyone interested in reading and writing about films.

—CHAPS (Cowboys and Heroes Amateur Press Society): I'm not sure who the OE is, but you could try con-

tacting Frank Denton, 14654-8th Ave. SW, Seattle, WA 98166. Bi-monthly, 2 pages every 3 mailings, for Westerns fans.

—DAPA-EM (Elementary, my dear apa): OE Donna Balopole, Box 7071, SUNY-Binghamton, Ginfhampton, NY 13901. 35 members, quarterly, \$2./yr. plus 6 pages every six months. For anyone interested in mystery and detective fiction.

—FAPA (Fantasy Amateur Press Association): to apply for membership, contact Bill Evans, 14100 Canterbury Lane, Rockville, MD 20853. 65 members, with a waitlist of 27; quarterly, \$4./yr. plus 8 pages. Prospective members must have appropriate credentials—contributions of written material or artwork to at least two fanzines, or editorship of one fanzine.

—MINNEAPA (The Minneapolis-St. Paul apa): OE Mike Wood, 1878 Roblyn Ave. #3, St. Paul, MN. 55104. Monthly at the very least, with an open membership and rules that seem to get made up as the apa trundles on—a friendly, informal madness.

—N'APA (Neffter Amateur Press Alliance): OE David Patrick, 27 Silver Birch Rd., Turnersville, NJ 08012. 40 members, quarterly, \$1.25/yr. For members of the National Fantasy Fan Federation (N3F, —and for information on that, contact JoAnne Burger, 55 Blue Bonnet Ct., Lake Jackson TX 77566; it's a traditional meeting-ground for new fans to meet other fen.

—RAPs: OE Frank Balazs, 19 High St., Croton-on-Hudson NY 10520. 25 members, monthly, \$1. plus 2 pages every 3 mailings.

—SAPS (Spectator Amateur Press Society): OEs, Jim and Doreen Webbert, 1415 Barcelona Dr., Akron, OH 44313. 30 members, quarterly, \$2/yr.

plus 6 pages every other mailing.

I deliberately didn't list the many private and by-invitation apas, and I know I've left out many local and special-interest ones as well. Most of my information came from Richard Small, 117 S. Meridian St. #3, Tallahassee, FLA. 32301, an apa-freak (he belongs to eight of them!) who'll send you a copy of *South of the Moon*, his apa-listing, if you send him a stamped, self-addressed envelope and maybe some information about an apa he hasn't heard of.

My neo friend still looked dazed. "I understand 'about apas, but... what's a 'Mimeo Man'?"

"Oh. It's a faanish musical, a parody, of *The Music Man*, written by Moshe Feder with Eli Cohen and Debbie Notkin. It premiered at PgHlange in 1974, and, last I heard, Moshe was planning to publish the script, for a dollar a copy or so. Contact Moshe Feder, 142-34 Booth Memorial Ave., Flushing, NY 11355."

OTHER FANZINES

AY, CHINGARI! #2 ("Lance Portfolio"—Larry Downes, 21960 Avon, Oak Park MI 48237. Irregular, ditto; 32 pp., 25¢.) Conreports, letters, and a neo-sounding parody.

BLACK WOLF #16 (G. Sutton Breiding, 424 Central Ave., San Francisco, CA 94117. Irregular, mimeo; 12 pp., 25¢.) Personalzine: confessions and poetry.

*DELAP'S F & SF REVIEW #1 (ed. Richard Delap; publisher, Fred Patten, 118363 W. Jefferson Blvd., Culver City, CA 90230. Monthly, offset; 11 pp. microelite, \$12/yr libraries, \$9/yr. individuals. April 1975.) An attempt to start a serious reviewzine, primarily for teachers and libraries, but of interest to the general sf

reader. The first issue covers sf, fantasy, the media (book versions of movies, for example) and nonfiction (sf criticism, social extrapolation) with high-quality commentary. Persuade your library to order it.

FIREWORKS #1 (John Di Prete, 45 Vale Ave., Cranston, RI 02910. Quarterly, offset; 15 pp., 40¢. Jan. 1975.) Mediocre fanfic by the author; contributions requested.

*JAWBONE #12 (Michael Carlson, 35 Dunbar Rd., Milford, CT 06460. Irregular, mimeo; 12 pp., \$1/3. March 1975.) Michael Carlson's columns over the past year or so have introduced a major fanwriting talent, with consistently interesting thoughts presented in a readable, communicative style. JB, his personal-genzine, continues to prove that writing teachers can so write too. Whether he's being faanish (out driving with friends), or humorous/fed up (trying to teach basic literacy in various colleges) or interesting/serious (discussing books or musing on an approaching birthday) or sercon (discussing poetry) he's an enjoyable writer.

*KHATRU #1 (Jeff Smith, 1339 Welton Ave., Baltimore, MD 21211. Quarterly, mimeo; 60 pp., \$1.25 or \$4/4. Feb. 1975.) Jeff's new serious fanzine, featuring Sheryl Smith's "The Ellison of Byronism" (reprinted from the Gormans' *Corbett*); Barry Gillam on sf film; and book reviews by the likes of Jeff, David McCulloch, Bob Sabella, Angus Taylor, Don Keller, and the semimythical James Tiptree Jr., whose contributions were the high point of previous Smithzines. Good repro, competent layout enhancing solid, interesting reading. Recommended.

