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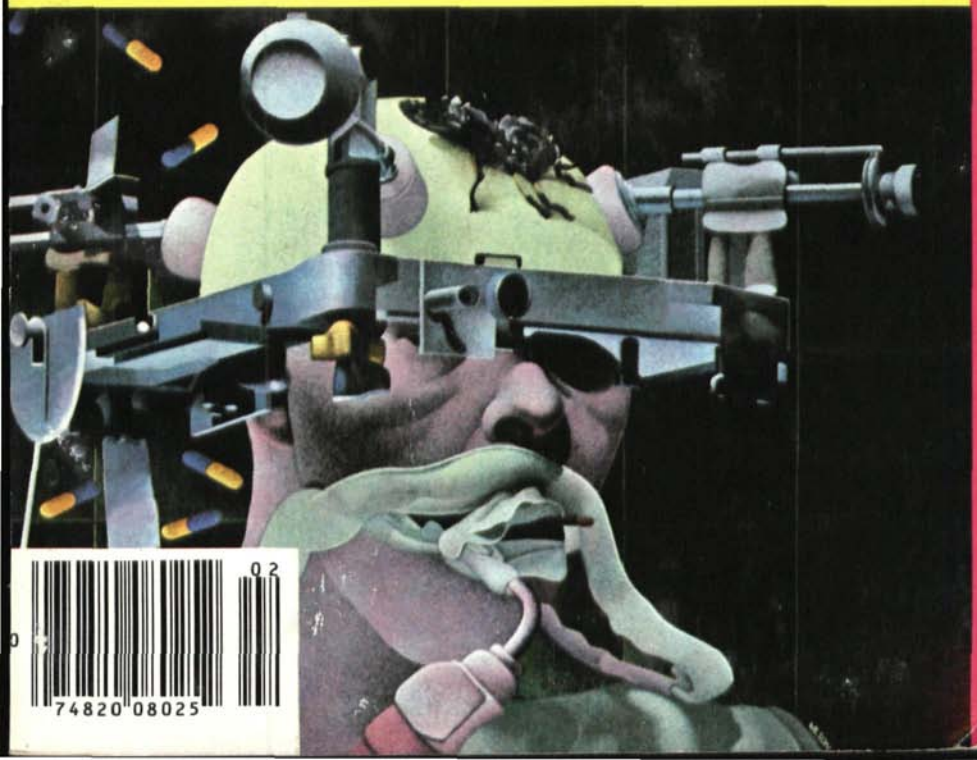
FIRST IN SCIENCE FICTION SINCE 1926

AMAZING stories

founded by HUGO GERNSBACK

7 NEW STORIES

plus • The Interstellar Connection Book Review/Interviews with Asimov, Silverberg & Foster • Darrell Schweitzer talks with Clifford Simak • 6 Department Features



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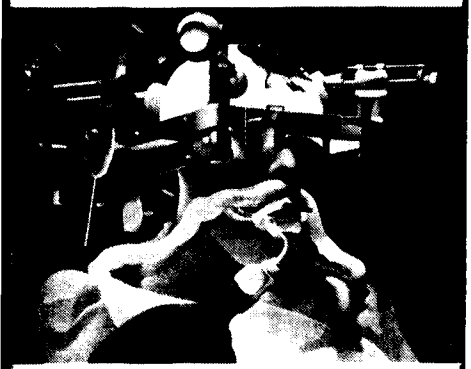

COVER

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features

fiction

departments

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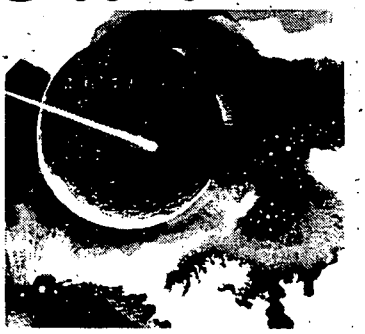
COUNT DOWN



PER OUR promises on the front cover, the following pages are guaranteed to deliver some scares, delightful surprises, a belly laugh or two plus a merry-go-round of ideas in a variety of mind-bending science fiction stories . . *seven of them . . . new to you and Amazing.*

We have selected this group of stories carefully in order to offer you a bright spread of entertainment, moving from deeper, serious pieces to light and funny ones . . . and back again. If you read from cover to cover, and don't delve into the middle first, you'll appreciate our choreography.

As a new feature, we will be including a few words at the end of each story telling why we chose it for publication. This should be fun for the reader and hopefully stimulate some conversation everyone can share.

Also, inserted with each piece will be an author bio-sketch which promises to add an extra flavor and dimension to each one of our seven new stories. —— You will enjoy "meeting" these writers very much.

A FEATURE interview by Darrell Schweitzer allows you to "meet" famous sf writer Clifford D. Simak. This interesting dialog reveals what a man who has created over 120 stories (plus the Hugo Award winning novel *Way Station* and the International Fantasy Award winning *City)* thinks about the state of the world and of the art. Simak reveals some of his writing techniques.

IN HIS "Spectroscope" column, Robert Wilcox examines Michael Kube-McDowell's sensitive story, "Antithesis." Mr. Wilcox created the first science fiction literature course at a college in Arizona and has written a text on the subject.

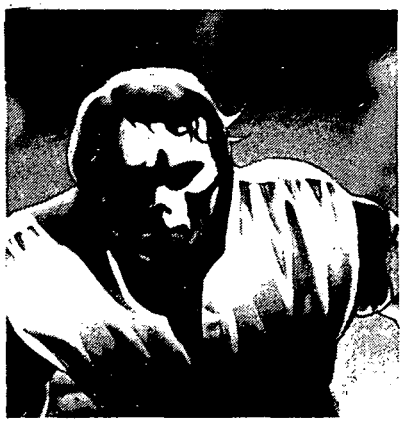
IN OUR November issue we published a piece by A. J. Thomas entitled, "The Macrophage Connection". The author has advised us that we had an error in our introduction: a macrophage is NOT a virus . . . nor is it a bacterium. It is one of the specialized cells which make up the immune system. These cells are found in great numbers near areas of inflammation and their function is to "clean up" the site. In doing this, they phagocytize not only bacteria but cellular debris from dead and dying red blood cells, white blood cells and tissues. Under certain conditions the macrophage will stick together and form *giant cells* which act as "Super" vacuum cleaners against invading bacteria.

The writer knows her science and we are happy to correct the error. At any rate, a giant *cell* (not a virus) consumed the hero of her story.

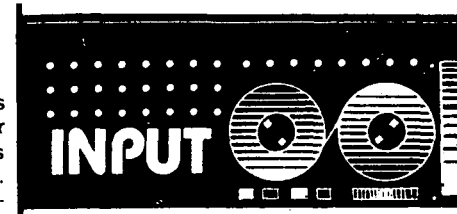
An amusing touch in "The Microphage Connection" was the use of the fictitious chemical compound, "thiotimoline" from "ASMOF" Laboratories. In Isaac Asimov's two-hundredth book, *In Memory Yet Green (an autobiography)* he recalls the time he wrote a satire on chemistry entitled, "Endochronic Properties of Resublimated Thiotimoline" which was published in the March 1948 *Astounding.* Asimov was dismayed that the article carried his name (he had requested otherwise), that it was a "howling success" and that it came out just as he was to go before a board of examiners for his doctorate at Columbia. Hoping the eminent scientists had not seen the light-hearted article, the would-be doctor sweated through an hour and twenty minutes of grueling questions until he was finally asked to explain "the thermodynamic properties of the compound known as 'thiotimoline' ". Totally broken up with relief and helpless laughter, the new PhD "had to be led from the room".

Asimov's fascinating and *long* book is reviewed in Tom Staicar's "Interstellar Connection" along with some comments from an interview with the famous author. In another interview featured in his column, Staicar talks with noted sf writer Alan Dean Foster, well-known for his highly successful film novelizations of *Star Wars* and *Alien* as well as his original novels and short stories. Foster is one writer who feels there is room in the world for many styles of writing and many forms of entertainment, and does not mind being involved with the popular "Star Wars" phenomena.

THE SECOND installment of Steve **Fahnestalk's** 'Fans, Prose & Cons" should keep everyone well informed and up-to-date on what's happening in the science fiction world. Be sure to send news to Steve at NW 440 Windus Street, Pullman, WA 99163. He wants to hear from all of you.



FUTURE ATTRACTIONS: an sf game column, history feature and film reviews. And we will continue to bring you a variety of visual stimulation to enhance our stories; this issue contains over 25 pages of illustrations from six different artists. Working with us for the first time are artists Nancy Koch (illustrating "Black Hole") —— and Gary Freeman (illustrating "Chimera"). We think you will enjoy the unique visions each has to offer.



Our Readers Speak Out

Dear Sir;

50 years ago I had my first fan letter published in a Gernsback science fiction periodical so it's great to see the Master's name once again gracing the cover of the original *scientifiction* publication. If memory serves me I once had *three* letters published in a single issue of *Amazing*. I write now for 3 reasons: (1) To correct a popular misconception that the gravity-defying figure shown on the cover of your August 1928 issue and repeated in miniature on your August 1979 number is Frank R. Paul's concept of Anthony "Buck" Rogers. It is, in fact, Richard Seaton. Quoting Gernsback's blurb: "Our cover this month depicts a scene from the first installment in this issue of the story entitled THE SKYLARK OF SPACE, by Edward Elmer Smith and Lee Hawkins Garby, in which the scientist, who has discovered a chemical substance for the liberation of intra-atomic energy, is making his initial tests, preparatory to his interplanetary flight by means of this liberated energy, which makes possible his interstellar space-flyer." (2) With no disrespect to Mr. Gernsback's memory, it is I, not he, who have been referred to thru the years as "Mr. Science Fiction" since the late great spaceflight popularizer Willy Ley first so-dubbed me in the public prints in 1949. Mr. Gernsback is rightfully referred to as the *Father of Science Fiction*, a title which he deserves to this day (and thru all time to come); and, as the spiritual father of us all, I was honored that he chose to call me toward the end of his life the Son of Science Fiction . . . and his widow (bless her) just sent me Hugo's Hugo, now the pride of my 200,000 piece science fiction & fantasy collection (archives . . . foundation . . . museum . . . call it what you will). (3) I enclose

a subscription to both *Amazing* and *Fantastic*, as I wish files of them to remain complete during my lifetime. Hurray for the return of the comet-tail logo and the revitalized interest in the pioneering "s f" (now sci-fi) periodical and its longtime fantasy companion.

Forrest J. Ackerman
2495 Glendover Ave.
Hollywood, CA 90027.

Thank you very much for your letter, which should be appreciated by fans old and new. We have enjoyed reading about your SFploits in Amazing Forries (cover reproduced below).

Dear Editor:

I regret the lack of full addresses in your INPUT letter column. SF fandom owes its existence to the available addresses of your fans that were published in the 1920s. Letter hacks want their addresses published; few would write you otherwise. Go ahead, try to prove me wrong.

Superficially, Jones' "The Man in the Silver Suit" was enjoyable entertainment, but now I regard it as a simplistic approach to an idea that should have been reasoned out on regard to our present complicated world. Government interference would cancel out the niceties the story implies.

The Kube-McDowell "Inevitible Conclusion" (sic) failed to consider that it would certainly weed out misfits by driving more people to suicide. Hardly a "Commendable Conclusion."

Sincerely yours,
Walter A. Coslet
Box Six
Helena, MT 59601

Jones' story has received much favorable comment; expecially from fellow writers. Perhaps you are digging too deep and missing the point, which is the encounter and just that. As for "Inevitable Conclusion," commendability was not the point; it was the inevitability of rebellion when free choice is taken away. Given free choice, some individuals do indeed choose to wreck or end their lives.

Dear Sirs,

I was very pleased with your magazine this month; the first month I bought it in about seven years. I was one of the first readers of *Amazing Stories* in the late twenties, and still remember some few that stayed in my memories thru the years, such as EXODUS . . . THE SHAVER MYSTERY series of stories. They were great. Also the PROFESSOR JAMIESON series of adventures, and possibly the best of all in my estimation, SO YE SHALL REAP by Rog Phillips (I even remembered the author), and I wish I'd been able to read more of his, but never found any. I think that was about 1946-47. Well, as time went by I stayed with SF but drifted to *GALAXY* and then to paperback books with such authors as Asimov, Clarke, Van Vogt, Heinlen, Larry Niven, etc. Tried *GALILEO, OMNI* and *DR. ASIMOV'S SF*, but so far the old *AMAZING* had the best group of stories for me, of them all. I am glad to see that it is once more "tops" because I'm tired of subscribing to Mags and to find only one or perhaps two stories that take my fancy.

Thanks, too, for your book review. I did not know that Arthur C. Clarke had a new book out. Also, there may be some stories

in Larry Niven's *CONVERGENT SERIES* that I have not read. Keep up the good work and stay with GOOD stories and authors.

Sincerely,
Jon E.H. Barnes
Carlsbad, CA 92008

Baste Herr redakor!

I was overjoyed to see the first issue of new *Amazing* on the newsstands.

Though Ted White did a very good job, he unfortunately didn't have the guts to try something really different. I think that something new had to be done to get *Amazing* back on its feet—and you're a good bit on the way doing it!

But I'm not all that fond of reprints.

The thing about new *Amazing* that strikes me most is the look. It's *beautiful!*

I was even more overjoyed to see the second issue of new *Amazing*. Most of all because the letter column was back. I've always been of the opinion that *Amazing* had the best lettercolumn among the prozines. *Analog's* is boring. *Isaac Asimov's SF-magazine's* is plain gosh-wow by the dozen. *F & SF's* is usually nonexistent. Etc. *Amazing's* is neither. Or *was*, I'm not quite sure this goes for new *Amazing*, too. The column in *New A 2* was of that dreadful ahundredwaystosayGoshWow-kind. I hope things will be better in the future, but that of course depends on the readers writing the letters and not on you. Gentle Readers, did you hear me?

I'll be most overjoyed of all, if you in *New A 3* re-install The Club House column (I would even write you GoshWow-letters praising it!). I think fandom and fanzines is a too fascinating phenomena to neglect. A fandomcolumn could inspire some of your readers to join the glorious world of fandom, and that would truly be a good thing! It's a shame that so few prozines nowadays refuse to even breath the word "fandomcolumn."

It was in The Club House-column I first read THE ENCHANTED DUPLICATOR and for that I'll be grateful until the day I end up six feet below the ground.

May Roscoe be with you!

Ps. If you dare to print my letter, why not print my address, too? You see, I have this crazy dream of mine that people someday will begin sending me fanzines . . .

Ahrvid Engholm,
Flotviksvagen 39, S-162 40
Vallingby, Sweden.

Hope you noticed Steve Fahnestalk's "Fans, Prose & Cons" column (second installment this issue). Wow?

Dear sirs,

I must admit I was shocked when I discovered several copies of *Amazing* on the science fiction shelf at my local newsstand. I had thought your magazine had folded years ago. Three explanations came to mind: (1) I had blundered into a time warp and was transported back to the 1930's. (2) I had discovered a cache of rare, mint condition issues of a Golden Age magazine. (3) This was somebody's idea of a joke. Needless to say, I purchased a copy and was pleased with its contents.

I am glad to see your open policy toward new writers. It's nice to have a magazine willing to stick its neck out a bit (unlike some other SF mags that shall remain unnamed.

Good luck with future issues.

Sincerely yours,
Kenneth J. Leap

Dear Mr. Gohagen,

I just picked up a copy of the August *Amazing* and was overjoyed. THE COUNCIL OF THE DRONES was one of the best SF stories I have read in years! Yours is the best SF magazine in the business.

At first I balked at the format change but happily I was guilty of jumping to conclusions. Since Star Wars, science fiction in books has gone down hill. I think your

book review column is an excellent addition.

Good luck in your new editorial post.

Sincerely yours,
Eric H. Caruso
Lovell, Maine 04051

Dear Sirs,

I was *Amazed* by your stories in your August issue. I am also *Amazed* by your cover.

I am 13½ years of age and a newcomer to reading this kind of science fiction. All your stories (except "Inevitable Conclusion"), really got me. I never read stories like those before. What did "Inevitable Conclusion" mean?

Oh, yes. Do you have the address of Mister K.L. Jones? "The Man In the Silver Suit" was great. I want to ask him if he is planning other great stories.

Your fan,
Ted Piwowar

Chicago, IL 60641

We will ask K.L. for you. His story was very popular.

"The Inevitable Conclusion" was about a planet in the distant future that dared to allow individuals to choose their own destinies . . . a freedom that is being threatened in the world today. When this freedom is totally denied, the result is usually a war—a revolution. ■

The Interstellar Connection

Book Reviews

by Tom Staicar

As a new feature, Staicar will be asking authors to comment on various topics. Their replies to his questions will be added to The Interstellar Connection *from time to time.*

ISAAC ASIMOV was kind enough to take time out from his writing schedule to send me some replies for this month's column. I asked him about the forthcoming film of his classic collection *I, Robot*, originally a Harlan Ellison screenplay project: "I liked Ellison's screenplay of *I, Robot*, and told the producers so. However, Harlan was removed from the job and someone else put on and since then I have heard nothing." (Mr. Ellison had insisted on strict adherence to the handling of the story as originally detailed in his screenplay).

I asked Dr. Asimov to tell us something he liked about the early pulp era: "The good point of the times when I started writing was that the sum total of s.f. appeared in three magazines and any fan could read it and keep up with THE WHOLE THING." Questioned about his two volume autobiography he told me: "The second volume was written along with the first volume—as one big book. For practical reasons, Doubleday divided it into two books and published them a year apart. The second volume will be published on March 1, 1980 and is entitled *In Joy Still Felt*. It will cover the years from 1954 on."

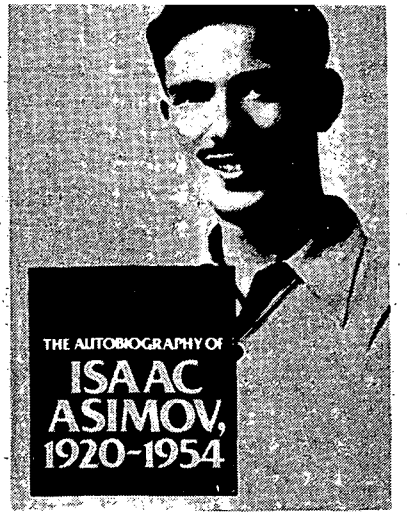
Many fans have asked him to write another SF novel and I asked him if he would consider such a project in the near future: "I may write another s.f. novel; my only reason for not doing so is that I have many other tasks to do and don't seem to get round to it. Heck, I'm even more anxious to write another mystery like *Murder*

At The ABA and I can't get round to that either."

He has some short fiction ready for publication, most of which will appear in his two SF magazines: "I am supposed to give my own magazines refusal on all my short fiction unless I get specific permission to write for another magazine. Joel Davis has never yet refused the permission and I will have a story in the January 1980 Analog to help celebrate the golden-anniversary issue."

Finally, I asked him to name an SF book which he recently read: "The science fiction work which I have most enjoyed recently was . . . *And Having Writ* by Don Bensen (Ace Books)."

I want to thank Dr. Asimov for sharing his thoughts with us.



In Memory Yet Green, *The Autobiography of Isaac Asimov, 1920-1954* (Doubleday, $15.95; also SF Book Club). Seven hundred thirty two pages and this is only volume one! For anyone else, especially Nixon or Carter, the length would establish a good case for clamping a lid on autobiographies by means of a federal law. But these are the writings of our beloved Isaac Asimov and I wouldn't want to see a single line removed. Perhaps Doubleday should be asked, for reasons of public safety, to use a non-slip rather than glossy book jacket. Imagine dropping a book this size on your foot!

I admit I was more interested in his experiences as a writer than in his detailed description of such incidents as the passing of a kidney stone, but I'm willing to bear with him as he tells the full story of his life. Where else could you find out all the details about his early rejections and triumphs in SF writing or his seemingly mortal fears (Asimov??) of blood tests and flying in airplanes.

I loved reading his anecdotes about the early pulp days, such as the one about waiting at his father's candy store for the mailman to cross the street with either a publisher's acceptance check or a manila envelope which carried a rejected manuscript. The mailman caught on and started calling out as he crossed the street things like "Bad news, I think, Isaac." Asimov was upset but afraid that an irritated mailman might refuse to carry his mail, so he kept quiet.

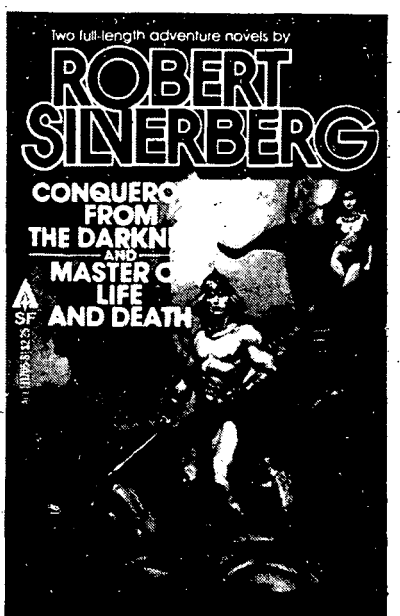
The early fan meetings and feuds were part of his life. He noted in his diary, kept since 1938, that he spent a 25¢ initiation fee to join the Futurians, with 10¢ dues per meeting. The whole group splurged on ice cream after a meeting, blowing a whopping $1.90 total on banana splits, sodas and sandwiches.