*MIDAMERICAN PROGRESS REPORT #2 (MidAmeriCon, P. O. Box 221, Kan-

sas City, MO 64141. Irregular; offset; 52 pp., \$1.50 or free to members of the 34th World Science Fiction Convention.) A worldcon progress report masquerading as a fanzine: Give it top prize at the costume ball. . . . It's a fanzine all right, from the fine wraparound Kirk cover to the interesting articles; some expected, like Chairman Ken Keller's explanation of how the concom is trying to control mushrooming attendance; some useful and funny, like Mike Resnick on costume balls; and some unexpected and welcome, like Bill Fesselmeyer's hilarious "How the Grinch Stole Worldcon." The highlight for me, though, is the first installment of Fred Patten's history of the worldcon—the sort of introduction-to-fanhistory project we've all been agreeing is necessary. Well, Fred's actually done it, from Nycon to Denvention, with photos; a detailed, readable account. The usual ads, lists of 999 members, etc. appear, but the extra features, graced by Rotsler cartoons, make this fandom's first really enjoyable convention progress report.

*THE REALLY INCOMPLEAT BOB TUCKER: THE HOY PING PONG SAMPLER (from Jackie Franke, Box 51-A, RR2, Beecher, ILL. 60401. Oneshot, mimeo; 60 pp., \$1.66 firstclass. Oct. 1974.) A collection honoring Tucker's forty years of fan writing, with proceeds going to the Tucker Bag to send him to Australia. A must for anyone who appreciates good fannish writing.

*REQUIEM vol. 2 no. 2 (Norbert Spehner, 455 Saint-Jean, Longueuil, Québec J4H 2Z3, Canada. Quarterly,

offset; 24 pp., 75¢ or \$4/6.) An excellent French-language fanzine: fiction, conreports, reviews of books, fanzines and films, good layout and graphics. Recommended.

SFINCTOR #3, 4, 5 (Craig Miller, Elliot Weinstein and Glenn Mitchell, 9115 Beverlywood St., Los Angeles, CA 90034. Monthly, mimeo and offset; 6,2 and 2 pp., 15¢ or \$1/8. Jan, Feb., March 1975.) Fannish newszine, with lots of fanzine reviews; good for COAs.

VATE-CON 3 PROGRAM BOOK (Victoria Wayne, P. O. Box 156, Station D, Toronto, Ont. M6P 3J8, Canada. Oneshot, mimeo; 40 pp., 75¢. Jan. 1975.) This is the latest in a series of one-shots sponsored by the Ontario Science Fiction Club—a policy I applaud as much preferable to the usually-late hodge-podge mess that is The Typical Clubzine, an attempt to satisfy everybody which never succeeds. (The Minn-Stf Rune is an honourable exception.) Vati-Con etc. embodies various speculations on sf and religion: the humour doesn't succeed, but Jim Allen's examination of religious symbolism in Farmer's *Lord Tiger* is up to his usual high standards. Highlight of the zine is a three-way conversation about resources, overpopulation and other problems, between Judith Merrill, Fred Pohl, and Father Arthur Gibson who teaches sf and religion at the University of Toronto.

—SUSAN WOOD

Department of English
University of British Columbia
Vancouver, B. C. V6T 1W5, Canada

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Don't miss this outstanding ALL STAR ISSUE.

Editorial (cont. from page 4)

What remains now is to rebuild, to begin once more.

BOOKS. I want to plug a couple of books here, one of which I am involved in as a contributor, and one which I am simply glad to see published at long last.

The book in which I am involved is Byron Preiss' two-volume set, *Weird Heroes*. Volume one goes on sale (or, from your point of view, *went* on sale) in October, 1975. Volume two follows in December. The publisher is Pyramid Books.

I can't say that I'm overjoyed with the title of the books, but I *am* enthusiastic about the premise which informs them. The publisher's blurb identifies them as "an exciting new concept in science fiction and adventure." Contributing authors include, in addition to myself, Philip Jose Farmer, Harlan Ellison, Fritz Leiber, Ron Goulart and Archie Goodwin (whose comics work I've admired for a great many years—I'm really looking forward to reading his contribution).

Basically *Weird Heroes* is an attempt to revive the old-style pulp fiction in present-day dress and suitably updated. Or so I understand it. Each author has created his own 'character'—I understand Harlan's is none other than Cordwainer Bird—and written a story around him. Mine is Doc Phoenix—a blend of Doc Savage and psychotherapy, in which interior mental metaphors become landscapes across which Phoenix must journey in order to find and root out his patients' problems. Those of you who enjoyed my late-sixties Captain America novel will find Doc Phoenix realized in similar terms.

But the books do not stop there. Preiss—whose conception the books are—has followed through on them

admirably. They are, he tells me, to be printed by photo-offset on *white* paper (not the usual newsprint found in most paperbacks) in order to show up the artwork to best advantage. Artwork? Yes, the stories are all illustrated. I don't know how many illustrations the books will contain in total, but my story, which runs about 8,000 words, has four full-page illos. And, in my case, the illustrations are by Steve Fabian (whose art has been an asset here for the last year)—upon whom I cannot bestow enough praise. He has captured not only the feeling of my story, but each of the characters in it whom he depicted, with perfection. I could not be more pleased. (I might add that his cover for the May, 1975, issue of this magazine, which illustrated my "Under The Mad Sun," was done from a brief, one paragraph description of what I wanted—*without* the chance to see Michael Nally's interior illustration for the same story—and hit the spot exactly. Fabian is an artist to watch.)

In addition to these first two volumes, Preiss and Pyramid plan to use several of the characters who made their debuts in *Weird Heroes* in novels of their own—Doc Phoenix among them. I hope those of you who have been asking me for another "thriller" like Captain America in *The Great Gold Steal* will pick up on these books: they're exactly what you've wanted.

In 1959 Philip K. Dick—a man who has written some of the most strikingly original science fiction novels of the past two decades—set out to write a "mainstream" novel.

It was never published—indeed, it would appear that his agent, geared to handling his stf output, never really understood the book—and, after several more equally unsatisfying at-

tempts to break out of the stf "ghetto" of the time, Dick "returned" to science fiction with the Hugo-winning *The Man In The High Castle*.

In fact, *High Castle* was not Phil's first stf novel after he gave up on cracking the "mainstream" market; it was simply the first published. In an enormously second period, Dick wrote at least half a dozen novels. (The first, in fact, was called *In Earth's Diurnal Course*; it was eventually published by Ace as *Dr. Bloodmoney, or How I Leaned To Love The Bomb*.) Among these were a number of classics such as *Martian Timeslip*, *A. Lincoln*, *Simulacrum* (first published here in 1969!), and the awesome *Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*.

Rumors circulated about Phil's non-stf work; in 1964 he told me he'd made his protagonist a tire-regroover—"The lowest job I could think of for a man—cutting fake treads on bald tires for unscrupulous used-car dealers. . ."—but that hardly hinted at the novel's true nature.

A year ago Paul Williams—the journalist and founder of *Crawdaddy*; not the singer-actor—called me up from New York to tell me he was doing an extensive piece on Phil for *The Rolling Stone*. We talked for perhaps three-quarters of an hour while I tried to dredge up ten-year-old memories of conversations with Phil and I suggested others to whom Paul should talk.

That piece has yet to appear as I write this, although I'm told it is finished and will be published—and when it is, I urge you to read it; stf authors rarely receive exposure of this nature in non-stf publications of the importance and circulation of *The Rolling Stone*—but it produced a most happy by-product.

Paul interviewed Phil extensively, and in the course of this, the subject of Phil's non-stf novel came up. Phil found the manuscript and gave it to Paul to read. And, after an unsuccessful attempt to find a current-day publisher for it, Paul decided to publish it himself.

In fact, the publisher is Entwistle Books, a very small company owned and operated (mostly at a loss, as I understand it) by Paul's close friend and associate, Dave Hartwell. (Hartwell was for several years the "Science fiction consultant" for New American Library/Signet Books, and serves a similar function now for G.P. Putnam/Berkley Books; he also does a stf column, "Thrilling Wonder Stories," for *Crawdaddy* magazine, in which he lamentably ignores the stf magazines. . .)

The result, at any rate, is the final publication, in book form, of Philip K. Dick's *Confessions of a Crap Artist* (—Jack Isidore (of Seville, Calif.); *A Chronicle of Verified Scientific Fact, 1945-1959*.)

It is a stunning novel, and one which will please anyone who has enjoyed Dick's stf novels. Like those novels it is at times surreal and at times very funny; it is also something of a tragedy. Like his other works it explores the interface between sanity and reality (or insanity and unreality). It is a pleasure to read, and one can, after finishing it, react only with stunned astonishment to the fact that no commercial publisher would touch it for fourteen years. (So much has been published which cannot hold a candle to *Confessions of a Crap Artist*; if one has any illusions left about commercial publishers, this surely will dispell them.)

I won't try to detail the plot here; suffice to say that Jack Isidore spends

rather little time as a tire regroover in the book, and that his reasons for doing such work are both ingenious and wholly in character.

The book has been published in hardcover, without a dustjacket, in a handsome edition which Paul tells me will be mailed to purchasers in a jiffy bag for protection. It includes a thoughtful introduction by Paul Williams, and the initial printing (the first edition) has been limited to five hundred unnumbered copies.

The price is \$10.00 a copy, which probably just covers the cost of publication and mailing. You can order a copy from Entwhistle Books, David G. Hartwell, Bard Hall, 50 Haven Ave., New York, N.Y., 10032. I urge that you do so, if you have any respect for the writing of Philip K. Dick.

THE ISSUE AT HAND: You've probably already noticed several changes in this issue—the most obvious being the lack of a serial and the larger number of short stories and novelettes. And you've already noticed—if you purchased this issue at a newsstand—that the price is \$1.00 a copy.