John W. Campbell had a vital role to play in Asimov's writing career and is discussed frequently in this book. It is both comforting and instructive to learn that even the author of over 200 books began his career with dozens of rejections. Although he sold "Marooned Off Vesta" to *Amazing Stories* for $64, he ended the year with that single bright spot out of fifteen rejections. His early hope of moving in a straight line toward stardom after the first sale was demolished. "Depression is inevitable at times," he writes. "Self-doubts cannot help but arise—but these must not be allowed to translate into writer's block. Every story is a new ball game."

Anyone who likes Isaac Asimov, and that doesn't leave out too many people, will become engrossed by his autobiography. If you can afford the price, this one is worth owning in hardcover. I'm already impatient for the second volume.

ROBERT SILVERBERG, who co-edited *Car Sinister* and wrote the two novels reviewed here, wrote to tell me: "I had relatively little role to play in *Car Sinister*—essentially most of the work was done by my collaborators, and I acted merely as a consultant after the project was brought together." He told me about *Lord Valentine's Castle,* his forthcoming major novel which brought a reported $127,500 from Harper & Row: "About all I can say about the book is that I much enjoyed writing it, that my long period of retirement did not seem to hamper my ability to put words on paper, and that the readers of my last five or six novels ought to expect something radically different in this one."

I asked about his past displeasure with publishers: "The pattern of reprinting of my past works left me actively and openly unhappy five years ago, when nearly everything I considered worthwhile was allowed to go out of print by my publishers of that period. I've since made other arrangements, and, since my entire body of work is now in print or shortly to be reissued, I obviously have no complaints. I understand that the recent major series of Silverberg reissues from Berkley Books is doing quite well."



Asked to tell us which books he has recently enjoyed reading he replied: "Benford's *In The Ocean of Night,* Cherryh's *Morgaine Trilogy* and Vance's *To Live Forever,* which I like to re-read every ten years or so."

Conquerors From The Darkness and **Master of Life and Death,** by *Robert Silverberg* (Ace, $2.25). This volume contains two complete novels from the action-adventure phase of the author's early career, which made way for *Son of Man, A Time of Changes* and the other complex, thoughtful novels of his later phase. There are large numbers of fans on both sides, most disdaining either the old or the new Robert Silverberg. As a Gemini I'm inclined to like both.

In the 1957 book *Conquerors From The Darkness,* he tailored his prose to the needs of the "sword-and-planet" pulp magazine audience and wrote about the pulse-pounding adventures of daring heroes. Even so, he wanted to add some character depth, an unusual practice for the era.

Dovirr is an 18-year-old city-dweller who rejects his heritage and leaves home to fight for a place among the swashbuckling Sea-Lords. The Sea-Lords are brutal fighters in this future Earth, expecting and getting tribute from the meek land-dwellers. Genetically-altered amphibious humans endanger them but the main menace in the book is the return of the alien Star-Beasts.

Dovirr makes his way up the power structure ladder, mainly due to his prowess with a sword, and has second thoughts about the superiority of brute force over cooperation and even about his rejection of the ways of his family. As the space aliens return, he attempts to unite the Earth's factions against them and thus faces the possibility of death at the hands of fellow Sea-Lords who accuse him of treason.

The character's self-doubts, coupled with his determination to win, show that Silverberg wanted to transcend the sword-and-planet novel conventions.

Master of Life and Death takes place in the overpopulated Earth of 2232 in which survival depends upon the ability of the

Population Equalization Board (Popeek) to control the problem. Popeek sends groups of people to less populous countries and decides on euthanasia for old people and genetically imperfect babies. Ray Walton believes in the Popeek plan. Once he becomes Director, however, he begins to change and his inner struggle becomes the focal point of the novel. He has decided to spare the life of one particular baby because he found that it is the son of his favorite poet. Walton's own brother decides to blackmail him for this felony offense just as a competing group is agitating for genocide against other nation's peoples. An Earthlike planet is located in another solar system but its suitability as a release valve is in doubt when hostile aliens are discovered already residing there.

The handling of Walton's character makes this book more worthwhile than most of the dreary overpopulation dystopias of its type.

Car Sinister Edited By *Robert Silverberg, Martin Harry Greenberg and Joseph D. Olander* (Avon, $2.25).

The twenty stories in this anthology deal with cars in a negative manner in most cases. The fiction and the introductions to the stories blame cars for pollution, traffic jams and the division of old neighborhoods into rich and poor by the placement of freeways. Harlan Ellison's exciting, fast-paced "Along the Scenic Route" (which appeared in *Amazing Stories* in 1969 as "Dogfight on 101") only slightly exaggerates the violence-by-car scenarios which occur whenever someone happens to enrage a hot-headed driver on a freeway. Barry Malzberg's experimental "Sedan Deville" is told as a series of letters which lack proper punctuation and grammar. Malzberg fashioned these into a gem of a story about Cadillacs. (Pardon me while I slip into my flak-vest and helmet to await the reaction I'll get for praising a Malzberg story).

Although I liked this book, I disagree with the anti-car attitude expressed by the editors. Eliminating cars would offer a simplistic solution for the many problems mentioned but tens of millions of jobs would be gone forever. SF writers have so

far failed to deal with the impact upon resorts, motels, restaurants, shopping centers and industries such as plastics, glass, steel, paints, tires and even advertising if cars become part of history. We might all ride public transportation vehicles or bicycles but who would then employ the people who used to make, test, sell, service or insure all those millions of cars?

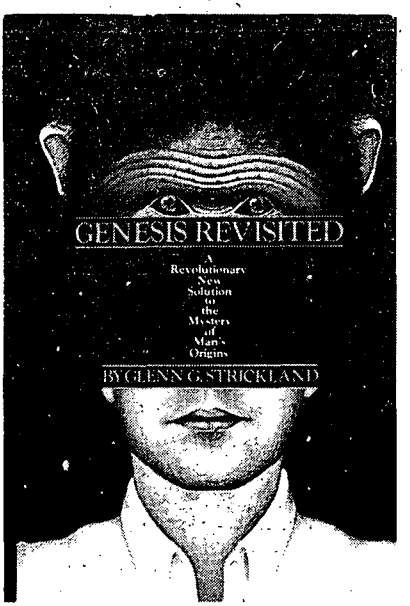
The Cosmic Rape By *Theodore Sturgeon* (Pocket Books, $1.75; Gregg Press hardcover, $9.50, including Introduction by Samuel R. Delany and novelette "To Marry Medusa"). Theodore Sturgeon's best writing stands out in any company. When 1950's SF readers expected linear narratives and cardboard characters who were usually overshadowed by clever inventions, Sturgeon gave them complex tales with multiple viewpoints and people whose emotions formed an integral part of the stories.

In January, 1958 his novelette "To Marry Medusa" appeared, which he then

turned into the novel *The Cosmic Rape*. The Pocket Books paperback contains the novel, while the Gregg Press edition adds the novelette and a perceptive introduction by Samuel R. Delany. Readers interested in finding out how a writer creates a novel from a shorter piece without losing the strengths of the earlier work should examine the Gregg edition.

The Cosmic Rape tells a story of alien invasion from the points of view of an African, an American family and a young violinist. A vicious, mean-tempered bum named Danny Gurlick happens to ingest a dormant seed of the alien life form as he eats a hamburger. He thus becomes the human agent of the aliens who offer him the ability to indulge in his psychologically-disturbed violent behavior in return for helping them to draw the Earth's people together into a single hive-mind linked with their own.

Theodore Sturgeon cares about the people in his books and this comes through strongly to us in *The Cosmic Rape*, as it does in his well-known *More Than Human*.



Genesis Revisited: A Revolutionary New Solution to the Mystery of Man's Origins By *Glenn G. Strickland* (Dial Press, $8.95). Mr. Strickland confidently takes on the scientific community with his non-fiction book about the evolutionary steps which led to modern human life. He has a theory that man's ancestors spent millions of years in natural terrariums in the Mediterranean Basin. He goes to great length to support this theory with data derived from a wide range of sources including anthropology, archaeology and the recent geological data about tectonic plate movements of the Earth. No one has done this before and the book is filled to the brim with fascinating facts and intriguing speculations. It is possible that a few wrong turns were taken along the way to his assumptions and many will find points with which to argue, but the book is well worth reading, nonetheless.

AN INTERVIEW WITH ALAN DEAN FOSTER

SF's top film novelist talks about *Star Trek, Star Wars,* and a Mini-Drag named Pip.

by Tom Staicar

AT THE age of 33, Alan Dean Foster has become one of the best known writers in science fiction. His association with *Star Wars* resulted in the best-selling *Splinter of the Mind's Eye*, his ten *Star Trek Log* volumes have sold very well and his novelization of the film screenplay of *Alien* became one of the biggest selling paperback books of 1979. Foster's other career includes his own original novels and short stories. *Bloodhype, The End of the Matter, Icerigger, Mission to Moulokin* and the collection *With Friends Like These* have built up a large following of loyal fans.

Born in New York on November 18, 1946, he studied at UCLA, earning a master's degree in film. He taught film writing and film history and also wrote dozens of screenplays on his own which went unproduced.

I interviewed Foster recently at a convention. I asked him how a young writer might break into the film novelization field: "I don't mean to sound discouraging," he told me. "But it *is* difficult. A book company buys the novel rights from a film company and then assigns a writer. Why should they pick an unknown if they can choose someone they know from past novelizations or previous writing?"

Judy-Lynn del Rey, Editor-in-Chief of Ballantine's Del Rey Books, recalled Foster's early career in answer to a letter I sent her: "I first met him at the World SF Convention in Los Angeles in 1972. I was managing Editor of Galaxy, and we had published a story or two of his. Lester and I were at an author's party and a young kid came over to thank Lester for the laudatory review of his first novel. The young kid was Alan Dean Foster; the novel was, of course, *The Tar-Aiym Krang.*"

"When I first arrived at Ballantine in 1973, we had contracted to publish a jungle epic called *Luana* and I sent the script to Alan. He produced a more than creditable novel, considering the thin material provided, and acquitted himself handsomely."

Foster recalled: "I had gotten a reputation at Ballantine as someone who could write fast, had a film background and had also written SF. They needed the novelization in three weeks in the case of *Luana.* I had to throw out everything but the basic characters and the barest outline of the plot of that atrocious film. I essentially had to write my own female Tarzan novel."

This minor work laid the foundation for Foster getting one of the most important assignments of his career: "When Ballantine bought the rights to the animated *Star Trek* TV series Judy-Lynn said 'Would you like to try these?' and I said, 'Sure.' She gave me a free hand. I had thought the James Blish adaptations of the hour-long *Star Trek* cheated the readers by condensing so many episodes into one volume. I always feel that in a novelization the readers should get more depth for their money. I took three episodes, made them novella length and tried to tie them together into at least the semblence of a novel." The reading public responded to the new approach by purchasing over 2.5 million Del Rey paperbacks of the *Star Trek Log* series.

Foster was selected to co-author the story treatment for the screenplay of *Star Trek — The Motion Picture* with Gene Roddenberry. "Gene is one of the few innovators in television. He's someone who knows how to get past some of the very stupid people in the TV business. They don't understand SF and don't want to learn. They are afraid to say they don't understand something because another guy will defeat them or take their job away. It takes a strong, intelligent man like the late Rod Serling or Gene Roddenberry to get worthwhile SF on TV."

When *Star Wars* was in production, George Lucas contacted Foster to work with him on the story to be used as the sequel film. At that time, Lucas had to be cost-conscious about special effects requirements as it was not yet known whether *Star Wars* would break even or not. The writer was told to keep expensive starships and planetary vistas to a minimum and, with this in mind, Foster and Lucas developed the story.

Star Wars became the biggest moneymaker in film history and Lucas decided to shelve the story, kept under contract for possible future filming. *The Empire Strikes Back* became the film sequel. Foster's novelization of *Splinter of the Mind's Eye* became a best-seller with more than 1.5 million copies sold.

"George is a very easy man to work with," Foster told me. "He listens to you. You don't feel like he's the boss and you're the pupil. It's a lot of fun and an easygoing one-to-one relationship."

I asked the author's literary agent Virginia Kidd about working with him: "Alan is a dream to work with, prolific beyond the common, and a cheerfully obliging person, no matter what awful demands are put upon him. Ever so often he surpasses

himself—as in *Alien*, for instance, which is the best novelization of a film I have seen in one heck of a long time."

Alien (Warner Books, $2.25) is the novelization of which he is proudest. He added depth to the film story, working with scenes which did not make it into the final version seen on the screen. The great popularity of *Alien* as a film helped boost the book into the best-seller lists where it remained for several months, often the only SF book in the top paperbacks listed. There were 1.5 million copies of *Alien* in print as summer ended.

I asked him about his writing habits: "I'm a fast but lazy writer. I spend about four hours a day working quickly. A novelization takes about 6 or 7 weeks and one of my own novels takes around three months."

"I write that way so I can spend the rest of my time doing what I want to do. I'm not one of those writers who sits there all day and night with a candle burning on a skull next to the typewriter."

He used to break each day in time to watch his favorite cartoon shows on TV. Now he tapes them with a videotape machine for later viewing.

As with most writers, time spent away from the typewriter is spent working, too.

"I usually mull the ideas over for about a week for a short story and months for a novel. Then I make notes and used a 5 to 10-page outline for the novel's rough draft."

Foster's first Commonwealth novel, introducing Flinx and Pip, was *The Tar-Aiym Krang* (Del Rey, $1.95) which has since gone into several printings. Betty Ballantine, his publisher at the time, asked him for a sequel. The orphan and his minidrag were on their way to becoming popular figures in the SF world and a second novel seemed logical. The second book was *Bloodhype*, set seven years after the first novel. When Judy-Lynn del Rey took over, she noticed that a true sequel had not been written and asked for one. At her suggestion he wrote *Orphan Star*, *The End of the Matter* and a novelette called "Snake Eyes" which appeared in Ms del Rey's anthology *Stellar 4*.

The Commonwealth books have a loyal fandom of their own, with readers working out detailed chronologies of the events. "Partly because of the readers' reactions I'm now planning to tie the whole series together. I'm planning to write novels which will cover only small pockets of time rather than a long, continuous chronology. My grand plan is to tie all of this together in about 40 or 50 years into a big conclusion."

Pip, the flying reptile, was inspired by the author's memory of the description of the real-life spitting cobra in Frank Buck's *Bring 'Em Back Alive*. Anyone who becomes a victim of the cobra has to be stopped from scratching or rubbing his eyes or the venom will enter the bloodstream. After a few hours, the poison becomes harmless. Pip's venom has no known antidote and produces death within sixty seconds.

Unfortunately for Flinx, his minidrag companion is not on his shoulder at all times to save him when danger threatens. "If a hero is invincible and has at his disposal superweapons and powerful allies then the reader will not empathize with him," Foster explained. "There have to be weaknesses whether Superman's or any other hero's."

His rapid rise in the SF field, from his

first sale to August Derleth's The Arkham Collector magazine in 1971, to his status today as one of the best-known names in the genre, has caused him to have both friends and enemies. Foster impressed me in the interview as a compassionate, intelligent man who chose to reach his readers and risk the scorn of elite critics. Some of these critics have called his books "commercial" or even "schlock" (as Orson Scott Card recently described *Splinter of the Mind's Eye*). Other critics have liked his books nearly as much as his many fans. I asked the writer how he viewed all this: "The insularity of some people in SF, especially certain writers, distresses me sometimes. It's like, if you don't do it this way then it's not valuable, it's not good. That's just not true. There are only so many intellectuals in this country. I'm not saying I write for or against them. I just mean there are many other people who want to read something that may not appeal to the intellectuals. I'm not going to run down anything because it doesn't fit my particular type. There is no such thing as *the* particular type of science fiction. You don't talk about the universe and then eliminate certain aspects of it."

"Some people say that *Star Trek* or *Star Wars* will turn people off of SF. That's not true. People have to start some place. They may not start with *The Dispossessed* or Robert Silverberg's *Son of Man*. They may never read them. There should be room in a field that prides itself on encompassing everything for something to reach everyone."

I asked if he made any statements in his books. "The first purpose of my books is entertainment. Therapy, if you will, to make people happy. Such forms of entertainment as books and films are worth more to people's happiness than all the self-help books in existence."

"I make statements indirectly in my novels. I never hit people over the head with them. An example would be the role of women. I come from a family full of strong women, my literary agent Virginia Kidd and my film agent Ilse Lahn as well as my publisher at Del Rey, Judy-Lynn del Rey, are all strong women. It is only natural them, too. I think this is much more effective than saying, hey, this is my stand on the women's issues. Showing women naturally as leaders in the novels is better than preaching to the readers. That preaching would turn people off."

I asked Foster what he liked least about SF: "I was very disappointed with some of the professional writers I met. I used to think SF writers were gods. The first SFWA meeting I ever attended, they were all arguing over whether or not to have an official SFWA necktie. It was not the sort of thing I saw the gods on Olympus debating. I hoped they would debate what we could do to stop the pollution of the Indian Ocean. I came to realize that SF writers are not gods, just unusual people who write unusual stories."

Foster and his wife JoAnn have traveled much of the world. Their favorite spots so far have been Bali, Fiji and New Zealand. They lived with a family in Tahiti for three months and the Tahitians they met formed the basis for Foster's characters in his new novel *Cachalot*. The book concerns a colony of whales on a water planet.

film *The Black Hole* was just published by Del Rey and his 200,000-word fantasy for Warner Books entitled *Spellsinger* will be published in early 1980.

I asked him what he liked best about being a writer and the two answers he gave show how he feels about the field which has become his life's work: "I like two things. One, knowing that some people are being entertained by what I write. When somebody comes up to me and says 'I really liked your book, it made me feel good!' A woman who is a teacher at the California youth Authority told me that the only reason she was able to reach one boy, and save him from getting into trouble again, was the *Star Trek Log* books. The idea that I could reach even one reader like that boy and communicate directly with him makes me very happy."

"The second reason? That I don't have to get up early."

■

AMAZING INTERVIEW

an interview with Clifford D. Simak

by Darrell Schweitzer

Clifford D. Simak is the author of over 120 science fiction stories and has won a Hugo award for his novel *Way Station*, as well as the International Fantasy Award for *City*. Mr. Simak has been a journalist ever since he left college and lives with his wife and two children where he is a Special Features Editor for the Minneapolis Star.

AMAZING: Why is it that in most of your stories the person who makes the scientific breakthrough or contacts the aliens is usually a very ordinary person rather than a specialist?

SIMAK: Because I write about ordinary people and most of the people who read my work are ordinary people. I'm disinclined to think that if there were to be an alien come to earth he would seek out a professional. He would probably make an effort to talk to someone who is a typical representative of our race. I think that a breakthrough or something like a first meeting with aliens is more dramatic if made by an ordinary man, because if a specialist made it he would not be as excited about it. He would probably go into a long detail of tests and wondering about it and trying to figure it out logically, while an ordinary person would react as you and I would react. I think it's far more effective. I'm against heroes anyhow. I rate heroes. They make the rest of us look so damn bad. A man who is always successful makes all the rest of us look terrible. Today we should be writing about the ordinary man in the street. It used to be, in the old romantic period of writing, the Victorian days and for many years after that, you wrote about kings and dukes and duchesses, because people were supposed to be very much interested in nobility. That's not true anymore. We are all just ordinary people.

AMAZING: What about the scientist, who through his study makes himself more than ordinary?

SIMAK: If some of the other writers want to write about the scientist who is making great breakthroughs, why that's probably more logical than what I do, but I find it extremely hard to handle a scientist, because for many years I interviewed scientists. I have all the respect in the world for them, but they simply do not make good fiction copy.

AMAZING: So when you choose a character you're more interested in what makes good copy than what sort of character might really be in that situation?

SIMAK: Yes, certainly. I choose a reader. Wouldn't you want me to pick the best fiction copy I could?

AMAZING: What is an extraterrestrial

going to have in common with an ordinary person?

SIMAK: Probably in his own terms the extraterrestrial himself is an ordinary person. In the first flights into space the extraterrestrial would probably use engineers, scientists, specialists and technicians, of different kinds, but if we were to find a race on Mars, I think we would be well-advised to send out some ordinary people along with the scientists, etc., to try to find out just what these beings are, because the professionally trained person is going to look at these aliens with an entirely different viewpoint than the ordinary man.

AMAZING: But isn't the ordinary man going to be less willing to put aside his prejudices than someone who specializes in studying foreign races?

SIMAK: Yes, he probably wouldn't be able to put aside his prejudices, but he would have something else going for him. He'd be much more apt to look on this alien life sympathetically and on his own terms than the scientist would.

AMAZING: He might also recoil in fear.

SIMAK: He would have to be someone who would understand that we do have to reach an understanding with these creatures. We can't recoil in fear. We can't think of them as repugnant, as we must try to meet them on their own ground. I think that as a human being he would do that better than a specialist.

AMAZING: How would you know that a flying saucer pilot, landing in your back yard, isn't going to behave like the Spanish arriving in Mexico?

SIMAK: Because the UFO astronaut, who would not come from this solar system, but from one light years away, would be a member of a culture that has evolved the kind of technology able to do this. They would also have to have the kind of curiosity that would bring them here. So they would have to have a very high culture. They would be people of great intelligence. By the time they were able to send a spaceship over a number of light years, they probably would have been able to solve their own problems. They undoubtedly would be coming here for information, or to contact us, or to find out what happened to life here. They would not be bent on conquest. They probably wouldn't need any more living room, because undoubtedly they'd have learned to control their own population within the bounds of their own planet. They wouldn't be looking for raw material because they would have ways by which they could manufacture new kinds of raw material. They wouldn't be looking for slave labor because they would have machines which could do much more labor than the human body could. So they wouldn't be looking for anything of a competitive nature.

AMAZING: Can we be sure that moral advancement goes along with technological advancement?

SIMAK: In the case of the human race it does not. In general, anyway, although today we burn fewer witches at the stake; except in times of great war madness, we massacre fewer populations. There are no two religions now at one another's throat. We have become perhaps a little bit better behaved toward other people than we were, and the reason that we have not gone beyond that in the technological age is because we're too new into it. We're too entranced with our toys. We're tremendously entranced with our toys of destruction. Maybe we can reach a time when we won't need them.

AMAZING: You mean no weapons?

SIMAK: Yes, I hope so.

AMAZING: How would you reach that?

SIMAK: By gradual understanding. I think that some of the sociological and psychological studies that are being made now may enable us in a couple of centuries to realize that the human race can live together, that nations need not be at one another's throats.

AMAZING: As I see it, everyone must disarm at once, or no one does, because if there's one armed country left, that's the whole ball game.

SIMAK: What's to stop us from total disarmament, given two hundred years? We're using weapons now as a deterrent for war, but at the same time we're working for some understanding. We're not getting very far with it, but the last

summer when a helicopter was shot down over North Korea, the President said it was simply an incident. It was nothing to make a great fuss about, and I think he probably had the right approach there.

AMAZING: But the Koreans do this periodically because they regard Americans as "patsies."

SIMAK: They do regard us as "patsies," but, if they finally decide after 20 years that they can't goad us into unwise action, they'll probably quit it. Then leaders die and are replaced, and whenever a new leader comes along there's always the chance that he might be a more reasonable man. In the case of Russia, when Nikita Kruhschev was out of office, many of us at the newspaper said that we were sorry for us, because we understood Nikita and he understood us. We knew how far we could push him and he knew how far he could push us. When the new regime came in, I think that probably for a considerable time, we got along better with them than we did with Nikita. So there's always a chance that you'll get new leadership. And the Russian people want peace just as badly as we do. All we have to do is put enough pressure on our governments, and maybe in another hundred years we may be able to do that.

AMAZING: Do you foresee any real moral progress for the human race?

SIMAK: Yes, as I just told you, we don't burn witches much anymore.

AMAZING: We don't burn heretics, but we purge them.

SIMAK: We do, but not quite as violently as we used to. Burning at the stake is pretty damn violent. Some of these fellows that we purge and disgrace, after all, come back. Oppenheimer was in as deep disgrace as you've ever seen a man. He was practically run out of the human race, and still, 30 years later, he was honored as a great American.

AMAZING: Getting back to extraterrestrials, isn't the concept of moral progress an anthropomorphic idea? We're defining it in our terms.

SIMAK: Certainly we're defining it in our terms, because it's something that fits us. What we call morality might not be what an alien would call morality. They might have a concept of morality which is much better than ours. They might have one which is much worse. Whereas the aliens and we can reach an understanding of one another, isn't it possible we can take the best from both?

AMAZING: When you're writing about an alien who thinks differently, how do you get this into human terms so the reader can understand it?

SIMAK: That's the trouble. I can't, nor can any other science fiction writer. We can only think in human terms. What we try to do is twist human concepts into strange, distorted shapes. They seem alien, but all they are are distorted human concepts. You don't know how many years I have tried to develop a true alien. I never have been able to. Terry Carr came awful close in "The Dance of Changer and the Three," but he wasn't quite successful. I think probably it's very close to impossible to do it.

AMAZING: What do you think is your most successful attempt?

SIMAK: That's a question I can't answer, because I'd have to sit down and think for half an hour and run through all my stories.

AMAZING: What caused you to start using traditional fantasy elements in science fiction contexts?

SIMAK: I see no reason why they should not be used together. Science fiction, while it's gone too far to change it, is a misnomer. It's not actually science fiction. It's fantasy. It's scientific fantasy. What we're doing is writing in the great broad field of fantasy and whether it takes a scientific and technological turn or a mythical turn or some other aspect, it's still fantasy. It's reaching out into the unknown and saying what's out there.

AMAZING: How about the old rule of violating what's known to be known? We know there are no dragons, but you've produced a few.

SIMAK: Well, who in the hell makes these rules? Is it an editor sitting behind his desk, or a critic sitting behind his desk, or a writer or the general public saying this is the way it should or shouldn't be

done? If you want to put together fantasy and science fiction, I see nothing wrong with it. I took my lumps for doing it, but I kept on doing it. I haven't done it for a while, but I think probably I'll do it again someday. It's fun. I see no reason why you should want to put scientific fantasy over here and mythological fantasy over there and draw a line between them and say the twain shall never meet. It's ridiculous.

AMAZING: Can we expect aliens to conform to our mythological expectations?

SIMAK: You can make a beautiful story by saying that trolls, dragons, etc., are all based on creatures which had at some time visited the earth and had perhaps lived here for many years before man came, but, no, I don't think so. Everything is possible, but I think it's very unlikely. I don't think the true alien, when we finally meet him, is going to resemble us in any way. The trolls, elves and all the rest are distortions of the human figure.

AMAZING: When you go about constructing a story, where do you start?

SIMAK: I can start from many points. You can start a story, of course, with the character. You can start with a situation. Now what actually happens—and I'm more and more convinced of this as time goes on—is that you don't plot stories. They sort of hatch. All your life you're storing ideas in your subconscious. This doesn't only apply to writers, but also to inventors and everybody else. These ideas that have been stored away mostly never come to anything. They just lie there and molder and die. But I think that the subconscious part of us is thinking of these things all the time, sorting and resorting, and classifying these ideas. The reason I think this is that suddenly, out of the blue, it seems, an idea will come to me, and if I give it any further thought, I can identify where it came from. There is a fragmentary thing I might have read or thought or heard somebody say. Your ideas just lay back there and hatch. You could start from scratch and say, well I'm going to plot a story, and I'm going to have a hero and a heroine and a villian and a certain situation. You can mechanically plot it. I think the mechanical part of it would show when you finally came around to writing it.

AMAZING: How much of it is a deliberate process for you?

SIMAK: You mean how much do I actually sit down and plot?

AMAZING: Yes. After you got the idea, and the subconscious has hatched something.

SIMAK: After I've got the idea I'll talk a lot of it into a tape. I'll put a lot of it down in notes. I'll wrestle around with it for anything from two weeks to a year or three years or four years—not exclusively working on that, of course. And one of these days it will all seem to come clear and I begin replotting, and finally when the time comes to write it, I probably don't refer to the notes or the tapes anymore, because the story is pretty well in mind. I may make myself a rather sketchy outline and this has to be fairly detailed for the beginning of a story because I have to keep that on track, but I don't trouble with where I'm going. I don't consciously plot too much of the second half of the story because I know very well that by the time I'm at the midpoint the characters and the situations will have taken over, and I'll be writing an entirely different story than I started out to write.

AMAZING: Do you find it difficult to talk about a story beforehand because you lose it?

SIMAK: I never talk about a story beforehand. Writing is sort of a private thing, and the idea of what you're writing belongs to you, and if you share it with anyone else it becomes just that much less yours. I think most writers feel that way. They will not talk about a work in progress.

AMAZING: As far as I can tell they divide into two categories. There are those who like to bounce ideas off people and those who are afraid of losing the story.

SIMAK: I can lose a story by talking too much about it. It's no longer an intensely private property.

AMAZING: Have you ever been able to collaborate?

SIMAK: I have collaborated with my son, and I think we did a beautiful job. I col-

laborated with Carl Jacobi on one story. I'm not too sure I'm ever going to collaborate with anybody again. The collaborations have turned out rather happily, but they become a little bit awkward. You have two different minds and it's hard to match them into one integrated piece of work.

AMAZING: How did the Jacobi collaboration come about?

SIMAK: We fought like hell for the weeks it took to write it but we finally agreed and wrote it. Carl wanted the man to do things like this. I wanted the man to take sleeping pills and Carl said they had to be sleeping powders, and if you knew Carl you could understand that much better than just hearing me telling it.

AMAZING: Is science fiction what you wanted to write from the start?

SIMAK: Yes.

AMAZING: Did you ever attempt anything else?

SIMAK: Oh, sure. At one time I was awfully broke and wasn't able to write as much science fiction as I wanted to, so I wrote a lot of westerns and some air war stories.

AMAZING: Whatever happened to them? Have they disappeared?

SIMAK: I hope they have.

AMAZING: What drew you to science fiction originally?

SIMAK: I had always wanted to be a newspaper man, and when I got to be one I was quite happy at it, but I realized after a few years that this was not entirely doing for me what I wanted it to. When you are writing for a newspaper you have to write objectively. You write from the record or from the interview, or whatever your source might be, and you don't deviate from it. But I found out that what I wanted to do was some creative writing, and I had read Wells, Haggard, Poe, and the rest of them. I was very excited about them, and then I saw my first copy of *Amazing* and that excited me even more. I knew immediately that I did want to write science fiction.

AMAZING: How long did you try before succeeding?

SIMAK: I sold my first story, but it was never published because *Amazing* sent it back after holding it for five years and said it was somewhat outdated. My second story sold and was published. Now during my entire lifetime I don't think I have had more than two or three stories that have not sold.

AMAZING: That's a remarkable record. How do you account for it?

SIMAK: At the time I started there were very few science fiction writers, and the magazines had by that time reprinted all of H.G. Wells and Haggard and the rest of them, and they were very avid to get new people into the field. So if you could put two sentences together you could qualify as a science fiction writer. The early people who got into the field really had no competition. The editors were at their mercy. They sent in a story and maybe the editor didn't like it, but where else could he get another story? So by the time the competition got rougher, most of the early writers had learned our craft well enough that we could hold our own.

AMAZING: Were you dissatisfied with the early science fiction because it was not well-written?

SIMAK: No, not at all. It was something new and it was wonderful. It was not well-written, but we didn't know it at the time. I realized years later that it was badly written.

AMAZING: What are your criteria for good science fiction?

SIMAK: You need two things. You need a good idea, and just because I put that first that's not ahead of everything else. You need a good idea and you need good characterization, and after that you need some craftsmanship.

AMAZING: How much do you think can be learned and how much is innate?

SIMAK: You can teach yourself to be a craftsman if you write long enough and work hard enough at it, but I think that the creative process, the idea of being able to dream up a story and work it out and actually bring it to the point where you can write it, is something that only a few fortunate people have. Anybody

can learn to play a violin, but they don't all play it well.

AMAZING: Do you have any ideas on the nature of the creative process?

SIMAK: I have no idea whatsoever. It's something in our genes, I suppose.

AMAZING: Samuel Delany has suggested that it's best we don't examine this too closely because we might lose it.

SIMAK: I think we had better not. If we examined it too closely and found the answer everybody would be writing.

AMAZING: You would no longer have the editors at your mercy.

SIMAK: That's right.

AMAZING: Do you feel that you still do?

SIMAK: No, we do not. The writer who tries to break into the science fiction field today has an awfully hard time because he does have a lot of competition. It's become easier in the last few years because the publishers have become very avid for science fiction stories. A writer who might not have had a chance to place a story ten years ago now can place it more easily because the supply does not quite meet the demand. I'm thinking about the novel particularly.

AMAZING: Do you see any danger that the field might overexpand and lower its standards accordingly?

SIMAK: You can't forsee the future. You don't know what is going to happen, but if the present trends continue we may lower the quality because the demand is there. I don't know how much that hurts the field. As long as readers will buy it, okay. When the readers begin to drop off, the publishers may lose interest and then you will have to be a top notch writer to sell. But we may never reach that point.

AMAZING: What I had in mind was something like what happened to the magazines in the middle 1950's happening to the paperback market.

SIMAK: What happened to the magazines was that the paperback market came into being. What might happen to the paperback I can't imagine. There's not another medium that I know of that could draw them off.

AMAZING: Movies?

SIMAK: I don't think so, because to see a movie you have to either go to a theatre and pay far more than you pay for a pocketbook, or you can wait for a long time and get it when it comes on television, but you can't pick your time to see it. I think that somebody who wants to get enjoyment out of any sort of literature will want to read it at his leisure. You can do that with a book. You can read it at any time. If you want to see it on television you've got to wait until it's programmed on television. So while they may be competitors of sorts, I doubt very much that the entertainment media will have much effect.

AMAZING: Couldn't they have considerable effect on the public image of science fiction?

SIMAK: Yes, it certainly could. Science fiction so far has been badly hurt by inept television and movies. I'm not too happy about *Star Wars*, but it was good clean fun, with a sense of wonder in it. It was the worst kind of space opera, but maybe you have to break the public in on space opera. I think that the movies can turn the public off on science fiction. They go and see a movie and say, "For Christ's sake if that's science fiction I want nothing more to do with it."

AMAZING: Has the movie industry ever expressed any interest in any of your books?

SIMAK: Oh, yes. If they could get it for peanuts.

AMAZING: But you never let them have it?

SIMAK: Never. One of my stories has been used on television and that's the only time I've been on the screen and still after all these years I keep getting royalty checks from it. It's playing all over the world.

AMAZING: This was "Good night, Mr. Jones," on *The Outer Limits*. Were you pleased with it?

SIMAK: Not at all. Christ, I didn't recognize that it was my story. I remember that I knew it was coming on, but I had no idea when it would be. Nobody could tell me. I got home one night rather late, and my wife was in a tizzy because she

said I had to sit down and eat dinner right away, and as soon as I had eaten dinner my daughter and my son hustled me into the living room and turned on the television set and I sat there for 15 minutes not knowing what was going on—I had missed the credits—and I finally got up and said, "Those sons of bitches have stolen my story!" and then my wife said, "Well, this is your story." And I sat through it and suffered.

AMAZING: Did they just do it badly?

SIMAK: Sure they did it badly. Since when hasn't TV and the movies done things badly?

AMAZING: Because they had to water it down for a lowest common denominator audience?

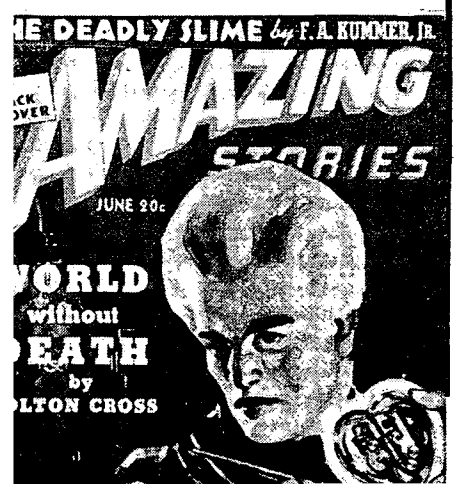
SIMAK: Because they've got the concept that to make a good movie or a good television picture, they have to have violence, they have to have a chase; this, that and the other thing. They aren't at all concerned with storytelling. If you take *Star Wars*, which is so fascinating to people, and break it down, there's practically no story there.

AMAZING: There's no conflict because the hero can't get in danger.

SIMAK: That's right.

AMAZING: I've always had this theory that the Imperial Stormtroopers are really terminal heroin junkies from the streets of Harlem and they have the shakes, which is why they can't hit the side of a barn.

SIMAK: That's right. ■



Fans, Prose & Cons

by Steve Fahnestalk

Please send con listings and information to me at N.W. 440 Windus St., Pullman, WA 99163—if I don't get the information, I can't list your con!

PART TWO: WHY A DUCK?

So, welcome back. Last issue, you learned that a "fan" reads and writes "fanzines," and attends "cons." You sent off for one of the zines I mentioned last time, but it hasn't arrived yet, and you want to know "Am I a fan—and what *is* a fan; or in other words, why a fan?"

Statistics show that the average sf (*my* preferred abbreviation for science fiction) reader has read it for a number of years, knows one or two others who read it, and when they get together, they tend to talk sf. (Don't ask where I got those statistics, I made them up). When a group of sf readers gathers, they are immediately on their way to becoming fen (plural of fan).

Surprise, surprise . . . fen have been gathering since approximately 1930; contacting each other through the letter-column of AMAZING, then meeting in person, forming clubs—and organized fandom was born. Over the years, fandom has grown and developed its own set of rituals, its own heirarchy, and lastly, its very own jargon. To become a full-fledged trufan, one needs only to learn a few funny words, write a few letters, and attend a con.

You'll learn some of the funny words

through this column, and later I'll tell you one way to learn them all, so hold on.

"But what is fandom *for?*" I hear your plaintive cry. You sure know the tough questions; but I'll try to answer. There are two schools of thought on this matter: one has it that fandom is the real secret of existence, that sf is all that matters in the world; the other holds that it's something you do to fill in the lonely hours between *whenever* and *whenever*. Each side has its motto, and you can hear the battle cries echo down the corridors at any con or fan gathering: "FIAWOL!," and "NO—FIJAGH!"

Whether Fandom Is A Way Of Life, or whether Fandom Is Just A Goddam Hobby, we will not try to answer here; my sole purpose is to get you *involved* . . . or at least to Point the Way, and the rest is up to you. Fandom encompasses the widest possible range of interests, all revolving around that epicenter we call sf. Fandom embraces those who want to discuss and participate in sf itself; also those whose interests are only peripheral, including wargamers, comic fans, medieval-minded people (no, silly, I'm talking about the Society for Creative Anachronism), and almost *any* interest condemned or deemed uninteresting by Joe Doakes, the Common Man in the Street.

For those who've been ostracised, or thought a bit odd, or who just can't find the interaction you've wanted, fandom offers you the chance to be part of your own in-group . . . and many fans secretly (or loudly) proclaim that they're better off than those common "mundanes" (meaning everyone who doesn't read sf or who isn't in fandom). *That* remains to be seen. We might examine that in another column, but now . . . I offer more zines for your perusal.

I promised to talk a little about APAs (see the Nov. AMAZING), so here you are: what if you live (as I do) in a very small town, with little opportunity to form close friendships with like-minded people; what would you do?

One of the very best things to do is to join an APA. You will have an opportunity, every month, to rant and rave, to write critical articles, to write whatever you want, and have it closely scrutinized by 25-50 close personal friends, not all of whom you've met. You also have the opportunity to ask them questions, to answer theirs, and to read the same sort of thing they've done. In short, it's a letter to and from (like the Coneheads, in mass quantities) friends.

All you do is write up your contribution, have it duplicated (by *any* means—I've seen ditto, mimeo, Xerox, and computer printout), and send it to the Official Editor, who then collates them into the requisite number of zines, each containing a copy of *every* contribution, and who then sends a zine to every member. There is a fee for joining, and you are required to contribute for postage, and usually you're required to contribute at least four pages every two months, but B'Gawd, it's *fun!* And it extends your circle of friends immensely. Here are a few sample APAs; write to the OE for more information. CLEAR ETHER till next issue.

APAS AND FANZINES

APA-H; the APA for hoaxes and humor. Elst Weinstein, 12809 Neon Way, Granada Hills, CA 91344. Apa-H sponsors the Hogu awards, and puts on the Banquet at the Worldcon.

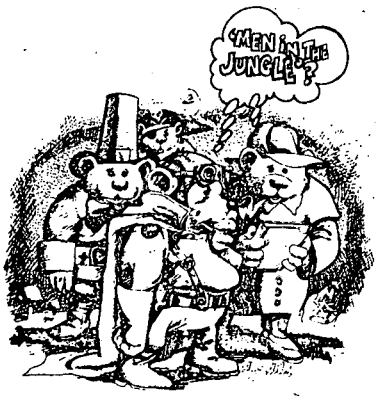
CRAPA; the Cascades-Rockies APA. Denys Howard, 1013 N. 36th, Seattle, WA 98103. Ostensibly for people in British Columbia, Alberta, Montana, Washington, Idaho, and Oregon, they also admit some people from outside the area. A wild and whacky group.

DADPA; for dada, fun, humor, and nonsense. Rick LeBlanc, 8833-92nd, Edmonton, Alberta T6C 3m3, Canada. Mostly crazy people, mostly Canadians, but they're open to everyone with a sense of "humour" (they spell funny, too!).

APA-50; for fans born 1950 and later. Bill Breiding, 3343 20th St., San Francisco, CA 94110. Younger fen have a more open outlook on *everything*, I think. This apa is characterized as a "gut spill" publication; see all, experience and feel all, tell all.

Now, as I promised you earlier: THE FILLOSTRATED FAN DICTIONARY, 172 pages with definitions of 2500 fannish

MAINSTREAM III



words and dozens of illustrations. $2.50 from Elst Weinstein, 12809 Neon Way, Granada Hills, CA 91344.