In fact the price went up last issue—a decision which was made after the issue was already set in type and too late to either make changes or comment editorially on the increased cover-price. I don't believe I need to call your attention to the ruinous inflation we've been suffering in the last year; suffice it to say that our expenses required the increase.

However, although it was impossible for us to increase the number of pages in this magazine, we did want to give you more—more actual material—for your extra two-bits. As a consequence, we have reduced the

size of our type (from 10-point to 9-point) and added the equivalent of about three extra short stories.

Additionally, we're inaugurating a new feature, the *Amazing Interview*. This issue the subject is Robert Silverberg, who speaks candidly about his career as a writer—both in and out of the stf field.

These are not good times for stf magazines; in 1975 two magazines, *Vertex* and *If*, suspended publication. That leaves, at present, only five magazines (including both *AMAZING* and our sister magazine, *FANTASTIC*) in the field—a disastrously small number to maintain a viable niche on the newsstands. Although *Vertex* was a newcomer to the field, it was in many ways the most handsome magazine in its slick-magazine format (its tabloid format, however, was apparently an unmitigated disaster, to the surprise of almost no one; contrary to prior reports which I quoted here a few issues ago, the tabloid issues sold for \$1.00 a copy and not 75¢). Unfortunately, the magazine never achieved good national distribution and apparently the paper squeeze did it in—its publisher had more lucrative uses for the available supply of paper. It seems unfortunate that the original *Vertex* experiment—to see if a slick-paper, high-priced stf magazine could become a commercial success—was aborted by factors outside the magazine itself.

If had been around a lot longer, undergoing several changes of publishers in the process. Born in the early fifties (my records of the exact date are not presently available to me, for reasons given at the beginning of this editorial), originally Paul Fairman's brainchild, *If* was at one time one of the best stf magazines. Although Fairman did not remain

(cont. on page 128)

...OR SO YOU SAY



Letters intended for publication should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of each sheet, and addressed to Or So You Say, Box 409, Falls Church, Va., 22046.

Dear Ted,

I decided to write after I'd finished both parts of the new Jack Vance novel you've serialized in the last two issues of AMAZING. "Marune: Alastor 933" continued the Alastor Cluster novels with the same painstaking attention to detail. Vance is a master of creating unusual but colorful worlds. His opening description followed by the chart explaining the orbital effects of the four sun system on the planet Marune realistically involved the reader in Vance's imagined world. However, the plot seemed a standard device designed to avoid complications. The main character was conveniently an amnesiac who made it very easy for the author to introduce lots of background information. Such a plot device makes it easy to write the story. Whenever information is needed it can be introduced naturally as part of the protagonist's recovery.

Oregon has supposedly begun a ban on the sale of fluorocarbons in aerosol cans. Unfortunately, even if that is true it means only one state has had the foresight to deal with this problem. I suspect federal action won't be

soon because no clear and present danger exists which might cost cynical or indifferent officials their jobs. The present administration would be loathe to alienate powerful business interests with restrictions on their profit margins. Also, a lot of people would probably confuse the fluorocarbon problem with fluorodation in city water supplies. A lot of muddled thinking would result before anyone finally understood what was really the problem.

I'm glad you pointed out what was really happening in Michale Girard's story. The point was subtle—masked as it was in the controversial violence. Most readers—myself included—are first drawn to the superficial aspects of a story. Only upon later reflection does insight rarely come. An old problem in aesthetics attempts to deal with the artist's intention versus the audience's perception of that intention. Usually the result of the interaction of the two viewpoints constitute what we accept as the valid interpretation. It can be misleading when readers praise or criticize a story on the basis of an erroneous prior assumption.

Daniel Oakes' poll reminds me too much of the Top Forty. It's as if each major author churned out books like tennibopper groups—or whatever they're called now—press records.

Even if he had done a carefully documented survey with a valid sampling technique I would still find the rating of stf authors in a numbers game a bit uninteresting. Who is going to remember who's 36th unless he's a purebred trivia lover? That's a rhetorical question, I admit, but then I doubt an answer would really be worth the strain on the memory. In any case, stf fans are notoriously but happily idiosyncratic in their thinking. You might get a thousand Top 40 listeners to agree to their favorite musical preferences, but to get even a few stf fans to agree to such an arbitrary ranking scale is dubious. I also distrust the assumption that stf authors can be rated equally and fairly when they themselves are such a variegated lot who appeal to widely different tastes. Such a poll would unfairly judge subjective aesthetic reactions in value-loaded fashion under the guise of strictly objective criteria. In fact, Daniel Oakes' poll really wasn't the point of his letter. His personal opinions stated in a rather emphatic way actually were his views. The poll served as an excuse to make unsupported claims concerning his own subjective prejudices.

I appreciated Greg Benford's science column. He does a good job of explaining scientific concepts to fans who aren't especially into science.