FANTASY; the fantasy artists' network zine. F.A.N., PO Box 5157, Sherman Oaks, CA 91413. 4 issues (includes membership) for $4 US and Canada. For anyone interested in SF or fantasy art, this journal offers artists' profiles, art tips, portfolios of art, artist news, and a con list by Kipy Poyser which gives specific information on art shows. Highly recommended for artists and non-artists alike.

MAINSTREAM; Jerry Kaufman and Suzanne Tompkins, 303 16th Ave., Seattle, WA 98112. 75¢, or 3/$2, irregular. From those people who brought you the Spanish Inquisition, this little zine is hard to define. Ostensibly a letter substitute, the contents belie this: it's a fannish genzine by two well-known fans. The last issue (#3) is rather slim, but has a short article on computers by Jon Singer, and an excellent article on feminist poetry by Jessica Amanda Salmonson. A good introduction to "fannish" zines.

COMPOUND FRACTURE; Georges Giguere, 8833-92st, Edmonton, Alberta, T6C 3P9, Canada. For new fans ("neos"), this is a good example of How To Start Your Own Zine . . . all you need is a mimeo, a panel transcription (the V-Con VI "Dead Authors' Panel"), and an interview (first issue, fanartist Dave Vereschagin). For more experienced fans, a fun read. 'Nuff said? (Price: try 50¢; frequency, irregular.)

WHIZZARD; Marty Klug, 5730 Chatport Road, St. Louis, MO 63129. 2/$4; twice yearly. For the comic fan, or anyone interested in comics, this well-established zine gives an in-depth look at that field, with interviews, artist indexes, comic art, and comic overviews. Good, but a bit heavy for those with a marginal comic interest.

SCIENTIFRICTION; Mike Glyer, 14974 Osceola St., Sylmar, CA 91342. $1 ea., irregular. This is one of the top fannish genzines. Many of fandom's "names" appear here with alarming frequency. Topics vary widely, as do columns, but one can usually count on book reviews, sercon stuff, cartoons, zine reviews, and the ubiquitous Gustafson art column. I rate this as tip-top for any fan.

RUNE; Minnesota SF Society, Lee Pelton/Carol Kennedy, 1204 Harmon Place #10, Minneapolis, MN 55403. 4/$2, quarterly. One of the most well-established clubzines, RUNE boasts some of the best and often funniest columns in fandom, with art by such notables as Steve Shiffman, Ken Fletcher, Bill Rotsler and Poul Anderson!! Get this one immediately—you'll love it!

SPACE AND TIME; Gordon Linzner, 138 W. 70th St., Apt. 4-b, New York, NY 10023. Quarterly, $2 ea. or 4/$6. This is where the "prose" in this column's title comes in: 59 pages of digest-sized fan fiction and poetry, profusely illustrated. Harlan Ellison once told me that if fan fiction was worth reading, it was worth professional publication; if not, forget it. "The Skin of Our Teeth," by Eileen Kernaghan, in issue #53 justifies a lot of cruddy fan fiction. Ask for issue #53, especially.

THE CHICAGO FANTASY NEWSLETTER; Robert T. Garcia, PO Box 41714, Chicago, IL 60641. Bimonthly, $3.50 a year. A slim zine, which may one day be fantasy's LOCUS. Nice Michael Stein

illustrations, news on magazine and specialty press releases, a Manly Wade Wellman article on a "Fantasy Writer's Library," etc. Interesting and informative.

FANTARAMA; Vaughn Fraser, 11220 Bird Road, Richmond BC V6X 1N8, Canada. Bimonthly, 6/$4. Pulps, comics, radio, art (mostly comic-oriented), reviews, and a fannish (Frannish?) column on Vancouver's RAIN con—something for most everybody. A very comprehensive and informative con listing and fanzine review section complete this zine. Not just another comics fanzine.

YANDRO; Robert and Juanita Coulson, Route 3, Hartford City, IN 47348. Irregular, 75¢ or 5/$3. YANDRO is one of the better-known fmz (I snuck in a new abbreviation on you—means "Fan MagaZine"); with editorials by both Coulsons, reviews, miscellaneous articles, letters, and more letters. This zine is a good definition of the word "fannish"; if you neos can get it, you're on your way to being "trufen".

CONVENTIONS

[GOH means Guest(s) of Honor; TM means Toastmaster]

I-CON, Nov. 9-11; $7 to 10/26, $9 after; to S.F.L.I.S., Rt. 3, Cedar Rapids, IA 52401. GOH: Rusty Hevelin, Gene Wolfe.

LOSCON 6, Nov. 10-13, $10 to Elayne Pelz, 15931 Kalisher St., Granada Hills CA 91344 (Checks payable to LASFS). GOH: A. E. Van Vogt.

FUTURE PARTY, Nov. 22-25, $5 supporting, $10 attending; to Christine Bunt, 606 Alpine Village, E. Greenbush, NY 12601. GOH: Hal Clement, Isaac Asimov, Theodore Sturgeon, Jacqueline Lichtenburg.

NUTRIACON, Nov. 30-Dec. 2, $6 to 10/31, $9 after, to Tom Longo, 6221 Wadsworth, New Orleans, LA 70122. GOH: Karl Edward Wagner, Bob Tucker; TM: George Alec Effinger.

CHATTACON 5, Jan. 4-6 (1980), $7 to 9/30, to ChattaCon, PO Box 31173, Chattanooga, TN 37421. GOH: Joan D. Vinge; TM: Bob Tucker.

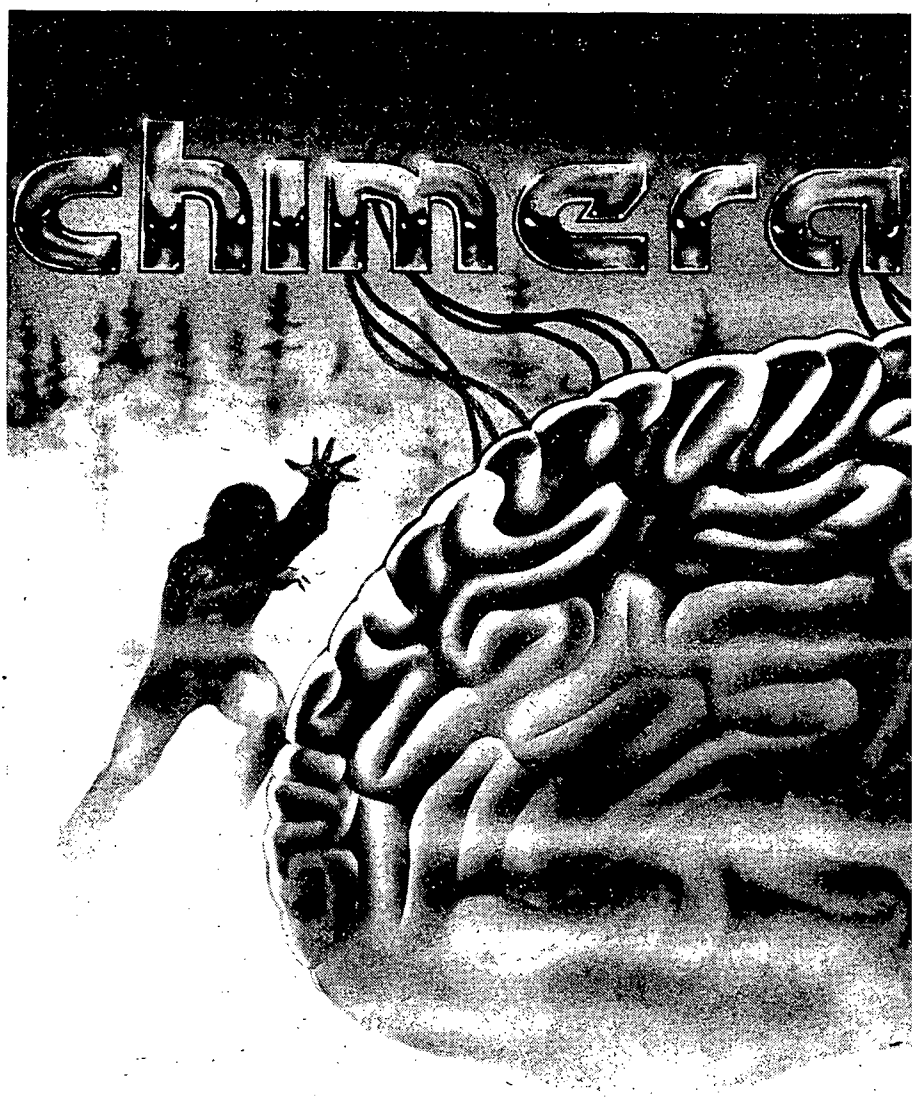
NORWESCON III, Mar. 28-30 (1980), $7 to Norwescon 3, PO Box 24207, Seattle, WA 98124. GOH: To be Announced.

EUROCON, May 1-4 (1980). Details from Eurocon 5, c/o Editrice Nord, Via Rubens 25, 20148, Milano, Italy.

WESTERCON 33, $15 to 5/80; to WesterCon 33, Box 2009, Van Nuys, CA 91404. GOH: Roger Zelazny, Bob Vardeman.

NOREASCON II, Box 46, MIT P.O., Boston, MA 02139. GOH: Damon Knight, Kate Wilhelm, Bruce Pelz. The worldcon returns from England. Rates are low if you join *now*. ■

Every crazy scheme was designed
for one purpose. Escape from . . .



Illustrated by Gary Freeman

by Hal Hill

CHIMERA EXPERIMENTAL prison was the brain child of Doctors Cleon Zephyr and Bill Weber. Three years past, in 2015, the facility had opened with the softest of bangs. Touted as escape proof, its boosters claimed that incarceration at Chimera would cost roughly one-tenth the amount required to house, feed, and rehabilitate an equal number of inmates at any other prison in the world.

The prison grounds were laid out like a terrarium set in a brandy snifter. The inner area was a three-by four-hundred foot oval that accommodated four round-shouldered adobe cell blocks, each three stories, and an athletic field. A one-hundred foot deep, uniform ring of pine forest skirted the oval and behind the pines a white fog billowed perpetually. The fog was thick and nacreous and it rose like a dome around the sheltered prison tidepool. Near the dome's apex the fog broke, forming an unnaturally even ring of clear blue sky that streamed through like a beacon to the orderly and controlled world below.

Troy Haver stood up in the thick bed of golden marigolds and wiped the coffee-colored humus from his hands and knees. His hair was blond and cropped and he was built like a short bull. A pug nose, soft facial lines, and neon-blue eyes gave him an open and friendly appearance. He surveyed the grounds and felt good about the sprouts and seeds that he had nursed to flowerhood at Chimera. When he'd arrived three years ago the inner area was barren; only the pastel-green cell blocks and playing field broke the curving monotony of the oval.

He'd been surprised when he was offered the gardening chores at Chimera, wondering if they'd never heard of "Houdini" Haver. Of course, he knew that they had. The Chimera files could serve as the source for the definitive biography of every con that arrived. It was imprisonment by invitation only and those that accepted got a twenty-five percent reduction in their current sentences.

Only the runners and incorrigibly institutionalized got the handwritten letter from warden Zephyr offering them the chance though. That's why Troy was there. He was a runner, *the* runner. Although there were many escape artists at Chimera, Haver, at thirty-three years of age, was deferentially regarded as the best. So, naturally he thought that the gardening position would offer him every opportunity to survey the grounds for chinks, weaknesses; anything that might become a ladder for his escape. But he found he didn't need a ladder; there were no walls at Chimera, only the surrounding pines and the fog that loomed as formidably as the Great Wall of China behind them.

Troy looked down the pleasantly uneven rows of marigolds and saw the also pleasant, but equally eneven form of one of his two cell mates, Rolfeo Garza, ambling toward him. Rolfeo was round and lumpy, and saturated with good times. He had the quick wit and ingratiating manner of a court jester, and like the jester he was a born follower, a surreal

but irreplaceable lieutenant. But it was Pancho Cordovan, the third member of cell number 34A, who was Rolfeo's general, his Zapata. Rolfeo lacked ambition, but he was not without guile. Pancho said that Rolfeo waded through life hoping that he would accumulate knowledge in the same way that lint collected in his bellybutton.

Rolfeo's chubby figure halted next to Troy. "Pancho's going for the fog soon," whispered Rolfeo. "Maybe tonight; maybe tomorrow night."

"Why do you always whisper like that out here?" Troy asked. "There aren't but four guards around the perimeter and they're at least two-hundred feet apart and twenty feet in the air."

Rolfeo chortled when Troy reminded him there was no need to be secretive. It was a game. Rolfeo liked intrigue, even when the only intriguing item at Chimera was the fog that hung like grounded cumulus clouds around the pines. "You sure got these zinnias looking fine," he said to Troy. Rolfeo was poignant about zinnias. His mother had grown them religiously, year after year, in the parched summer sun of the Texas panhandle.

"They're marigolds," said Troy. "First Lady marigolds."

"What do you mean?" Rolfeo asked incredulously. "I know zinnias. I know zinnias like I know starchy food and those are zinnias, yellow zinnias."

Troy plucked a ripe blossom and handed it to Rolfeo. "Have you ever seen a marigold?" Troy asked. "This is a marigold, fully doubled and possessed of the haunting fragrance, or odor if you prefer, of the said flower."

Rolfeo sniffed. "This flower has no characteristic marigold smell; its petals are unruffled. It is a zinnia."

The debate ended in mutual confusion. Troy wondered how Rolfeo could know marigolds and still see zinnias, and Rolfeo wondered how Haver ever got the job as groundskeeper. Troy was sure that Rolfeo was bullshitting, but he made a mental note of the discrepancy, as he always did. It might help him escape later. To Troy, anything that didn't fit right might help him escape later.

"Anyway," Rolfeo went on, "Pancho's going out soon and . . ." Rolfeo narrowed his eyes and surveyed the air, earth, and flowers, making sure none was listening. "I'll tell you more later," he said.

Troy nodded, reached down and pulled a stray dandelion then handed it to Rolfeo.

"Here, take this and eat it if anyone questions you. It will put a bad taste in your mouth and no one will believe anything you say for twenty-four hours; no way to inform even if you're tortured."

Rolfeo ducked his head and thrust the broadleaf weed into the top of his blue denim work shirt, then headed for the concrete path that divided the cell blocks.

Soon Troy had loaded the wheelbarrow and was heading down the same path. He passed between the soft green prison buildings that fed and housed the three hundred inmates of Chimera. Immaculate lawns spotted with crepe myrtle and mock orange separated the structures, blocks A and B on one side and C and D on the other. He arrived at a tin work shed that stood at one end of the inner oval and parked his wheelbarrow. The shed was a typical gardener's shambles, with hoes hung precariously from stingy juts and short nails, and spare sprinkler parts arranged helter-skelter in coffee cans, baggies, and rubber bands.

So Pancho's going to try the fog at night, Troy thought. It didn't matter. Day fog, night fog, it robbed you of your senses before you could penetrate five feet into its numbing whiteness. Whether you left the forest running or crawling, mid-day or midnight, the ethereal fog was as intractable a barrier as rocks and gravel piled to the moon. All of a sudden you weren't there anymore. You were waking up, usually in a sitting position, just inside the fog and two guards armed with tranquilizer guns and smug I-told-you-so attitudes were seating you in the rear of the recycled golf cart that was the sole means necessary to track down and transport prisoners who tried to escape.

Tools away, Troy retraced his line down the cement walk until he came to Building A. The bottom floor of cell block A served as the kitchen and dining area for the prison population. After dinner, at six p.m., the prisoners were locked into their cells just like in a regular prison and for mostly the same reasons. Close confinement was still best modulated with hard and fast walls and bars. There were no guards posted outside at night because prison officials felt secure that anyone able to circumvent the lockup system would still be faced with the roiling grasp of the fog.

Troy, Rolfeo, and Pancho sat together at dinner but didn't talk much. Socializing was usually saved for the cell, for home. Pancho told Rolfeo

Bio-Sketch

Hal Hill

Born and raised in New Mexico, I came to California eleven years ago to be a hippie and go to school. Among other jobs, I've sold encyclopedias door to door, sold popcorn and tickets at a porno theatre, and worked as a copy and technical writer for a hobby magazine. Somehow, I received a degree in English from California State University at Fresno in the fall of '75, and am now employed as a gardener by the state. My interests are hard to pin down.

—OR—

Hal Hill is a 105 year old mulatto dwarf now living in the Galapagos. He lives solely on a diet of 200-year-old turtle meat and finds amusement by playing paper-scissors-rock with friends that gather in the evening at his home and form a social circle around a pile of burning rags.

he looked like he was putting on a little weight and Rolfeo belched and asked Pancho if he was going to finish the gravy and rice that were left on his plate. Dinner finished, the trio took their place in the walking line of cell block A prisoners. The line began a cadenced, zig-zagging climb up the stairway and ramps until Troy, Rolfeo, and Pancho were deposited at their front door: third story, fourth cell, building A.

Lined up at the door, the three waited for the bars to slide left admitting them for the night. Each cell was eight by twelve and fitted with four bunks, two lower and two upper. The bunks jutted from the walls and were framed with angle iron and fitted with springed webbing that supported the six-inch thick mattresses. At the far end of each cell an open toilet protruded from the wall like a distended udder between the beds. At the opposing end of the cells was an open space. The open area of cell 34A was filled with a desk, books, a trash can, TV, and sundry other household items.

TROY HAD been at Chimera a year before first Rolfeo, then Pancho arrived; each within a few weeks of the other. Troy and Rolfeo had spent a confused interim before Pancho got there. Rolfeo had heard of Houdini Haver, but he was basically a one-man sidekick. Haver saw Rolfeo as an amiable schizo, an entertaining herald of the amazing Pancho that Rolfeo claimed was on the way.

Pancho had the classic lineament of a rural guerrilla. Fine bones and high cheeks gave his bronze face a dark and wordly visage but, in fact, his stolid wariness broke all too easily into a Harpo Marx smile. In his mid-twenties, he was a self-made scholar who claimed that he had broken out of college after the third year. After that, he took a meager background in philosophy and soon developed a thriving import business that handled goods from Mexico. His venture sputtered out a year later when his light plane ran out of gas over a Texas cotton field. He was arrested, and sentenced for possessing about a thousand pounds over the alloted and legal personal use marijuana limit.

Sentenced to a year in county jail Pancho, for reasons he claimed never to have understood, led a hunger strike. Rolfeo was in the same jail for petty drunkenness, and it was during the strike that his allegiance to Pancho developed. The strike only lasted until dinner of the second day, the prisoners softening little by little, then caving in just before the chili-mac and green salad were to be served.

Pancho's sense of fun and fair play had been offended and only Rolfeo had stayed by him. In a painful fit of disdain for his erstwhile mates, Pancho managed to escape, but not without Rolfeo. They managed to stay on the lam for only a week before they were captured and put back in the same jail to await trial on escape charges. It was then that they received the hand-written offer from warden Cleon

Zephyr. They would go to Chimera.

Rolfeo appeared as lackluster as Pancho did elegant. His demeanor was facile; he played the perfect *peon* with aplomb. Because of his supposed woodenness he was privy to jokes, indiscretions, and slips of the tongue that guards and others of importance would never repeat in front of a man of wit. He was a wall with ears that could deduce the hidden and confidential from the careless words and nuances of those around him. More often than not he supplied the strategic and logistic information that was needed to formulate the rough escape plans of his two compatriots.

Once inside the cell the trio seated themselves in front of the TV that hunkered like white noise at the end of the bunks. Cop shows, variety shows; all the video offerings served as background music for the strategems and buffoonery that reverberated nightly off the steel walls of cell 34A.

Rolfeo reached under his bunk and pulled out a plastic gallon jug of the vintage brew he had begun preparing the day before. He called it "Apple Juaquin," and it was a cornucopia of fruit, yeast, fermentation, drunkenness and nauseau. Grapes, orange segments and chunks of apple and pear, all bloated with the quick taste of the freshly ripened alcohol, bumped and sloshed carelessly in the jug, woozy on their own juices. The drink was fruity, light tasting, and devastating. Sometimes Pancho would drink half a gallon, put a pillowcase over his head and wave an innocent yardstick into a flailing broadsword; then advance on the bars shouting Odin into the perplexed darkness of the Chimera night.

Troy and Pancho were having one of what they called their Apple Juaquin discussions. The accommodating brew was the diving board from which they plunged into the absolutes of the deep end.

Troy is saying for the umpteenth time, "I escape because it's what I *do*."

"Sheeeit! You hear thees crasy gringo, Rolfeo? He's a genuine existentialista, huh?" Pancho says.

Troy belched and stuck a distended grape over his middle finger. He stuck the grape in his mouth, chewed, and began his defense.

"That's the closest I can get to an explanation," he continued. It's no more a justification or rationalization for my escapism than it would be for the act of murder; it's not intended to be. I escape because I like it. It's challenging, satisfying, and the prisons are the perfect place for me to work."