Sarah Anne Lawrence's predicament seems all too likely to sometime occur due to the cruelties and polite looking-the-other-way of the body politic. She was symbolic of the government's need to exploit people to do certain tasks through whatever means necessary. The ending was chilling. The petty bureaucrat's unfeeling assessment of the situation was in accord with ideals of totalitarian efficiency. However, given the cir-

cumstances, his proposal was the logical conclusion of the process of dehumanizing Sarah and the other women in the Pleasure Control. However, the situation is not without its wry touches of humor. If the rulers could use public assistance to supply the population with prostitutes, then VD and related social problems could be brought under control. The cost in terms of freedom for the prostitutes would be small due to their even greater disadvantage in a free market situation. At least the government, although cynically, had used safeguards to protect the women from the guilt of the knowledge of their own profession. Even so, I've probably missed the points you really wanted to make in the story. I wonder what Seth McEvoy would say about Sarah and her milieu?

DAVE HULVEY

Rt. 7, Box 68

Harrisonburg, Va. 22801

"What Is Happening To Sarah Anne Lawrence" was originally written for Roger Elwood's Future City book. Roger called me up on a Friday to tell me that he had a 3,000-word hole in his book—he'd rejected a previously commissioned story as "unsuitable"—and needed a story set in a future city dealing with the theme of prostitution. Elwood's anti-sex prejudices were well-known to me then, so I tried to handle the theme obliquely. I wrote the story the same day and put it into the mail that evening. It came back the next Tuesday—Elwood felt I'd been "too hasty" in writing it (although he'd said he needed it in a week)—and treated the story as an "op-spec" submission rather than a commission. I dropped all further plans for contribution to his anthologies at that point (1972). The story went into my files (the only other editor who saw it

was Harlan Ellison, who suggested changing it into a different story—a worthwhile suggestion, but one I never got around to) until I recalled it in 1975, took it out again, and re-read it. After workshoping the story at the local writers' group and making a few changes in it, I felt no qualms in publishing it here, although reactions to it (in the letters which follow) have been mixed.—TW

Ted,

Well, if Dave Hulvey and Forrest Ackerman can do it, so can I.

The last I heard, there were two bills in House committee that would ban freon type spray cans. There may be a presidential signature or a veto override on one of those bills by the time this session of Congress ends. (There'd better be action of that sort before the next Congress comes in.)

It's good to see *The Science in Science Fiction* back, but I must disagree with your reasoning behind the decision to drop *The Future in Books*. There are an awful lot of fanzines around, too, but you wisely haven't dropped *The Clubhouse*. Other science fiction magazines can put together good book review columns. So can AMAZING. I wouldn't expect every book to be reviewed. The multitudinous hackwork would be ignored, for instance. And there aren't more than enough book review sources in the prozines. *Analog* and *Galaxy* review science fiction books every month, and *F&SF*'s review column is divided between science fiction and fantasy. *Verter* has no reviews at all. Well, it's your decision, and I can understand how overcrowding can occur (especially when you get a lot of long-winded letterhacks). Still, one of the main reasons I've rated AMAZING and FANTASTIC as my favorite science

fiction fantasy mags over the past four years has been the out-and-out fanishness of the mags. Whenever I pick up an issue of either one I always read the features first and then start on the fiction. I hope you can continue to keep those good-sized editorials, lettercols, and other features going, without sacrificing fiction. And I hope *The Future in Books* returns soon.

"What is Happening to Sarah Anne Lawrence?" was a cute attempt at countervictorian moralizing, but the "memory police" or whatever they were called really weren't the ones who were dehumanizing and degrading Sarah Anne Lawrence. She was doing that herself by selling her body.

"To Gain a Dream" was typical Rotsler. He should stick to drawing.

"Deliveryman" was a bomb. Was Richard Peck saying that such a society is really possible in not-too-distant-future America? If he was, he's not going to turn out to be much of a prophet, I'm afraid. If he wasn't, then the whole story boils down to one joke, the "milk run" punchline. And I've gotten bigger laffs from listening to MacLean Stevenson's stand-up comedy routines.

"Marune: Alastor 933" 's conclusion was splendid. Jack Vance never misses. All his epic novels, especially those in his Alastor series, are textbook cases of what a science fiction adventure novel should be. Jack Vance deserves to place among the top 20 science fiction writers on anybody's list. And you're indeed fortunate to have him as a regular contributor to AMAZING.

About going back to calling the medium stf, I have mixed feelings about it. Scientifiction was a cumbersome word invented by one man, albeit the father (or the grandfather,

depending) of modern science fiction. Yet the dominant abbreviations have at least equal drawbacks. We all rebel at the term sci-fi, and sf has come to stand for speculative fiction, speculative fantasy, and a host of other things as well. So what to do? Well, one thing for sure, going back to the use of stf will certainly rub Harlan Ellison and his ilk the wrong way. (Can you see Tom Snyder, on Ellison's next visit to *The Tomorrow Show*, calling him "an stf writer"?) So for that reason alone i think i'll go along with your move to readopt stf as the abbreviation for the genre. And i've already seen it appearing in various fanzines, so *some* people are taking your lead.

LESTER BOUTILLIER

2726 Castiglione Street

New Orleans, La. 70119

I'm not sure you read the stories too carefully, Lester. There were no "memory police" in my story, for example, and Sarah didn't know she was "selling her body," except on a deep unconscious level which reached her conscious mind only in dreams. The point of the story was that the government was selling her body—perhaps the ultimate result of pressures existing in governmental circles right now to "make those welfare people earn an honest living." Nor was Peck's story intended humorously. Still, it does seem like Old Home Week here at Or So You Say, with both you and Hulvey in the same column. Now, where's John Robinson?

—TW

Dear Mr. White,

Seems like quite some time since I read your prostitution issue, and in the meantime, the subsequent month's issue of FANTASTIC has already been on the stands for a long

while, and here I am, first writing to you now. The next issue of AMAZING should be hitting the racks pretty soon by now—that'll be, let's see, the November issue. My, how time flies.

Anyway, this just goes to show how impressed I was by September. Your own story was intriguing, but I refuse to dwell at any length on the question of what Freudian associations Sarah Lawrence College has for you. I must remark, however, that the guy who did the artwork on page 7, whoever he was, seems to dig skinny chicks with knobby knees.

But the story that really merits comment is Peck's "Deliveryman". It's a testimony to the richness of the science fiction genre that stories of such widely diverse political orientations can be encompassed within it. In a decade when the field has been swinging so sharply to the left, it's good to know that pure classical conservatism can still be accepted and appreciated. (Don't get me wrong, now. This is not to be interpreted as meaning that I'm a conservative; just the opposite is the case. I mean exactly what I said: I like to see all points on the spectrum of opinion represented.) This story reminded me in many ways of good Heinlein. Coates was the perfect military father figure; he could have been patterned on the same prototype as Sergeant Zim. Lee was the naive, idealistic kid who learns his lesson in the end, with a vengeance. But the real master stroke was the way in which the reader (me) was just as surprised at the climax as Lee himself was. Real shock when that girl got up on her crutches and moved out of the way as the mob attacked. I had thought all along that Lee would prove himself right, end the war, and reform society.

Unfortunately, despite my admiration for the drama of Richard E. Peck's story, I was a bit puzzled by the logic of the setting (even more than I was by the mystery of the disappearing middle initial). It would appear that Peck was attempting to superimpose a different kind of social structure on our familiar kind of urban development pattern in order to make his point, but I don't see that such a situation as he depicted was economically or socially viable. To mention only one point, how do the people of Opensky survive? Are they living on government handouts, consuming what they hijack from Crawlers, scavenging among the ruins, eating rats, or what? Surely, the conflict described in the story could hardly last longer than a week. Well, at the time I first read the story, I didn't know that Peck had set at least one other in the same milieu. Since then, I've encountered another and read it, and it makes a bit more sense. Given a complex setup of dole centers, recreation areas, and a system to control the passage of workers between Opensky and Working, it could all work out. But even so, it's rather strained. And it could never have evolved into the situation depicted in "Deliveryman" in any way that I can imagine.

Your mention in the lettercol of the point of Michael Girard's story having been lost on many readers really surprised me. I still remember those concluding three paragraphs, and they were a shocker.

Now, all kidding aside, I'd like an authoritative opinion on this next point. On what syllable is the secondary stress in the word "scientifiction"—the third or the fourth?

STEPHEN A. ANTELL
45 Pineapple St., Apt. 4A

Brooklyn, N.Y. 11201

I pronounce it scientifiction, myself, but I'm hardly an authority. Forry?—TW

Dear Ted,

I find it necessary to comment on Mr. Oakes letter in view of his statements which appear after the list. Case in point, "People Who Don't Belong So Damn High On The List." Naturally anything I say will be only my opinion, and therefore not any more important than the remarks Mr. Oakes. But as he said, "Lester Boutilier and Thom Watson got the chance to shoot off their mouths. . ." To get down to business he states that Asimov shouldn't be so high on the list. I agree, but I don't agree that Heinlein has ". . . got to go up." Personally I don't think he should be as high on the list as he is; maybe he would do well at about 18th. place. And I resent being referred to as a "masochist" for disliking the fiction of Heinlein, his obvious favorite. "What has Vance written lately?" Your answer was worthwhile, but what of his other works? Obviously "Domains of Koryphon", and what about "Morreion" in *Flashing Swords!* And by the same token, what has Wells written lately? As far as Burroughs goes I see Oakes prefers literary values over entertainment values; no accounting for taste. He's probably right about Piper; by the way who is he?

His "People Who Belong Higher On the List." is at best pathetic, and at worst idiotic. You already know my thoughts about Heinlein; Bradbury's not all that great; Weinbaum does belong higher on the list, as does Delany; Malzberg, Sheckley, and Dick shouldn't be on a list of the top 50; Russ and Wells should be somewhat higher. His comment on Disch (of all

people) and Bradbury are amusing, but I'm afraid he could find more likely candidates.

As far as people belonging higher on the list, I was amazed at not finding people like Zelazny, Leiber, de Camp, and Tolkien in higher positions; Carter, and most other s&s writers (by this I mean those writing primary sword and sorcery). At first I thought that everyone thought the list was only for stf writers, but there was Tolkien and Burroughs.