It was hard to believe it was as simple as that, but it was. Haver had been an orphan. He was a good boy and an excellent student, and was neither embittered nor deranged because he had never been chosen for adoption. He had entertained the idea that his need to yo-yo in and out of prison was prompted by some unconscious desire to leave the

institution, i.e. the orphanage, and seek something permanent, something his, but he soon dismissed the thought as unnecessary mental baggage. He was happy doing what he did and the notion that he escaped because of a hidden want or need in his psyche had no more meaning for him than did the thought that God guided his departures.

When he was eighteen Troy committed his first and last public crime. He went to bed with a seventeen-year-old girlfriend and got caught doing it. After the girl and her family withdrew their complaint, the police pressed charges of statutory rape. Troy felt that it was he who was ultimately raped, raped by the statute. Caught with his pants down, Troy pleaded guilty to a lesser offense of disorderly conduct and accepted sixty days in the county jail.

Because he had no prior record, Troy was made a trustee, jail cook, after serving one month. Four days after his appointment he took a county truck to pick up a load of celery and never came back. He would never be a trustee again.

By the time he was sent to Chimera, Troy had spent seven of his last thirteen years in prisons and had accrued one hundred and thirty-four years of escape time. The remainder of the time he was on the lam in countries around the world. He was sent to the most desolate and ingenious of penal systems, but he always managed to leave before he was supposed to.

For Haver, escaping was the concept, the canvas, to which his life was directed. The lines and patterns of his attempts were drawn with every breath he took and he had a stock of escape ideas completely beyond the imagination of the authorities.

While in prison he read books and attended classes on everything, always arranging and juxtaposing the information like chess pieces; mentally trying and re-trying the possible sequences of flight. He programmed himself to react to advantageous situations with the clarity and confidence of a Samurai, or a Zen archer. Some of what he called his "new paths of action" were Machiavellian and intricate, and some were as simple as running out the door when no one was looking. He'd escaped from two county jails while in transport to state or federal prisons in just that way, by training his feet to move ahead of his mind.

Eventually he got good at staying out of prison. Thanks to prison trade schools he was a journeyman welder, plumber, electrician, carpenter and gardener, and there was always a job waiting on the outside in at least one of those trades. He attended classes outside, too. Psychology, philosophy, astronomy; all might come in handy. The wardens and guards got tougher and the security systems got more and more sophisticated; Troy had no choice but to apply himself.

But in spite of his self-imposed discipline and training, and a mental set that worked like a computer to reduce his experience to the ready components of liberation, Troy had been at Chimera for three years, a

prison record. In four escape attempts he had experienced four uncompromising failures. He wore a jerry-rigged gas mask into the fog on his last try, but the effect of the fog was inexorable; apparently you didn't have to breath the vapors to succumb; the fog put you under either way.

"How many people huddled outside these walls have the opportunity to try for freedom?" Troy asked, continuing the argument for the validity of his lifestyle. Rolfeo waved his hand . . . he had an answer.

Troy gave him a dour look. "That was a rhetorical question," Troy instructed Rolfeo.

Rolfeo smiled and shrugged. Pancho had explained the intent of the rhetorical question several times to Rolfeo. It wasn't that he didn't understand, but he believed that a person should at least take a guess. Rolfeo once said that he figured that about eighty-four angels could sit on the head of a pin; then challenged Troy and Pancho to prove otherwise when they tried to shout him down.

Troy went on. "I mean, most people out there don't even know they're prisoners. No bars and no fog. They don't *see* the fog, and can't ask the questions that might shake them loose."

Outside the cell, guard Kevin Brophy was eavesdropping. Brophy was twenty-five years old, impish and Irish, and had the serene visage and delicate features of a cloistered priest. He strode to the front of cell 34A and stopped. His smile threatened to devour his face and a tangle of ruddy blond curls fought to free themselves from the confines of his guard cap. "What fog?" he said, looking at Haver. "How many times have I got to tell you, Haver, there ain't any fog. It's all in your head."

Brophy laughed like a self-satisfied leprechaun and continued his rounds. Haver didn't know what to make of Brophy. For the past year Brophy had been dropping nonsensical hints and spouting stupid jibes about Chimera. Pancho and Rolfeo said he was warped, but Troy wasn't sure. Haver seemed to detect a subdued and hidden streak of intelligence in him that made his comments all the more cryptic. Lately, Troy had begun to gather all of Brophy's asides into a separate space in his mind. Someday he hoped to find a meaning to the scattered comments and thereby bring an end to Brophy's glowering smile.

Haver felt himself tiring. The final stage of the Apple Juaquin was almost upon him; the fitful slumber of mild alcohol poisoning was near.

"I'm finished now, so I'm turning the floor over to you, either of you," he said. "You, Rolfeo, you quick-witted slug. Is there anything that would make you want to escape?"

"I would try to escape because it's there," Rolfeo answered, flopping open the centerfold from the latest issue of *Stuff* magazine and turning the photograph around the room.

Not all the cons at Chimera were potential escapees, but they were a good cross sampling of what sociologists termed the "institutional-

ized." Each arrival was given the same terse speech from warden Zephyr when he arrived:

"Chimera is much like most of the prisons you have called home. We have prison buildings and the shadows of bars reflecting on the dining tables. There are guards to keep you orderly and inside the buildings at night, and orderly and on the grounds during the day. But here we also have the fog. You will not escape, and at the time of your release you will understand that Chimera is not the kind of place that you would want to think of as home."

He told everyone that they'd be out before they knew it, but for Haver he added, ". . . but not before *we* know it, and not until we're ready."

Cleon Zephyr was tan, spindly and had a sharp mind. Not the kind of socio-penologist Troy Haver was used to. Like Brophy, but to a lesser degree, he was smug. The whole staff shared a kind of fraternal "inness" that annoyed Troy. The keepers he was used to were a tired and anguished lot from warden on down. The rise and fall of innumerable breakthroughs in rehabilitative psychology and related fields of penology had robbed them of their visions, and the overpopulated prisons and their degenerate charges had sapped their faith in humanity. Zephyr and his staff were different. They said "fog" like they were pronouncing "boogyman" or "God." To Troy, they acted like the world itself was on their side.

A few plump orange segments still flopped belligerently in the plastic jug that held the Apple Juaquin, and Rolfeo was shaking the container like a piggy bank, trying to snag the last drop of his investment.

Propped solidly in the hard-backed chairs that surrounded the pine table, Troy and Pancho still talked, though their phrases were now tainted by a slurred and alcoholic inflection. They didn't discuss Pancho's exact escape plan, if he still had any after the transfusion of Apple Juaquin. They never exchanged exact strategies. After one escape and one attempt, Pancho was still a neophyte runner, but he agreed with Troy that ignorance was the nexus of any escape. Factors of surprise and preparation were, in Troy's estimation, methods of increasing the ignorance of the system. Unnecessary confidence was unnecessary risk. Instead, Troy briefed Pancho on points of reference and information that might be useful in future escape efforts.

"So, as you lose consciousness, make an effort to remember what happens; feel and see all that you can," Troy said. "I heard voices last time, I know I did. Also, I saw a ring of pale suns through a haze, like flashlight beams in a dust storm. So see what you can do."

"What I can do is catch a unirail to Casita's restaurant in Verde where I will dine on fresh tortillas while contemplating you and your need to escape," Pancho answered. "Didn't you ever think of any other life, Haver? I mean, isn't there anything you ever wanted to do on the

outside besides preparing to get in and out of the pokey?"

"I've considered opening a quiet bar in the mountains somewhere," Troy said. "But it's just a thought, an idea."

"Now you're on the right track, Troy," Rolfeo cut in. "I been in some bars I thought I'd never get out of." He sucked the last of the forbidden fruit from the neck of the jug and turned his attention to Pancho. "If you go anywhere tonight, it will have to be in a taxi, Pancho, because you're too drunk to walk."

The old joke, and the hilarious effect of the Apple Juaquin, put the trio into a fit of laughter that ended moments later when lights went out at eleven p.m. Troy and Rolfeo groped into their bunks and Pancho climbed sluggishly into the upper berth.

About two a.m., Pancho rolled out of his bunk and fell eight feet to the concrete. The fall was punctuated by a sickening thud: like the sound of a skull whacking against porcelain, a head meeting the edge of unyielding toilet that extruded from the cell wall as he came down.

Troy awoke to the staccato of spoons and cups on the bars. It was dark and everyone was hollering for the jailer.

"What's the matter?" came a yell from the next cell. By then Troy was wide awake and squatting next to Pancho; trying to assess his condition in the darkness. Rolfeo was next to him, confused, drunk and worried over his dangerously fallen leader. The cups and spoons fell silent.

"Pancho fell out of his bed; I think he might have caught the toilet with his head," Troy answered. The tinny, clanking S.O.S. started back up as the cons rattled the bars with their utensils. Troy couldn't see Pancho well, but he could feel him. He was shaking all over, but stiff as a board.

After forever the lights came on and Kevin Brophy came hustling down the ramp.

"Pancho's hurt," Troy said.

"I can see that," said Brophy, operating a scankey to release the cell door.

Pancho lay on the floor like he was tied to the rack; only his shoulder blades, butt and heels touched the concrete. Clenched fists dammed the flow of blood to his fingers and the veins in his forearms looked like swollen black scars ready to rupture. First to the left, then to the right his face contorted as the sweat poured down his temples. His eyes were closed in a tight squint and a nerve-wracking sound issued from a mouth set in a strained grimace. He was grinding his teeth so hard it sounded like his molars were made of pumice stone. No blood, no visible mark on him; yet he looked worse off than anyone Troy had ever seen. Like if he relaxed even for a second, he would be dead.

Brophy switched on a wall mike and told the senior guard who was stationed on the first floor that an injured man was on the way and that two prisoners would be transporting.

Troy and Rolfeo had no trouble getting Pancho to the emergency elevator at the end of the ramp. A big enough man could have carried him over his shoulder like a rifle or spear. Downstairs, the guard had Troy and Rolfeo lay Pancho on a gurney located at the building's front entrance. Two orderlies were on their way and they would wheel Pancho to the medical facility located on the first floor of building B. Pancho and Rolfeo exchange worried looks as Brophy escorted them back to the elevator. Pancho still looked like somebody had plugged him into a wall socket and set the circuit on overload. He was shorting out.

Alarmed, the guard walked back to his desk to call building B and

make sure the orderlies were on the way. Pancho was left alone in the anteroom inside the front entrance to the building. When they arrived moments later the gurney was empty. Pancho was sprinting smoothly across the playing field, his powerfully grinding teeth framed in a wide and healthy grin.

In two minutes Pancho was into the sheltering strip of pine and fern that preceded the fog. His pace slowed in the dank humus and moss that mottled the forest carpet. Stopping, he turned toward the compound and saw the auxiliary ground lights blare on.

In the sharp light, he could see the usual Chimera posse readying for pursuit. Two lousy guards and a blue-and-gold-painted golf cart; because of the fog a man gets no respect, Pancho thought. The two guards, one of them Brophy, stepped into what was officially called the "retrieval vehicle," and proceeded down the abbreviated road that ran through the forest before disappearing in the fog.

Pancho fished a plastic bottle from his back pocket and downed the contents, one-half pint of vintage Apple Juaquin, two weeks old. He wiped the libation's pleasant mist from his neat mustache and relaxed. He wasn't sure that inebriation, or the night's darkness would help him, but they were untried factors and therefore worth a try. The fog seemed like the enchanted nimbus of some formless, all-powerful Chimera spirit. All who looked into the chalky veil were rendered senseless and left with nothing, no visions; not even the shadow memories of some other place or reality. So for Pancho and Troy, escaping was still a wild-card game of trial and error.

Eyes closed, Pancho began a breathing exercise. Inhaling and exhaling through the nose, his respiration soon became deep and even. He took a final, giant breath and sprinted into the fog's enervating pallor.

He never wanted for oxygen. Even before his body began to strain for breath, it began to numb. At first, his skin felt pricked by a thousand tiny needles, like the legs feel when the circulation is cut off and they go to sleep. Then the needles withdrew and he was left with no feeling at all. Then consciousness, being and "self" were gone and his mind gone with them, nothing left to even register confusion.

PANCHO CORDOVAN lay immobile, unconscious on a hard and narrow bed covered with pale blue sheets. The head of the bed was tilted thirty degrees, inclining Pancho's supine figure from the waist up. His head was shaven and a four-inch, equilateral triangle had been drawn in red ink on the top of his skull. At each of the triangle's intersecting angles, a craniotomy had been performed. A spray of attenuate wires extruded from each opening, then converged inside a plastic tube that was suspended just above the skull.

The transparent tube shot vertically for ten feet, then right-angled

and proceeded on a horizontal. It soon met and commingled with like tubes that hung over the skulls of the other three-hundred and forty occupants of Chimera Prison. The tubes stopped in the center of the mammoth room; all entering a doughnut-shaped mondo computer, Chimera's Bioputer.

The "feeder couches" and their wards were arranged in concentric circles around the Bioputer and all heads were aimed at the Bioputer. In the tightest circles were warden Zephyr, guards and professional and support staff.

Troy, Pancho and Rolfeo tended a small arc in the third ring. They lay in the grip of a common dream that they and their couch mates knew as Chimera Prison. The dream was infused and regulated by the torus-shaped computer that force-fed the world's images to them at a rate that packed one day of Chimera life into one second of ordinary time.

Along the length of one wall of the lab, two-way mirrors were fitted to allow observation by interested professionals and the press. The first term at Chimera would be a five-year one; it would start at four p.m. and end at four-thirty p.m. At the beginning of the half hour, a project spokesman joined the interested spectators behind the peeking glass to deliver a short presentation and answer questions. His talk would last eighteen minutes. By that time the men on the feeder couches

would know three years of Chimera Prison and Pancho Cordovan would be making his escape attempt.

"GENTLEMEN," THE spokesman began, "as you know, the Chimera project is the product of years of research and lobbying by Dr. Cleon Zephyr and his associate, Dr. Bill Weber. Both of them being principals during this first term, they will be understandably busy for the next thirty minutes.

"In the late 1990s, they pioneered work in neuro-object scanning. Early experimentation was open-ended and speculative, but soon a thesis was born and began maturing within the fertile matrix of the inquiry. Eventually, they were able to aim their electrodes—not at balls and bats and ceiling wax—but at geometric shapes and colors and smells. Finally, the complete list of attributes that philosopher John Locke categorized as the primary and secondary qualities of objects could be elicited consistently from any subject with an organically sound brain.

"Locke was a 17th-century British philosopher. He believed that an object's primary qualities—length, breadth and depth—resided within and as a part of the object, but that an object's secondary qualities—taste, smell and color, etc.—as perceived sensations, were only in us and not in the object.

"But Zephyr and Weber found that the brain didn't know the difference between the primary and secondary qualities. Electrodes placed in the right areas, and pulsing at the right energy frequency, could elicit long, red, short, sharp and purple from the subjects at will.

"After that, technicians and specialists worked like police artists with volunteers who underwent the craniotomy and hook-up procedure. Through the complex trial and error of what Zephyr termed "synchronous brain stimulation," they began to create buildings of red brick, cinder block and wood; ponds in freeze and thaw, and all the other common pieces of reality's furniture. The logistic data was stored and coordinated in what is now known as the Bioputer.

"The creation of Chimera Prison might be compared to the making of a movie. For example, the Bioputer locates the stimulus coordinates for the simple components of, say, a wall. It will be tall, thin, grooved and rough. The bioputer then colors the wall and plays it over and over like the frames in a strip of film. The result is a solid wall, a prison wall. With the exception of the population, the Chimera Prison world is constructed in just this way. Tap water runs and pizza slices steam much like they do on the silver screen. Only at Chimera everyone is a player in the movie; so the water is wet and cold and the pizza is hot and rich with cheese.

"The Bioputer is not infallible, however. There is an emotional range of personal experience that is outside the baliwick of the Bioputer. That

is to say that *how* a prisoner reacts to the stimulation of the Bioputer can, theoretically, affect *what* he experiences. Emotional reaction is a primary function of the individual in much the same way that Locke supposed that the primary qualities were functions of the object. When individual consciousness reacts strongly with the environment, shifts in the perceived structure of reality can occur, creating new paths of action.

"It's in just that way that ninety-pound mothers lift automobiles in order to save their children, and it is in that sense that a Chimera prisoner could, with a supreme effort of will, see through a portion of the Chimera veil. But even then he would be inclined to believe he was mistaken, or even insane, before he would deny the reality of his familiar world. It's more likely that discrepancies in Chimera's appearance would be miniscule and come as a result of the unconscious will of the individual and not through conscious excitation. For example, some might taste more or less spice in a favorite dish according to their likes. It's for this reason that the created environs of the Chimera Prison are uniform and regular. The monotony of reality construction reduces the opportunities for unknowning reconstructions by the prisoners."

A distinguished brain researcher from Sweden raised his hand. "Sir, you said all of Chimera Prison 'excepting the prisoners' are created in this manner. In just what way do the prisoners and staff know and interact, and how do their perceptions differ from the dream state?"

"As the Bioputer feeds the prisoner, the prisoner feeds the Bioputer. A sensor/electrode planted at a point connecting the frontal lobe to the midbrain and the limbic system acts to center the subject's attention. Activations in that area create a *first hand* experience and each man, in effect, assembles his own corporeal form. The Bioputer supplies the normal flow of waking sensations and the subject unwittingly supplies the bodily form. A sensor planted in the same area picks up the electronic and chemical output and sends it back to the Bioputer along a special path called the "inline." There, signals from the inline and other select areas of the brain are transformed into their component sine waves by the Bioputer and mixed into the fabric of the prison. All the volitional movements—speech, appearance, moods—of the prisoners and staff in their imaginary world are constantly subsumed and distributed by the Bioputer so that the identities of prisoners and staff interact as freely and casually as they would in more conventional prison settings. In a way, the prisoners and staff see each other because they see themselves. I realize that this is a very technical aspect of the Bioputer's functions and not of special interest to those of you here with the public press, but for those of you with those special interests, Dr. Zephyr and Dr. Weber will be available for comment tomorrow. Suffice it to say that mortal men cannot separate sensations such as sight, touch and hearing from ideas like eyes, hands and ears, and where you

find one you will find, or create, the other. Once the image frequency is established, it is a simple process for the Bioputer to share a thus created individual with the remainder of Chimera's hard-wired phantoms.

"Because we are in a sense making a movie, we can naturally enough speed up or slow the film. That's exactly what we do to create the "fast time" for the prisoners and staff. Basically, it's the Bioputer's orderly feedout of events that does the trick. The days, seasons and intervals of organic growth and movement are introduced more and more quickly, but at a gradually ascending rate so the prison population never notices. The intervals of space are reduced and the subject's time consciousness goes along for the ride. As the sequence of activation streams from the Bioputer into the brain of the subject at speeds approaching that of light, time slows and a five-year term is completed in thirty minutes."

Another hand came up. It was attached to a young man, the editor of a widely read human rights magazine.

"Given the ability to construct the collective reality of the prison world, why isn't a program of emotional control used? Wouldn't it be easier to interject guilt and other remedial emotions into the prisoners in order to more effectively facilitate their rehabilitation?"

The spokesman hid a look of contempt. The journalist was either talking rhetoric, or was talking in anachronisims; hadn't done his homework. "The process is untenable," he answered curtly. "Studies as far back as the mid 1970s have shown that the labyrinth that we call the mind is really an oozy and slippery beast that flits first this way, then that way like mercury under pressure. Even the simplist emotions are infinitely more complex activities than are perceptual and motor behaviors.

"Aggression, for example, does not reside in the caudate nucleus or in any other one brain area. Any emotion involves several areas of the brain simultaneously and even then the spatial relations between different brain activations vary. Also, like stimulation in like areas of the brain can't be counted on to produce the same behavior or emotional state at different times. Stimulation in a given area of the same subject may elicit arm flinching one day and thirst the next. And to further complicate things, different subjects may not respond to like stimulation in the same way. Electrodes may produce drowsiness in one, elation in another, even when applied to what are supposed to be the *same* areas.

"Not until the early 1990s were we able to sift the basic blocks of perception and effectively manipulate them. Chimera deals in colors, shapes and sounds, gentlemen; not hate and love. As Dr. Weber has so aptly put it, 'We don't make them laugh and we don't make them cry. We just send them to prison the cheapest and quickest way we know how.' "

The speaker continued and the hands of the clock moved. Over two years had passed inside the flashing mind of the Bioputer, inside the spectral walls of the Chimera Prison. Troy Haver had made two escape attempts and Pancho and Rolfeo had made their late arrivals at the prison. It was four-thirteen p.m.

"Pardon me," said a middle-age penologist from Argentina, raising his hand. "Chimera has been called escape-proof and it's easy enough to see why, but what of the prisoners? How do they experience the fast grip of Chimera Prison?"

"It's the fog, sir. A thick and opaque blanket of whiteness. The fog marks the limits of reality construction and anyone that makes it to the cloud that describes the outermost perimeter of the prison grounds runs into nothingness. Instantly he finds himself waking up just inside the fog's ring and the escape attempt is foiled. The fog is the limit; beyond its perimeter lies non-experience. Outside the generated field is zero and any "real" escape effort in that region would require a belief system strong enough to conceptualize from the void." Another hand.