BARRY WALDRON
215 4th. Ave.
Derry, Pa. 15627

Dear Mr. White,

I would like to comment on Mr. Oakes' letter and survey in the Sept. 1975 AMAZING. I disagree with many of his remarks concerning the placement of authors in his survey.

How can Asimov not be placed near the top? Who can forget the Foundation Trilogy, the robot series, "Nightfall," etc. . . I could go on forever.

Come on now give Piper a break—he's only number 49 and you can't get much lower than that.

Vonegut may say he doesn't write SF but by most standards its still SF.

While I agree with most of his list of people to move up how can you really distinguish at the top? How can you rank Niven, Clarke, Heinlein, Asimov etc. . . I find it impossible! To me they're in a class of their own. The class of greatness!!

DUANE GREGGORY DOUGLAS
6490 Johnson Rd.
Flushing, MI 48433

Both of the foregoing letters point up the futility of individuals making lists of "50 Great Stf Authors"; tastes diverge too much. The average reader will read these letters and mutter to

himself (as I did myself), "Now So&so doesn't really deserve that kind of praise. . ." or "Such&such is a really fine writer and I don't know why that fellow can't see it." All it really comes down to is that certain authors are your favorites and you don't care for someone else's favorites. That takes us back to the beginning of this discussion—Lester Bouillier's original list of his fifty favorites. Oakes offered to take a poll and get a consensus from among the readership, and this he did. What he did not do was to tell us how many responses he got, or give us a statistical breakdown on the results. In any case, his poll represents the aggregate of an unknown number of readers' favorites. Unless I receive a letter which has more to say on the subject than "How come my favorite ranked so low," or "So&so didn't deserve to be on the list," I'm going to cut off this line of discussion right here.—TW

Dear Ted,

This letter deals basically with two subjects. First my support for your printing "To Gain A Dream" by William Rotsler. And secondly praise for "Marune: Alastor 933" by Jack Vance.

I can all ready hear the self-righteous cries pouring into AMAZING condemning you for printing the Rotsler story. The yells and screams of porno, dirty, trash, and other indignant cries. *Bull!* I too was going to cry out in outrage but to be fair I read the story again. And what did I find? A very moving story. You dream and search for some ultimate goal and what happens when you find it? Disappointment and maybe the realization that there is no place else to go once you're there. That theme fits into science fiction as it has with this story. Rotsler's fantastic imagery

paints a complete world, a world where an individual was alienated by too many people, and too large cities. The prostitution in the story was just a logical result of that alienation. What could be more appropriate to put in a science fiction magazine than that?

Your own story "What is Happening to Sarah Anne Lawrence?" deals with prostitution and dehumanization of cities in a different way. In contrast with "To Gain A Dream" with aggressive solicitation your protagonist doesn't know she is a prostitute and is repulsed by the idea of a man entering her room even to talk. These two stories compliment each other by that contrast and enhances the dehumanizing aspects of each. My compliments to the editor.

This brings me to "Marune: Alastor 933" by Jack Vance. This is the best novel of the past year. The world of the Runes, with all their idiosyncrasies and customs was perfect to the smallest detail. I could quibble about minor points in the plot like, Mirk was the only time that was distinct while the eight other variations of light blended together, and Lissolet Maerio was so sketchily developed, and how the hero successfully countered all of Singhalissa's attempts to embarrass him, but these were minor points overshadowed by the excellence and the power of the novel as a whole. (As I look back over my list of minor details they seem to gather a bit of strength; this was not my intent as I said these are only very minor details.)

I was appalled by the letter in this issue, Sept. 1975, by Daniel Oakes who says "Big Deal. So what's he written lately?" in refering to Jack Vance. Jack Vance has won two Hugo Awards for his "The Dragon Masters"

and "The Last Castle" and "The Moon Moth" was a *Science Fiction Hall Of Fame* selection. His recent novels in AMAZING— "The Domains of Koryphon" and "Marune: Allastor 933" in the past year. What does he want for Pete's sake? In the next paragraph he wants to move H. G. Wells and Stanley Weibaum up on his list. What have either of them written lately?

In conclusion, "Deliveryman" by Richard E. Peck was a fine story. I enjoy an occasional 'hard science' story thrown in for spice. Greg Benford's "Hard Lessons, Well Learned—The Exploration of Venus" was by far the best *Science In Science Fiction* article he has written yet. The artwork in this issue was good, however there wasn't enough of it to bother discussing. Welcome back to letterhacking, Stephen A. Antell.

EDWARD FORREST FRANK

R.D. #1

Reynoldsville, PA 15851

Dear Ted,

What the hell's happening? Usually, I can pick either one of your mags and find at least one good story. Then you put out the Sept. issue of AMAZING!

Your "Lawrence", Peck's "Deliveryman", and Vance's "Marune" were all transparent from word one. Not that that is necessarily a fault, but I expected some development within a familiar pattern at least. Instead I get a paperback zine with paper characters. And from established writers!

The redeeming story could have been Rotsler's "Dream". The first column on p. 14 was sheer poetry, and inspiration for a story which will be floating in your slush pile shortly. However, I think he could have taken

time and space to perhaps develop the characterization a little more fully.