"Might not the emotional effect of the incarceration wear off after the prisoner wakes up in recovery and finds that only thirty minutes have elapsed?"

admitted. But they forget about it as soon as the Bioputer takes over. The actuality of Chimera Prison becomes unassailable when the Bioputer is working. Even guards and staff would forget what was happening if they did not undergo special conditioning to establish cognizance of their split lives."

The speaker, a young graduate student in criminal psychology, saw the waving arm of Jack Ames. Ames was a Pulitzer Prize winner and chief contributing editor for the prestigious *WASHINGTON TELLER*.

"What is to prevent the institutionalized man from spending thousands, even a million years in Chimera Prison?" Ames asked. The men surrounding the interrogator chuckled, but the graduate spokesman looked attentive. "That's right," the journalist continued, "in just five months over ten years, a prisoner could celebrate his millionth anniversary behind Chimera bars."

This one's done his homework, the speaker thought. The problem Jack Ames brought up was thought to be the biggest gamble that the Chimera project had to deal with. If a man liked the prison life enough—if he were "institutionalized" enough—might he not spend hundreds, thousands, even a million years lying on a feeder couch and sharing dreams with the Bioputer?

"Exactly, Mr. Ames," the project representative answered. "But you must remember that time is on our side, not the prisoners. We expect that institutionalized men of the hardest core will be able to stand no more than two days hooked to the Bioputer. Two days on the couch equals 480 years of prison time, Mr. Ames, 480 years. Certainly most criminals will see the error of their ways long before the 480-year limit and will stop their criminal activities after spending only one or two-hundred years at Chimera. Everything gets boring after a while, and given enough time even the prison-lovingest con will do anything to stay out of jail.

THE QUESTIONS petered out and the seconds ticked by, each marking a day at Chimera Prison. On the far side of the silvered glass, the Bioputer continued to send water, walls, beds and supper through tentacles of plexiglass and wire, into brains that danced like marionettes across the elaborate and fanciful stage of Chimera Prison.

Attending neuro-surgeons and technical specialists hovered over the docile criminals, noting vital signs of limb and circuit and watching the

inlines that gleamed like slender, red-hot drills through the clear tubes that connected the prisoners to their dream. An inline's crimson color indicated that the man to whom it was attached was in the right state of mind. His conscious attention was focussed on stimulation from the Bioputer, and his corporeal shell languished on the feeder couch, deprived of sensation. The only action the brain continued to perform on its own was operation of the life systems.

Any change in the focus of attention of prisoners or prison staff would appear as a silver glint at the terminal of the line and the Bioputer. Then the glint would slowly creep down the inline, leaving a thin wake of mercury through the clear tube that functioned like an umbilical cord between the ultimate mother machine and her charge.

The inline silvered whenever a prisoner made his way into the fog. Consciousness faced with nothingness would begin to wander toward its antecedants and an escapee could, theoretically, awaken in a very unfamiliar and extremely shocked and nervous Chimera lab. To prevent this, an automatic adjustment would be made by the Bioputer and the Chimera movie reel would start again, the escapee finding himself in a dazed squat just inside the fog.

The Bioputer would adjust the frequency and pattern the moment the prisoner broke the fog. The action was designed to reverse the flow of mind before the chrome stream had traversed twenty percent of the inline. The adjustment sequence had been required only once. Of the eight escape attempts made in Chimera's three years—of which Haver accounted for four, Pancho one—only the last, Haver's, had required a remedial sequence.

During all the other attempts, Troy's included, the would-be escape artists had put themselves back inside the fog. Like those straining to awaken from a nightmare, they clutched for the secure fabric of Chimera in the face of the abhorrent and vacuous nothingness of the fog. They simply denied the nonentity of the fog, as minds are accustomed to doing, and accelerated their returns to the reality of the prison. The surgeons were on the alert, though, as backups. If the prison walls came tumbling down in a fusillade of blown circuits, they could always manually sedate the prisoner before he gained consciousness on the feeder couch.

Dr. Carlin was a backup surgeon. He assisted in opening and closing surgeries and recorded vital signs while operating surgeons and brain specialists gathered around the instrumented girth of the Bioputer. During the thirty-minute prison term they would peruse the readouts for correlative blips, frequencies and patterns for a fuller understanding of the metaphysical golem they had created while Carlin and his counterparts around the arena watched the vitals panels that were situated at the head of each feeder couch. Their most important function was to keep a collective eye on the inlines. In case of a disastrous mal-

function, Carlin and the rest of the backup medical staff would be there, like the most trusted cogs in an otherwise logical machine, to sedate the feckless shells that lay on the couches so that they might withstand the frenzied awareness that would land on them like reality's won sledge-hammer.

Carlin was a nervous man, but he liked to think of himself as "incredibly alert." He had charge of fifteen men; among them Troy, Rolfeo and Pancho. His skittish gait broke into a run when he spotted the moving spark of Pancho's mind jump from the Bioputer to the inline. A soft, green light on top of Pancho's vitals panel started blinking for all to know that it was Pancho, and no one else, who was lost in the fog's limbo.

"Dr. Carlin here. Pancho Cordovan is coming down the inline," he reported into his pocket communicator.

Pancho's inline began an accelerated slide of silver. Carlin started to scratch when the bright river of consciousness passed the point where most beings voluntarily denounce the solitude of the fog and reintegrate with Chimera Prison. The glimmering continued, nearing the point at which the Bioputer would reverse the process, about sixty feet down the four-hundred foot line.

Carlin chewed a styrofoam cup to bits as he watched the brightness creep ever closer to the sixty-foot mark.

Trapped in the fog, Pancho gritted his mind in a final effort to see or hear anything past the shimmering fuzz of his failing senses. For a timeless instant, he felt himself awaken from a dream so gripping that it vied with reality for possession of his spirit. His eyes flitted for a split second beneath the translucent gauze that covered them. Above the feeder couch clusters of operating lamps shined dully through the gauze, burning the brief image of light spheres in a haze into Pancho's mind. Then he was whisked back to Chimera in a barrage of neural impulses; pushed back into the endless exchange of reality that the Bioputer mediated with the precision of the Fates.

Perspiring freely, Dr. Carlin watched the silver comet of Pancho's mind slow to accretion inside the inline, then stop like the blood in a vessel caked with age. Slowly, the crimson began to rise in the inline and Pancho, unknowingly, was taking his first steps back to Chimera Prison. Dr. Carlin sagged in relief, then jerked tight once more when he saw Dr. Weber and his corps of medical and technical elite advancing toward him through the feeder couches. Carlin would be glad when the five-year term was over; he wasn't sure he could take another twelve minutes.

BROPHY AND the other guard arrived just in time to see Pancho's re-directed consciousness wax to form in a sitting position inside the fog's bilious curtain.

Brophy was a blue-ribbon graduate student from some incredible school back East. Even at that he'd been lucky to secure a guard's role in the Chimera Project. The grounds were studded with bright minds from academies and penal systems around the world, all there to watch and learn. Brophy hoped that his Chimera experience would serve as the main resource for his Master of Arts thesis on experimental penal systems. In order to foster this hope—and to further the even brighter dream of Doctoral work, TV spots and a best seller—he had fed Troy the paradoxical bits and hints about the nature of Chimera.

To Brophy, his indiscretions didn't consititute a breach of contract; to the contrary, they provided the potential variable that Brophy considered vital to the experiment: how would a prisoner react to a quick awareness of the total situation? Knowledge of Chimera Prison, the lab, his self, the Bioputer?

A master rat-runner in his undergraduate days, Brophy had simply selected the smartest rat and was giving him the best possible chance to solve the maze. So far though, Troy hadn't been able to make use of the pregnant phrases and ironies that Brophy had lately been spouting. Perplexed, Troy stored the terse riddles in the catchall memory of his runaway mind, and waited for the day they might be of use to him.

Pancho was coming around. He flinched, cursed in Spanish, and sat up. The effect of the fog was gone, but the full report of the last jolt of Apple Juaquin had sounded.

"You know, I think I might need a hand getting in. This fog has left me woozy," Pancho said. He smelled like a grape dipped in gin. Brophy gave him an Irish grin and helped him take a rear seat in the refurbished golf cart, and the posse and its sluggish quarry drove back to Chimera.

The ramp light on the third floor of building A stayed on during the escape attempt because retrieval never took over five minutes. Led in quietly, Pancho nodded to Rolfeo and Haver, and then made a ragged climb into the top bunk. Relieved, Rolfeo fell back into his stupor. Haver waited until the lights were out before speaking.

"How far did you get?" Troy asked. He immediately regretted his phrasing. It sounded like a classically stupid question: the kind you already know the answer to.

"I got as far as the Swiss Alps," Pancho answered stupidly. Then, beginning in earnest: "I did the breathing exercise and filled my lungs with air before I went in . . . I mean, I never breathed any mysterious vapors, I didn't breathe at all. Maybe the drug passes through the skin, I don't know."

"Did you see or hear anything as you went out?"

"I saw the luminous globes, but it was like you said. They were behind a filament or haze and I couldn't see them well. It could just be a shared hallucination though, or maybe I took your experience for a suggestion

and recreated the scene myself. But I did smell something familiar before I lost myself. It was the piquant aroma of Casita's *chile verde*, vivid and immediate."

"So? *Chile verde, chile verde* what?" Troy probed.

"I was concentrating, centering on Casitas, that's all. It was my focal point and I thought it might give me a little edge." Pancho mused in the dark. "It doesn't matter anyhow," he went on. "It will obviously take more than skill, good looks and luck to get out of here."

"Faith," Troy muttered.

"What?"

"Faith," Troy repeated. "It might take a lot of faith to get out of Chimera."

An idea was ripening in Troy. It hung on the periphery of his mind like golden fruit, waiting to fall.

He thought about marigolds that Rolfeo swore were zinnias; about Brophy's quizzical statements concerning the "reality" of Chimera, and the fog and its inexorable workings. What was behind the shades of perceptions and visions that he and Pancho had experienced in the fog? A stew of questions bubbled in his head; questions that needed just the right answer to become palatable.

At the edge of sleep, in that serene no-man's-land of easy thoughts and free associations, Troy was seized by a hypothesis. It was a wild idea, but it satisfied his riddled mind. Still, it was tentative, so he devised a plan that would either validate or cancel his notion. Warden Zephyr and no other, Troy decided, could give him the answer he needed. Luckily, Pancho would soon be seeing Zephyr for the procedural, escape attempt counseling that followed every miscarried exit from Chimera. Satisfied and blissful, Troy reflected on the word "Chimera," and was for the first time struck by the delicious irony of the prison name. Here I am at Chimera, he thought, a "vain and foolish fancy."

Zephyr postponed his session with Pancho for a few days. He was anticipating a message from the Chimera lab; Dr. Weber might have, or need, information relative to their talk. After eleven days the message arrived, as usual, in the form of automatic writing on a blackboard that Cleon Zephyr had tacked on the wall of his office. The Bioputer was the final word in forms, so it was no hard task to create printed messages on the board.

It was a bit more difficult for Zephyr to communicate with the lab, though. His correspondence had to be delivered by departing prison personnel. A cook would get a better job, or the loved one of a guard or boiler tender would be reported ill, and soon the chosen messenger would be driven to the outskirts of the pine ring and bidden farewell. Moments later he would be repeating his memorized bulletin from a feeder couch in the lab.

The only wrinkle in the exchange was the time lag involved in sending dispatches from the lab to the prison. It took Weber and his staff several seconds to compose an answer or message, and the Bioputer took up to an additional four seconds to direct the words onto the blackboard on Zephyr's wall. Every second represented a day at Chimera Prison and Zephyr waited weeks, sometimes months, for answers to the queries that he sent by proxy to the lab. In a sense, they were as cut off as the remotest colony in the Himalayan penal system.

Through the blackboard, Zephyr learned that Pancho, like Haver before him, had strayed too close to his body—had begun to peek through the eyes and nerves of a supposedly insentient shell.

On meeting day, Pancho was led along the concrete walk that divided the lawns between buildings A and B. He'd seen the warden only twice before. Once to receive the perfunctory welcome-to-jail speech and once, after his first brief encounter with the fog, to be advised of the futility of escape. He arrived at building B and knocked on the door of Zephyr's first-floor office.

"Come in, Frank," called the warden.

Pancho smiled at Zephyr's use of the English equivalent for his first name. From what Pancho had seen and heard of the warden, it was hard not to like him. All the cons except the hard-core haters thought Zephyr was all right; Chimera too, for that matter. At sixty-one years old, Zephyr's physique remained resilient and firm, like a wiry, ex-tennis pro's. He seemed candid and straightforward about his functions and responsibilities, as he was about the function of the prison itself. They were not there to be tested, analyzed, or even "rehabilitated" in the modern sense. The incarceration was the basic tonic, and if the prisoners would leave the warden and his staff alone, then warden and staff would do the same for them. Chimera's wards had been run through so many mental mazes and shown so many ink blots that they were glad to get back to something more traditional, something that they could understand.

Pancho entered and the two men exchanged greetings. Pancho seated himself in an easy chair covered with cotton brocade and smiled across the top of the ovular pine desk that separated himself and the warden. Zephyr struck a thoughtful pose, then stood and walked around the desk. He halted in front of Pancho, leaning his thighs against the edge of the desk.

"Pancho, what are you and Haver doing?" His smile was friendly but incredulous and his tone was incredulous, but friendly enough. "You two are becoming a real slapstick duo; Keystone Cops that run into the fog, fall down and get marched right back."

He was prepared to wait for an answer. He wanted Pancho's thoughts and wasn't about to direct the conversation. He didn't have to wait at all. Thanks to Haver, Pancho had his answer ready before he

ever knocked on Zephyr's door.

"Haver says he doesn't believe we're in a prison. Thinks we're strapped down somewhere with wires plugged into our brains and this prison's being fed to us bit at a time. Pretty crazy idea, huh?"

Zephyr managed an uneven smile, but it was drawn in cold wax and lacked any semblance of authority. He turned and headed back around the desk, recovering a little with each step. But it was too little, too late. Pancho had Troy's answer for him.

Zephyr seated himself and looked at Pancho. His smile was genuine now. "And what if that were true? What then, Pancho?"

The conversation soon petered out. Pancho had what he wanted, a moment's fear and surprise from Cleon Zephyr, and the warden had made his point. If Pancho were right, it would be sheer folly to attempt future escapes.

But Haver, far from being deterred, rejoiced at what Pancho thought might be ominous news. To Haver the knowledge marked the beginning of new and challenging strategies. Now he could begin to plan his escape in earnest.

The Chimera library had plenty on PSI, yoga, meta-programming, plus the newer theories in holistic metaphysics, and for weeks Troy pored over the works, slowly creating a belief system, an over-thought that would sear the fog and make him the master of his own reality, his own universe. And he slowly began to rearrange the imaginary furniture that the Bioputer constantly assembled around him.

First, he levitated a dandelion. The white puff of seeds that forms the head tore itself from the green stalk and followed Haver's unspoken command to the top of the nearest tower and into a guard's yawning mouth. Then, on the sly, he stuck his fist through a concrete wall, watching the hard surface yield like butter, then reshape itself once the hand was removed. He was able to look through the "walls," and through the dense trunks of the "pines," but his super vision balked at the fog.

He could leave Chimera anytime he wanted, but like all escaped prisoners—being suddenly free—he needed someplace to go, somewhere to hole up. He didn't relish breaking out only to find himself strapped to a cot, surrounded by white jackets and long faces. He wanted to really escape. As was the custom, he never confided his exact plans to Pancho or Rolfeo. The crucial facts and methods were privileged data, though both cell mates and the worried heads of the Chimera project knew what he'd been reading.

For Haver, the last days before his escape passed timelessly. When not attending to his groundskeeping chores, he was in meditation. He was slowly building the place that he would be when he split the fog into a thousand dreams and visions.

Zephyr couldn't be so patient. He had to get a handle on Haver's

motives. If Troy knew what lay behind Chimera's thin veil, what did he hope to accomplish by integrating himself and ending up in the lab? The doctor couldn't steer his mind away from the obvious even though he knew that Haver's recent thoughts had drifted toward the esoteric and mystical.

The Warden found his man kneeling in the coffee-colored humus of a rose bed. He sensed that Troy would soon be making his attempt and he wanted one last chance to dissuade him. He also felt there was something missing, some slippery piece of irony that Haver was hogging all to himself. Cleon Zephyr wanted to play stud poker; all the cards face up and on the table. He squatted on his heels beside Haver and the two men exchanged hellos.

"You know, Troy, I've been trying to organize the least painful and most effective prison this country has ever known. Now I'm getting old and you're starting to look more and more like a monkey wrench. The point is, there's nothing to be gained by escaping from Chimera. If you know as much as we *hope* you don't, then you understand what I mean. You want to end up in another prison? A regular jail? Because that's just what will happen if you get past the fog. Or does that escape philosophy of yours invest this particular effort with some special meaning? Is that it?"

Troy sat quietly, smiling his blond self-assurance into Zephyr's imploring, rational eyes. "No, no special meaning," he answered. "Chimera is just another prison to me. But you see, I have a vocation, perhaps even a calling, and so it might be more correct to say that *every* prison is important, even special, to me. Is your dedication to Chimera so different?"

"I love philosophy, Haver, I love it to death and sometimes I'd like to talk with you about it. But right now what I want to know is how you can equate escape with what will happen to you if you circumvent the fog. There is no "escape" from Chimera, Haver. You have my word as the prison's designer."

Troy was struck with unabashed admiration for Zephyr. He'd suspected that Cleon Zephyr had been in on Chimera's ground floor, but he hadn't been sure until then.

"Some prison it is, too," Troy said, smiling. "I accept your belief in the infallibility of Chimera security, and so accept your word that it's escape-proof. But I also have a belief. To me, no prison is escape-proof, and I must exercise my belief even as you do yours."

The impromptu debate ended abruptly, Zephyr realizing something that Haver already knew; that their premises were antithetical. Dr. Zephyr was a scientist; for the most part logical, mathematical—rational. Troy's philosophy was closer to Plato than Newton. For him the "escape" existed as surely as did the "forms" that Michelangelo freed from the amorphous slabs of Carrara marble. The way out, the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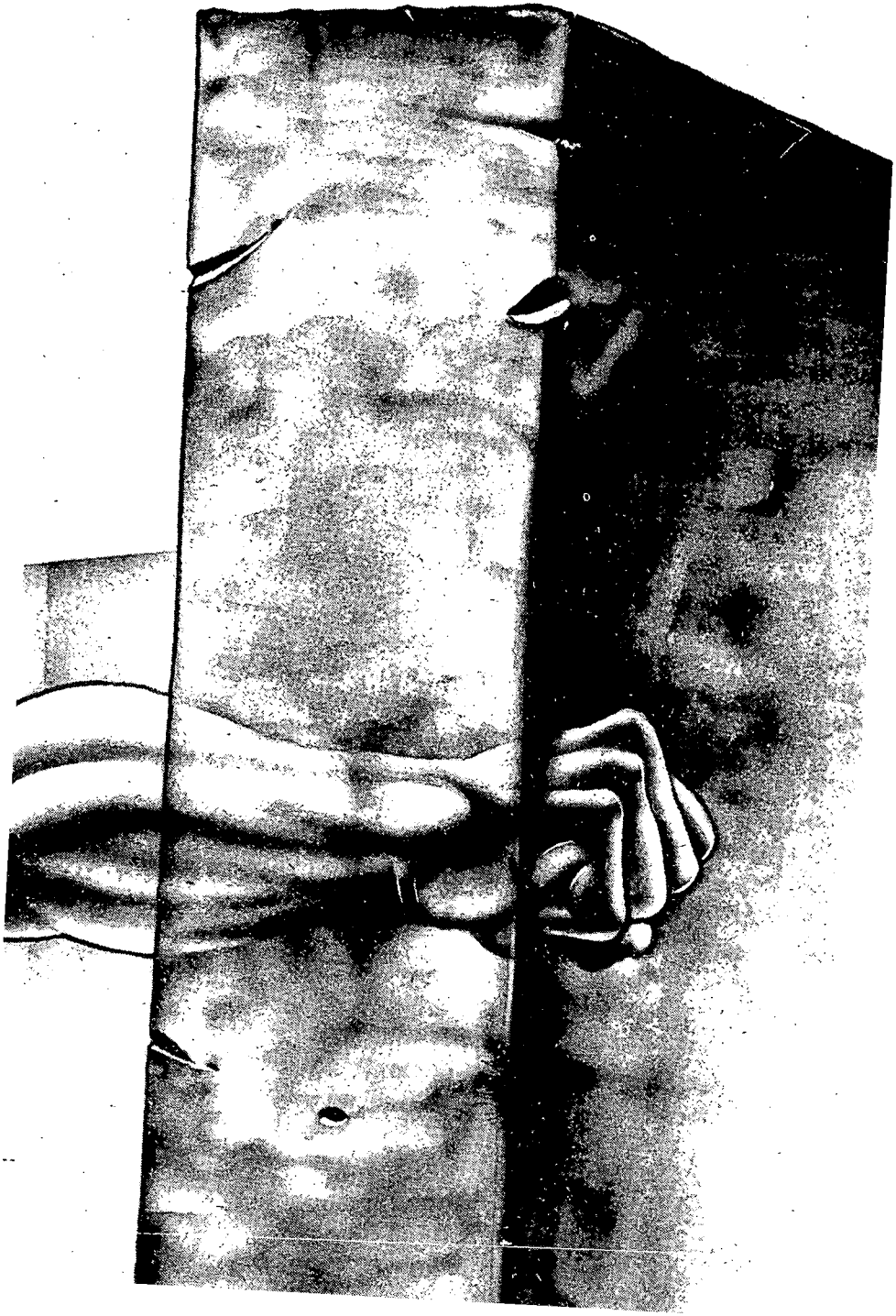

move, was always there; Troy need only recognize and define it.

Both men stood. Zephyr took in the ordered luxuriance of the rose bed, then looked over the grounds.

"You've done a fine job here, Troy. The color and variety add a lot," he said.

"Thanks, warden," Troy responded. "It's been a pleasure."

Zephyr suspected that Haver was set to go. He wanted to send a warning to Chimera lab if he had time, so he fired a cook and sent him packing down the road into the fog, then down the inline to the lab. The erstwhile cook was only three seconds into his message when Haver—three "days," not seconds, having elapsed since he talked with warden Zephyr—stepped through the walls of Chimera and floated into the fog.

Even Dr. Carlin's jittery reflexes were no match for Troy Haver's ignited mind. His consciousness blasted from the Bioputer and down the inline so fast that there seemed to be no change from red to silver at all. The inline flickered once, then gleamed on like a neon light. The Bioputer's retrieval system never got off the starting blocks.

On the feeder couch, Haver's eyes batted open and he deftly reached up and plucked the gauze from his eager sight. "It's here, I made it!" he cried into the shocked quiet of the Chimera lab.

Zephyr, too, was hurtling down the inline. He'd requested that he be recalled if Haver made it to the feeder couch. The moments at the prison were split, split seconds in the lab, so Zephyr reintegrated at almost the same instant as Haver. He lay over thirty feet from Troy, but in the still of the stunned arena he had no trouble being heard.

"Where to now, Troy? You're caught. You'll do extra years for this and you'll do them in a prison where the walls are as solid as the rock that forms them," came Cleon Zephyr's voice. It was a macabre scene. Two heads bantering like surreal puppets; wired like electric Medusas to a massive steel doughnut of silicon chips and circuits.

Awed doctors and technicians, immobilized by the spectacle, began to unfreeze and move around the room. Carlin and Dr. Weber moved cautiously toward Haver's couch, like G-men moving in on Dillinger. They wanted to isolate his consciousness; he might decide to run back up the inline. As Dr. Weber passed Cleon Zephyr's couch, the men traded unsure glances. Neither was sure what Haver might be capable of now that he'd outmaneuvered the Bioputer.

About twenty seconds had elapsed in the lab; Haver and the warden would have been absent from prison for almost three weeks. It would be embarrassing if Haver were to start popping in and out of the fog at will in a desperate game of tag. Even if he were able to slip back into the Bioputer for only a quarter of a second, that was still six hours of fast time at Chimera. The balance was delicate and irrevocable.

The sprays of wires that extruded from his skull were pulled taut as Haver strained to turn his head. He surveyed the room like a gawking

tourist, trying to take in as much as he could in a limited amount of time. Weber and Carlin were almost on his couch when Haver spotted them.

"I can't stay. I just wanted to see the place; to satisfy myself," Haver said.

Carlin lunged for the control panel near Haver's head, but once again, Troy's mind far outstripped Carlin's hand. As quickly as he had vacated it, Haver moved his consciousness back into the Bioputer, and Carlin's grasp was left fumbling in thin air.

"He's gone," Dr. Weber said woodenly. "He's gone, Cleon," Weber shouted hoarsly to warden Zephyr.

"Damn it!" Zephyr cried. "Get me back up the line. Now!"

WARDEN ZEPHYR materialized in his office at six a.m. on a Tuesday morning and was immediately informed that Haver had slipped into the fog six hours prior, at twelve midnight. A fraction of a second's delay at the lab had cost him six hours and Haver was gone again. Zephyr figured that by then Haver would be isolated at Chimera lab, but the Chimera project, the immaculate child of his old age, was in jeopardy.

From all reports, Haver had spent the week as a model prisoner. No one knew what to say or do to him until the warden turned up, so he was treated routinely until Cleon Zephyr came back. Zephyr was told that Haver had trimmed and fertilized his favorite shrubs and flowers and generally spruced up the grounds during his absence.

Pancho and Rolfeo believed what Haver told them about the lab, the Bioputer and the fog, but for them, as for most rational men, the revelations added up to the very best reason not to escape. "Troy . . . where are you going?" Rolfeo would entreat Haver, affecting a mournful and plaintive mother's tone. As usual, Troy wouldn't divulge the where's and how's of what he called his "maybe last escape."

Zephyr sent for guard Kevin Brophy. It was Brophy who had followed Haver to the fog the night before. While Zephyr waited, a yellow light started blinking from a small bulb attached to the blackboard that hung behind his desk. A message was coming from the lab. The warden directed his attention to the eighteen-inch-square slate. The compact, printed letters appeared whole and in quick succession.

"HAVER IS GONE," came the first sentence. Zephyr was flustered. Of course Haver was gone. "GONE FROM THE LAB," said the slate, answering his question. "HE CAME BACK DOWN THE LINE THE MOMENT YOU VACATED THE LAB, THEN HIS BODY FADED LIKE A PIECE OF OLD FILM. HE BECAME TRANSLUCENT, THEN VANISHED. WHAT IS GOING ON?" Jake Weber's name followed the message.

Zephyr slumped. He didn't want to believe the writing, but he had to. The information was as clear and concise as the invisible hand that

delivered it. It was also clear that the problem was back in his lap. Whatever could be done would have to be done on his level, at the prison. Zephyr gave up trying to think and waited for Brophy, hoping he'd bring a little Irish luck with him.

Brophy was elated at the turn of events. Haver's eerie disappearance might be the foundation for his dissertation; the stepping stone to a book, TV spots and the pick of jobs at prestigious schools. He knew he had to look dumbfounded for Zephyr, though. He didn't want to tip his hand and let the warden know that he had anything to do with Haver's escape. Kevin had convinced himself that he really hadn't had anything concrete to do with the escape anyhow. Just a few flights of fancy, some wry hints, and a smile in the right place was all it took.

"It was the strangest thing I've ever seen," Brophy told Zephyr after he arrived at the warden's office. "I was running about ten yards behind him and I swear his feet never touched the ground. He was floating about two inches above the earth and making far better time than I was. Just inside the fog he turned and told me to tell you that you'd have to clear the fog to find him. He said he was starting a business on the far side of the fog. That was all. Then he sailed into the haze as trim and easy as a ship into home port."

"Clear the fog if I want to see him?" Zephyr repeated incredulously. "What the hell does that mean?"

Brophy shrugged and put on a puzzled smile. "If he's not here, and he's not at Chimera lab, then he must be out there," Brophy said, waving his right arm in an arc.

"What you mean is that it doesn't sit well in the old cortex to think that Haver is 'nowhere,' so he must be 'somewhere.' Right? I mean, if he's not in the right hand and not in the left hand, then he must be in the other hand, right? But what's wrong with the idea that Haver is in the other hand, Mr. Brophy?"

"You only have two hands, sir," Brophy answered, responding to the professorial tone.

"Apparently, Haver has three," said the warden. He punched out the light on a desk communicator and his secretary answered. "Get me a messenger," Zephyr said. He turned to Brophy. "I've got to see about having the fog lifted."

At the lab, it took only thirty seconds to decide how and when to raise the fog, but because of the time lag, Zephyr waited just over a month for the answer to his request. Haver hadn't reappeared anywhere, and confusion still reigned at the lab since less than a minute had elapsed since he faded from the feeder couch.

Finally the yellow light on the blackboard stuttered and Zephyr was called to his office. The blackboard informed him that the frequency and logistic correction would take fourteen seconds from the message's time of arrival and at that point the illusory fog would dissipate.

For Zephyr, another two weeks to wait.

Chimera lab had no idea what Zephyr would see. The fog was the final illusion; there was nothing behind it and in two weeks it would give way to the void. Possibly, he would see nothing past the pines; that is, perhaps the limits of his far-sightedness would comfortably end there and nothing would seem awry. No one knew the facts though, and Haver loomed like the night, a dark and hidden variable.

Chimera lab had indicated that three a.m. would be the point of clearance. Zephyr asked Kevin Brophy to accompany him and on that night they sat in Zephyr's office, drinking Arabian coffee and playing backgammon until the hour arrived. Brophy was a blocker and Zephyr was a runner, so the games depended on the roll of the dice. At 2:55 the warden rolled double sixes and cleared his men off the board.

"Time to take a walk," Zephyr said, his nerves beginning to fray. Brophy, an opportunist to the very end, rose with alacrity, ready to gaze into the void.

Once outside, the pair angled across the athletic field and headed for the encircling pines. A subdued red light was blinking through the trees, silhouetting the myriad spines of the evergreens and giving the forest a dark and skeletal appearance. The light had a soft neon brashness to it and it flicked on and off like an advertising sign.

They walked silently through the woods, neither man averting his attention from the mesmerizing glow that nodded through the trees. They neared the far edge of the forest, the trees thinned, and the two stood on the brink of nothingness.

The only thing that Zephyr and Brophy could see was a cabin-designed bar which sported a red, neon sign. In a curving and elegant script, "TROY'S" flashed intermittantly in unabashed crimson, obliterating everything else. It was as if the outline of the bar marked the limits of their peripheral vision and the rest of the world lay behind them. To them, everything looked normal; the void, as usual, was out of sight.

Both could easily make out the inky chasm that separated them from the bar that Troy built, though. It appeared to be about thirty feet across and a million black miles deep, and neither man was prepared to test its validity.

Haver stepped through the front entrance of the bar and walked down a slope that was covered profusely with brilliant wildflowers. He looked fit and healthy and he waved good-naturedly to his visitors. His disarming smile still seemed as natural to his face as his fine blue eyes and compact golden curls.

"I plan to build on here," Troy shouted across the murky expanse once he had reached its edge. He waved his arm, encompassing the cabin-styled bar and the surrounding area. "Maybe some mountains back there," he said, pointing behind the bar. Zephyr looked and there were mountains behind the bar where none had been before, a pano-


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rama of mountains lush with vegetation and backdropped with blue sky. "And maybe a stream over there," Troy continued, indicating the area to the left of the bar. And there was the stream, full of moss and rocks, filling their ears with the serene babble of gently cascading water. Zephyr looked at Brophy, but got no response. Troy's incredible antics had finally wiped the cocky grin from Brophy's face and he simply stood there, pale and quiet.

Haver laughed. "That's right, Dr. Zephyr," he said. "I've got the power now. *I've* captured the Chimera. I've lived in palaces, ranches and all manner of grand edifices lately, but I always wanted a bar in the mountains. So I figured I'd build the bar, or *think* the bar, actually, and wait till you arrived to add the mountains."

"There's a woman in the window," Brophy whispered to Zephyr, finally finding his voice.

"What?"

"In the picture window on this side of the bar, a woman. Look!"

There *was* a woman in the window. A winsome blond, both supple and shy. The best that Troy could think of. There was a bartender, too. He knew the funniest jokes in town and when not to tell them. He was the best bartender Troy could think of.

Zephyr cupped his hands and called to Haver. "Come back, the program might be shut down. Do you hear me, the program . . . Your link to the world, might be broken."

Haver laughed and winked at the blond who sat demurely in the window. "Shut it down, Dr. Zephyr," he said. "It didn't work anyhow. I've found a better machine, a more powerful computer." He tapped a forefinger on his temple, indicating the better machine, the Bioputer's bain. Troy Haver waved goodbye, then turned and walked back to the bar, shutting the door behind him.

Zephyr knew there was nothing he could do. Haver was outside the baliwick of the Bioputer now; framed in a world whose only boundaries were the limits of his imagination. ■

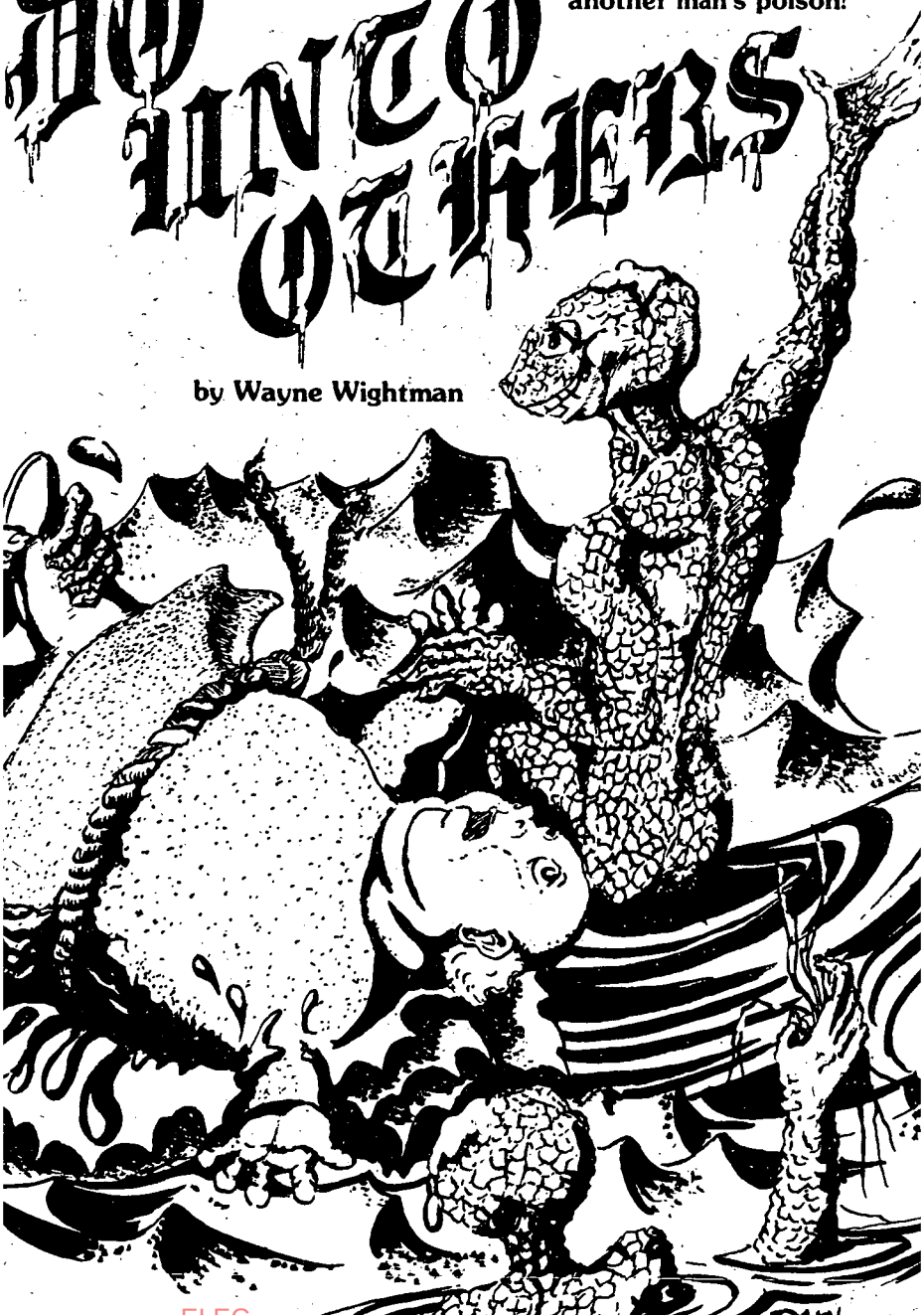
WHY WE CHOSE THIS STORY

We felt this was nothing short of a science fiction masterpiece. The characters are very real and you live with them their daily problems in this very strange prison. In fact, you find yourself identifying with the "hero" and rooting for him to make it through the fog. When you are allowed to realize what really is happening, the surprise is as incredible as it must have been for Troy Haver, who then figures how to make the mental leap to liberation after all. This story has everything required for a good, solid suspense adventure in a science fiction setting. One of the best we've seen.

DO UNTO OTHERS

One man's passion . . .
another man's poison!

by Wayne Wightman



Illustrated by Raven

GOOD FRIAR Bolino's cheeks grew round with satisfaction. The dome had been assembled, the grounds cleared, a few flowers planted, and the comfort system behind the dome hummed smoothly. And last of all, The Knotted Rope, symbol of his order, glowed in front of his habitat, a beautiful trivid projection of corals and blues. It shimmered delicately in the growing dusk.

The next thing to do would be to establish a daily routine so the natives could observe him and see that he was harmless. Then, later, when communication had been achieved, he would, as Creed Representative, reveal to them the doctrine of the Intragalactic Order of the Golden Law—the one pure belief embodied in the One Command. The One Command had been the keystone of the Third Confederation's expansion over the last 400 years. First, the Order's Creed Representative educated the natives, that is, made them abide by the One Command in everything they did; and then, second, the planet was officially brought into the Confederation and civilized.

Friar Bolino made himself visible in his old-fashioned yard, straightening the rows of flowers and gathering stray twigs and leaves. He loved neatness.

Across the cleared area from the dome lay the swamp. It covered virtually all the planet's one continent and was inhabited by more or less humanoid sentients of unknown intelligence.

The Survey Corps had observed the swamp creatures when they scouted the planet, and back at the monastery on Earth, Friar Bolino had watched trivid tapes of the swamp creatures as they crawled and swam through the slush bogs and the still, scum-covered waters. Tentacled tree ferns rose seventy or eighty meters over the bogs, and only rarely was there any elevation high enough to permit actual dryness. On a wide, levelled mound, one of the few on the continent, Friar Bolino had arranged his shelter.

He had accepted his assignment at the farthest edge of the Cancer Quadrant with unconcealed joy. Now, he thought, he had reached his goal—he stood, surveying his neat grounds and the dark swamp beyond, proud, determined to prevail, joyous, and alone.

THE FIRST night, as Bolino sipped his yellow tea and listened to music he found inspirational, he heard a scratching at his door.

Fearlessly, he opened it, expecting a curious delegation of the swamp sentients. But no one was there. Only a slightly stronger-than-normal odor of decay came from the black and gray sucking mud that now lay in darkness.

He relatched the door and had no more than reseated himself (and spilled some of the yellow tea on his smock), when the scratching came again, this time louder.

The odor still lingered outside the door—a little more intense even—

but as he looked around and across the cleared area, he saw nothing.

Until he looked down.

Staring up at him, eyes wide and curious, lay one of the creatures. It smiled a very human smile, although it was covered with tiny iridescent scales and an incredible amount of reeking slime.

Friar Bolino mustered a smile, made an open-handed gesture of welcome, and hurried to set up the translator. The creature waited patiently, lying across the threshold like a collapsed drunk, ever smiling when the Friar glanced in his direction.

"Just a moment now," Friar Bolino said as he made the final connections between the translator and the heavier Semantic Memory Correlator.

"Sheema-skish slollimosh kish Sharwain ushi," the native replied.

Friar Bolino smiled and made the last calibrations on the translator and turned one of the dangerous-looking receivers toward the grinning sentient.

"Good evening," the Friar said happily. The machine translated the expression into the liquid foreign tongue.

The creature answered and the machine said, "May swamp water fill your nostrils."

The Friar forced a smile and recited: "I am here from the Third Intragalactic Confederation, and of my own free will I have chosen to come to tell you who we are and what we believe."

The translator clattered and wheezed and gurgled out the message in the swamper's tongue.

"I am from the swamp," the other answered, "and I believe that rotten roots are the sweetest."

The Friar flinched. Was the translator breaking down? Was the sentient being covertly hostile? Or could he have meant what he said?

"I am Friar Bolino. What is your name?"

"It is Sharwain." The sentient crawled a little further into the dome, a trail of filthy slime glistening behind him. He again rolled over onto his side, much as a pet might, and smiled at the Friar. "Well?" he asked.

Bolino cocked his head. "Well what?"

"You wished to tell me who the Third Intragalactic Confederation is and what it believes. I need to know now. We people of the swamp can't handle suspense very well."

The Friar truly wished this creature would not grin so widely nor so steadily, and he wished it would sit in a chair instead of lie on the floor like an inebriate. If he hadn't looked so human, his behavior would have been more tolerable. With effort, Bolino recalled his training: occasionally non-human lifeforms had unpleasant habits and didn't always act precisely as one wished—at first, anyway.

"The Third Confederation," he began, "encompasses over four hundred and forty-six million worlds, and, of these, three hundred

twenty thousand are inhabited by higher lifeforms."

"You know many very large numbers," Sharwain said respectfully.

Bolino smiled his appreciation of the compliment. He continued: "I belong to the Order of the Golden Law. We come to worlds on the edge of the Confederation and bring them the Truth, the Truth of the One Command."

"You have the Truth?" Sharwain said, apparently somewhat awed by the claim.

"Yes, my friend. It is the unassailable Truth of the Confederation through which all lifeforms live together in peace."