All I can say is, you must've just had a bad month. But then I'm still looking forward to next issue. Keep up the usually good work, and get back to writing with the depth that came through in 71 with "A Girl Like You."

HANK HEATH
250 Dale Dr.

Cassadaga, NY 14718

P.S. please, oh please keep Dave Hulvey from those slime sluts, or, if that's not possible, away from a typewriter. . . .

Hank Heath, meet Edward Frank; or, you can't please everyone all the time. . . (Personally, I thought "Lawrence" was better than "A Girl Like You," but what do I know? I only wrote them. . .)—TW

Editorial (cont. from page 120)

editor for long (subsequently he edited this magazine for Ziff-Davis), he set high standards which were adhered to by his successor, Larry T. Shaw. (Shaw, for instance, bought and published the original version of James Blish's "A Case of Conscience.") Shaw left the magazine in the middle fifties to found *Infinity*, and the last three issues of *If* under its first publisher were edited by Damon Knight. After a lapse of a few months in the late fifties, *If* was purchased by the publisher of *Galaxy* and enjoyed thereafter the role of spear-carrier for that magazine, undergoing several changes of editors and one change of publishers in the process. Although the revived *If* was never as handsome as it had been under its original publisher, it survived for fifteen years in a field which has been undergoing a steady, if sometimes deceptively slow, collapse. There are, at present, rumors about its possible purchase by another publisher, and I can only hope that in time the magazine will be once more revived.

JAMES BLISH. Finally, it is my sad duty to note the recent death of James Blish, a genuine titan in our

field.

Blish had been highly thought of, both as a writer and as a critic, for a great many years. I don't intend to list his impressive credits here—I could hardly do them all justice from memory—but I do want to say that I, personally, enjoyed his work throughout the time I've read science fiction. (My personal favorite of his works is probably his fifties novel, *Jack of Eagles*.) As William Atheling, Jr., he was one of only two critics of any importance in our field in the fifties (the other was Damon Knight); his collected criticisms are available from Advent: Publishers as *Issues at Hand* and *More Issues at Hand*. As "Atheling" he contributed extensively to *The Future in Books* in this magazine in the late sixties. He subsequently moved to England, where his health (for unrelated reasons) deteriorated steadily.

Although his contributions to the field in recent years consisted largely of *Star Trek* script adaptations (controversial, but lucrative for him), his passing leaves a large gap that can never be filled.

—TED WHITE

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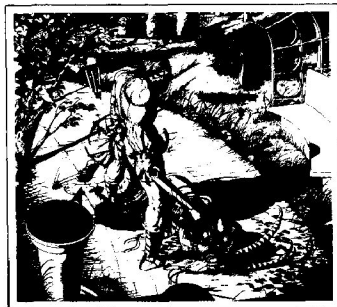
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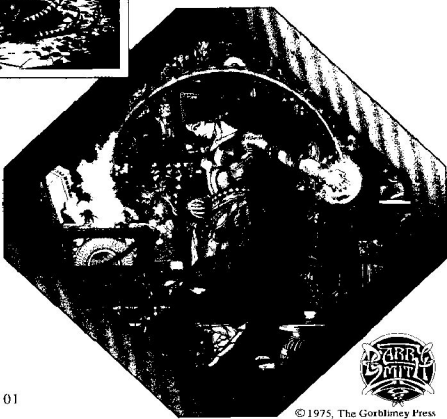
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IF YOU'RE LIKE a lot of people who've taken up the guitar, you went out and bought your guitar with high hopes. You probably bought a little instruction book to go with it, figuring all you had to do was to learn a few chords...and that with a bit of practice, you'd sound pretty good.

But maybe now you're finding that what you've learned isn't enough. Being able to strum some chords and sing a few songs is nice, of course—but you get tired of the same few songs after awhile. You'd like to be able to play other, harder songs...to play melody along with chords...to say things with your guitar that you feel inside, but haven't got the musical skills to express.

If this is the way you feel, we'd like to help you get the skills you need. We'd like to teach you to play the guitar the right way...by note as well as by chords, and by notes and chords in combination.



The Guitar is just one of several popular instruments taught by the U.S. School of Music. Our lessons-by-mail teach you to play not just chords, but melody notes, chords and bass notes in combination. If you prefer, learn the piano or spinet organ—all for far less than you'd pay a private teacher.

We'd like to teach you to read music, too—so you won't be limited to just a few simple songs that you've memorized. We'd like to help you get the freedom and fulfillment you *should* be getting from your guitar—instead of frustration from not being able to play the way you want to.

In short, we'd like to teach you the same kind of things you'd learn if you went to a good, thorough private teacher. The big difference is that we teach you with lessons we send you by mail.

You learn at home, on your own schedule. And it costs you a whole lot less.

How do we teach you without seeing you in person? If you are 17 or over, let us send you a free booklet that explains. To send for it, use the coupon. It could start you toward getting a lot more joy out of your guitar.

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☐ Piano ☐ Guitar (pick style) ☐ Spinet Organ (2 keyboards)

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