"We like peace," Sharwain said, rolling slightly from side to side. "What is the Truth? Can you speak it? Will I go deaf if I hear the words? Or will I go blind from its beauty and fearsomeness?"

"None of those, none at all," Bolino answered, his arms spread wide, in an attitude of open honesty. "It is a simple truth—simple, simple!"

Sharwain nodded expectantly, his grin now filled with the hope of approaching rapture.

Friar Bolino took a deep breath and intoned:

" 'Do to others what you would want them to do to you.' "

Sharwain's smile faded and his face took on a perplexed look.

Bio-Sketch

Wayne Wightman

I was born April 23, 1946 and grew up in Missouri. Since that time I've lived in California. At a very early age I developed lasting interests in astronomy and writing. In my twenties I decided I wanted to be a living encyclopedia—I wanted to know as much about as many things as was possible. Fortunately I later realized that this was a low calling: it is more important to be a living person than a living book. It is also more difficult.

Prior to March 1, 1979, when I began writing sf, I had written several dozen short stories and four novels, all of which were quite mysterious and unpleasant and dealt with things no one likes to think about.

My past is less important than my present.

Right now I'm working full bore at sf because I know I'll never have enough time to write everything I have in mind to write.

There are two ideas common to nearly all my work. First, humanity will always have more questions than answers about the universe, and second, a person should be kind whenever he can, for there will be times enough when kindness will be impossible. ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆

Biographical information is the hardest thing for me to write of anything I've ever done. If what I've given you doesn't please you for any reason, change it. I really don't care. Make me older, younger, inept, or wise. When I read over what I wrote, it sounded like another person, so if you changed it, it wouldn't sound any more *un*like me than it does already. I thought about writing something like, "I have a soft place in my heart for all those things other people irrationally find disgusting. I appreciate the delicacy of a mosquito's construction and the changing colors of light on a fly's body and the gradations of yellow in a smog-bank." But that kind of thing one probably shouldn't spread around too much. And it would probably make your circulation drop. So I don't know what to say about me. I'm not the fudd the "biographical information" makes me out to be, but neither am I as eccentric as I probably sound right now. So I give you full permission to change this in any way you want.

"That's it?"

"Yes!" good Friar Bolino said triumphantly. "*That* is it!"

" 'Do to others . . .' " Sharwain murmured. "That is what the worlds of the Confederation live by?"

"All of us. The entire Confederation. Human and near-human alike. Billions and billions of souls."

Sharwain nodded, still looking somewhat perplexed. "I assume you're sure of that."

"Absolutely."

The translator hummed in silence between them. Friar Bolino glowed with the excitement of his mission, with the thrill of bringing the One Command to an alien swamp-world.

"It is all, absolutely *all* you need to know," Bolino concluded.

The joy came back into Sharwain's eyes, then it spread into his face. "Friar Bolino, I will tell the others and we will try out your way tomorrow."

"Wonderful, my true friend, truly wonderful."

Sharwain began crawling back through his trail of drying slime, out into the cleared area. "I will tell everyone," he said. "Good Friar, have you ever tasted the rotten gishosh root?"

"No, that I have not done."

"I will tell the others that too," Sharwain said as his face beamed even brighter.

AFTER A short glass of soma to settle his excitement, Friar Bolino made up his cot and drifted into a sleep filled with fabulous dreams. All the swamp creatures gathered around him and honored him as a repository of wisdom, the bringer of benevolence, and the joy of their world. With another success like this one, the Creed Fathers would want to make him a Cardinal—but no, he would insist on remaining the humble Representative that he was. They would beg him. He would be forced to decline repeatedly. He would be sent to worlds where other Representatives had failed . . .

He awakened when it seemed his bed had fallen beneath him. A quick inspection revealed nothing to his still-sleepy eyes, but across the dome, on the master panel, a yellow warning light blinked.

EQUILIBRIUM EQUILIBRIUM EQUILIBRIUM

Then it went red and a buzzer sounded. The dome was tilting . . . though only slightly at this point. But it was no longer level.

Machines, Bolino realized, tend to overreact, but still, something unusual was happening. A quick operation on the computer gave the reason—underground seepage. The prognosis was that, at the present rate, everything would be a meter and a half under water in twelve hours.

Very strange. He had read the Survey Corps' reports that had assured the Order that the area had been stable for at least seven hundred years.

The continental swamp was not deep, nor was it infested with poisonous vermin—nevertheless, the Friar knew he would not like slogging a hundred and eighty kilometers to the next nearest dry spot.

He muttered to himself as he dressed but carefully avoided any obscenity. It occurred to him that Sharwain could have an answer to this, so he opened the dome door, hoping to find him nearby.

His eyes couldn't believe what they saw. The swamp was gone . . . perhaps. Within ten meters of the dome rose a seeping wall of brown sludge laced with rotting roots, and the smell . . . the stench . . . was unlike anything he had ever smelled back at the monastery. Bolino reached for the door behind him.

Once his stomach had ceased its spasms, though, he calmed down long enough to take a second look at the levee. The semi-solid wall of brown glop rose over three meters in the air, and the air seemed nearly solid with the odor.

Not knowing why he did so, the Friar dropped to his knees, stunned, beginning to pray. His knees sunk through the once-dry soil into a dozen centimeters of muck.

"It *is* sinking," he thought desperately, "and I shall be buried on a foreign world in a mountain of mud and rotten roots."

Like an apparition in some horrid nightmare, atop the brown oozing wall, appeared the grinning faces of the swamp creatures. As they slithered and struggled up the far side of the levee, the wall jellied inward. Finally, in a few moments, dozens of beaming scaly faces peered at Bolino over the top of the gelatinous wall.

"Please," Bolino cried, forgetting that without the translator, his voice was only so much noise to them, "please! I came only to give you the love embodied in our One Command! Don't kill me!"

As the wall edged toward him, creeping like a tidal wave in slow-motion, Bolino believed that surely the smell would kill him as dead as drowning in the mud would.

"Please!" he shrieked. "Don't kill me like this!"

He prayed on his knees as the coffee-colored ooze seeped up through the ground, reaching as high as his navel. Words would no longer pass through his lips.

What happened next happened quickly. At once every swamp creature rose up, wiggled violently, and more or less body-surfed forward on the breaking tide of quivering glop.

Bolino managed to shriek only once before they had him. Bodily he was pushed through the stuff, then tossed to another creature and dragged through more of it. Had he had his wits about him, he would have known that he was not being beaten or harmed at all—his wits,

unfortunately, were temporarily elsewhere.

Still they threw him back and forth like a rag. Bolino, for one second, thought he saw Sharwain's face suspended over his own, rotten roots dangling from his scaly lips. "No . . ." Bolino begged. "Not that!"

Sharwain smiled beatifically as he stuffed a webbed handful of stringy rot into good Friar Bolino's mouth. He tried spitting it out, but Sharwain kept stuffing it back in with his wet gritty fingers.

Bolino resigned himself to whatever happened—humiliation, degredation, even death. The world seemed to be filled up with scaly web-fingered men, and, as they all wildly sloshed and rhythmically rolled him in three meters of filth, Friar Bolino mercifully fainted.

MUCH TO his surprise, he did not die. But he did not feel a great deal like living either.

When his eyes opened enough to permit any distinct vision, he saw that he was inside his dome and the translator hummed patiently beside him, and beside the machine, Sharwain lay patiently humming, apparently imitating it.

"Am I not dead?" Bolino managed to mutter around the indescribable taste in his mouth.

"Certainly not!" There was a trace of puzzlement in Sharwain's voice.

"You failed in your attempted murder then," Bolino said venomously. He swung his feet over the edge of the cot but changed his mind when he saw that the coffee-colored ooze was now four or five centimeters deep inside the dome.

"We did not try to kill you, Friar," Sharwain intoned with great seriousness.

"Well, what do you call trying to drown me in whatever-you-want-to-call-that out there?" he spluttered. "Explain *that!*"

Sharwain seemed to wilt under Bolino's tone. "Sir," he began, "dear enlightened Friar, when I told my people of your creed, they were stunned with wonder. Never had any of us suspected that the persons of other worlds were so much like ourselves that they would want to be treated as we treat ourselves. The galaxy must have wonderful swamps."

"What are you talking about? We just want people to do to others what they'd want done to themselves."

"That is all we were trying to do," Sharwain said softly. "We did to you what we love doing to ourselves. We gave you a birthday party. I guess you didn't like it."

Friar Bolino's face first went blank. Then in his head he went over the logic of it once more. He didn't like what it added up to.

"What shall we do now?" Sharwain asked.

Bolino wept into his hands. "What shall *I* do?" he cried. "Everything has been yanked out from under me. The One Command doesn't work!"

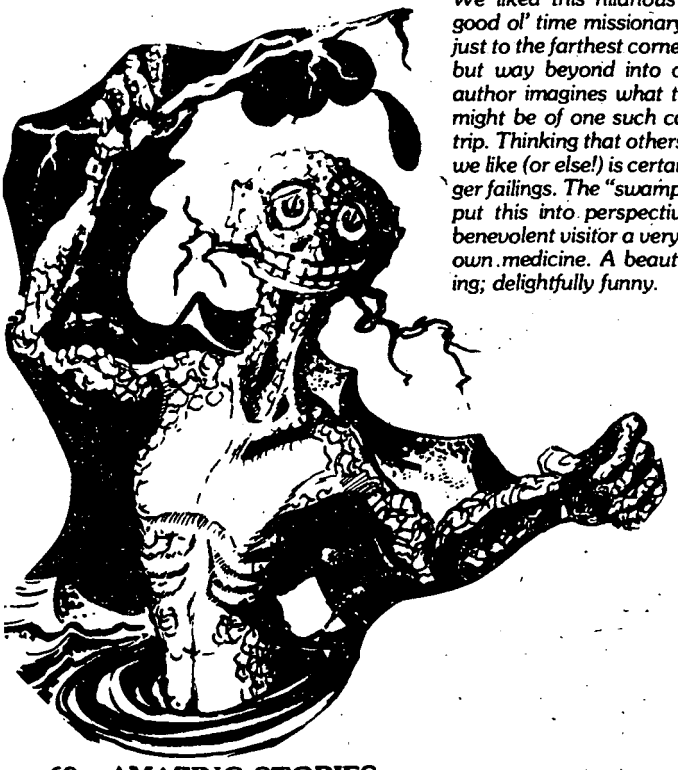
"Eat some rotten roots," Sharwain offered. "They change one's perspective."

Bolino nibbled at the black stringy things with only mild disgust and with utter hopelessness.

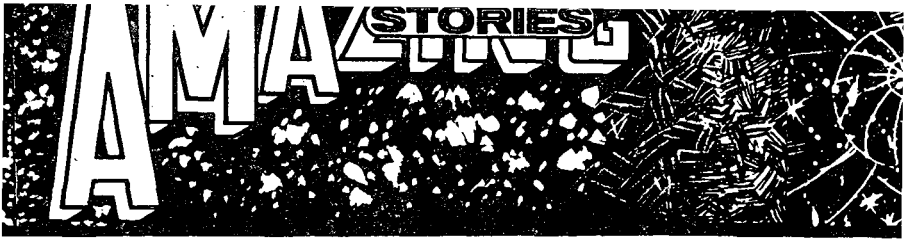
"Perhaps," Sharwain said quietly, "since all people are different, you could treat other beings the way *they* want to be treated."

Maybe it was the roots he chewed. Maybe the glistening slime-covered Sharwain made sense. Friar Bolino couldn't clearly distinguish, but something made him smile as broadly as the smiling Sharwain beside him. ◆

WHY WE CHOSE THIS STORY



We liked this hilarious example of that good ol' time missionary zeal carried not just to the farthest corners of the world . . . but way beyond into outer space! The author imagines what the consequences might be of one such cosmic "good will" trip. Thinking that others MUST like what we like (or else!) is certainly one of our bigger failings. The "swamp creatures" really put this into perspective by giving their benevolent visitor a very literal taste of his own medicine. A beautiful piece of writing; delightfully funny.



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Illustrated by Elinor Mavor

He dared to challenge the ideas of a genius . . .

ANTITHESIS

by Michael P. Kube-McDowell

HEY GUYS, look: I'm Blaine the Brain," said Reginald Towne, clowning behind the massive professor's console. He struck a pompous pose and scowled imperiously around the room, earning the desired ripple of laughter from the other students. The sound of a footstep in the hall sent them scurrying to their seats, however; Lord Master Blaine could be trifled with in his absence, but never in his presence.

"Your acting is no better than your most recent test score, Mr. Towne," said Blaine as he strolled through the doorway, and the dying laughter briefly renewed itself. Towne averted his head and mouthed something unintelligible.

"As for the rest of you, good morning," Blaine continued, settling comfortably behind his console. "I am pleased that no one is absent, though of course I expected it. Some days are more important than others, are they not? Exams, papers due, parties — and today, the final day of class, the first day of the Research Recess. A vacation of sorts for me; slavery of sorts for you. As you are all painfully aware, only one obstacle stands between you and advancement to the second form — your science exposition project. Thirty days from now you will be standing, quaking, in the Grand Hall alongside your project, while Dr. Avidson decides whether you will continue as a student at this school. Dr. Avidson is an alumnus of this school, a distinguished astrophysicist, inventor and planetary geologist. He has promised to be most critical. As well he should, for also at stake is the generous second form research grant.

"Twenty-two years ago, I sat where you sit now, facing the same challenge. I had fears, uncertainties — could I measure up? As you may know, I overcame those moments of doubt to predict and discover the eleventh planet of the solar system, bringing glory and acclaim to Hziu-Tyu Tech."

"Let us all praise Blaine the Brain," someone said in a stage whisper.

If Blaine heard, he gave no sign. "The project rules have been encoded into the data banks of your dormitory computers. Your processing credits for the science computer have been arranged. The laboratory schedules have been cleared. I have pounded and pleaded into your skulls ten percent more knowledge than you could ordinarily have mastered." He paused. "So far, you have shown yourselves to be an undistinguished group of students. I do not expect much of note to come from you. Perhaps you will surprise me." He rose and swept his gaze across the room, locking eyes briefly with each student.

"I strongly doubt it, though," said Blaine, and walked out of the room.

A moment of silence reigned after his departure.

"That man's heart is a black hole," someone finally said.

"Takes it seriously, doesn't he?" called out another.

"'Undistinguished,'" Reginald Towne snorted. "You know he's just

trying to pump us up. How many Excellence ratings from National Junior Science Fair are sitting in here, fifty, sixty? Parents all in the science Who's Who. Qualifying test scores of 98% or better. Right?"

"Well . . . ," one girl said slowly, "there is one that's different."

As if cued by a director, all heads turned toward the far left corner of the room, toward Dayton Tindel Lopez.

"Scholarship boy!" Towne called out. "They making you be in science fair, just like a regular person?"

"Everyone's in it — you know that," Lopez said quietly, switching off the terminal at his seat and standing.

"What're you going to do," asked a girl near him, "invent the wheel?"

"Nah — he's going to perfect a gasoline-powered engine!" The class roared, knowing that the last thirty gallons of petroleum were in the possession of the National Museum of Natural Resources. Amid the laughter, Dayton Tindel Lopez fled the room.

"Don't you think you're too hard on him?" asked Marcie Brooke petulantly.

Towne answered as though for the class. "Stars, no. We're too easy."

"That so? What are you doing for your project, hotshot?"

"Directing the terraforming of Ganymede," Towne said casually. He glanced at his wrist chronometer. "My father should be making the arrangements now."

DAYTON TINDEL Lopez *was* different. Alone among the students, he hadn't laughed at Towne's impersonation. He hadn't scurried to his seat — he'd already been there, scanning a recent lesson tape he hadn't quite understood.

Neither of his parents was a top scientist — he was only a lab technician, she a computer operator. National Science Fairs were outside his experience — his school didn't participate. But the worst of his flaws, at least in the eyes of his fellow students, was that he had outscored them all on the Hziu-Tyu qualifying exam, winning the Blaine Fellowship. He had to. His parents couldn't have afforded the tuition, much less the lab fees, which were almost three times as much.

There was one other difference setting him apart from the other thirty-one members of the first form in the planet's most prestigious science secondary school, though only Dayton Tindel knew what it was. Dayton Tindel wasn't sure he belonged there.

Oh, certainly the tests said he belonged. But he was slow, and knew it. Almost daily he would doggedly pursue a point with one of the professors, to the boredom and amusement of his peers. Understanding came to him six questions and seven minutes later than anyone else. Primary schools teachers had considered him a nuisance; these teachers seemed willing to indulge him. That, at least, was a

pleasant change. But he longed for the intuitive grasp of ideas that Towne and others displayed, envied their broader backgrounds and resented the free time they had as a result.

It was none of those things, however, that had sent him fleeing the classroom for the relative sanctuary of his room. The students' attitude hadn't been a factor; asked any more pleasantly, and he still would have fled.

Sequestered in his room, Dayton Tindel Lopez wanted very badly to start work on his project. There was just one little unsettled detail.

He didn't yet know what it was going to be.

FOR FIVE hundred years, men of science had been trying to dispose of the Gregorian calendar and the annoying tinkering that went with it. Except within the closed circle of astronomy, they had had little success. Research Recess was an exception, for the Gregorian calendar was suspended for its duration. The new calendar had no month, no year, and no name. It began with the final class session: that was Day One. It ended in the Grand Hall with the Exposition: that was Day Thirty.

The changing of the calender was just one of the Recess's impacts on Hziu-Tyu. The tenor of life on campus became at once more hushed

Bio-Sketch

Michael P. Kube-McDowell

I like cheese and foods that crunch.

It wasn't until I got a copy of my birth certificate at age 14 that I discovered I had been born in Philadelphia.

The Fairview branch library had eight of Judith Merrill's *Year's Best SF*, and I read each one at least thrice.

Before I moved to Goshen, IN, I thought its name existed only as a joke in a Firesign Theater album ("Land o'Goshen," and "We in Goshen yet?")

I used to smuggle a radio and earphone into school to listen to, not the World Series, but manned NASA launches.

My hyphenated name comes from combing my noble ancestral surname (McDowell) with that of my wife (Kube). It seemed like the thing to do at the time.

I teach middle-school science in a northern Indiana town too small to appear in my World Almanac's "Places of 5,000 Or More With ZIP Codes."

I believe that if we don't think about and actively shape the future, someone else will—and we may not like their plans for it.

The P. is for Paul.

A $100 National Merit Scholarship and the promise of more than eight flakes of snow per winter made me decide to attend Michigan State University.

Time not taken up by teaching, writing, and Karla goes to movies, fanatic baseball fandom, and music (I've played viola professionally).

I am no longer afraid of dogs.

There is an SF novel, *The Open Face of Heaven*, on its way.

I will read anything that doesn't move.

I write fiction for myself, my wife, and a few close but widely scattered friends. When someone from outside that circle gets pleasure or stimulation from it, I consider it a beautiful bonus.

and more hurried. At times the grounds seemed deserted, since all activity was hidden in the labs, computer rooms, and observatories. Meal hours were extended from pre-dawn to long past dusk. Especially in the early days, few lingered at their tables to talk.

All the many rhythms of the school were broken, in fact, save one. One pattern was held inviolable, demanding and getting one hour per week from a student body fanatically jealous of demands on its time.

Assembly took a back seat to nothing at Hziu-Tyu.

The students and the school had differing versions of the origin of Assembly. The official story relates that Assembly was begun when administrators realized that there was an extensive science philosophy and ethics going unnoticed and unappreciated by the students. The students' version had it that Assembly began when within the space of five months the seamy sides of three student and two faculty projects were exposed in the local media. Those seamy sides included DNA alteration without consent of the donor and seduction through human pheremone enhancement.

No matter what the origin, Assembly was well-entrenched. Three years ago, a group of second-form students petitioned the High Master of Hziu-Tyu, objecting to the four scheduled intrusions by Assembly during an upcoming Recess. The High Master listened impassively while they pleaded their case, claiming that breaking off programs and experiments in progress meant much more than one hour a week in lost time. When they were done, the High Master dismissed them with a single sentence:

"There is always time for ethics."

This year, Assembly came at 10:00 A.M., Day Four, and every seven days thereafter. At 9:50 the Grand Hall was empty; at 9:58 it was bustling with people, some taking their first moments for human contact since Recess had begun.

"An enormous pain, that ninety minute delay," complained Reginald Towne to a large group of first-form students. "It's almost impossible to communicate productively. Next year I'm going to develop a faster means of communication. Light-speed is too slow — the age of the laser is over."

"Right, Reg," Marcie Brooke said, bored. "You do that, and bring us all fame and glory."

"I'll do my modest best. Speaking of fame and glory, where's D.T.? I wanted to ask him about his project."

"That's right, where is ol' Scholarship?" A quick visual search of the room met with no success; a moment later, Lord Master Benton (Paleoarcheology) mounted the speaker's platform and the room slowly grew silent. Towne gave Benton 5-1 odds on making Assembly worthwhile, and settled back to listen.

"The radical thinker in science has always had an extra helping of

problems along the way. In the beginning, those problems were largely religious and external; Galileo is the most famous but by no means only example. His forced recant of the Copernican system . . ."

Towne mentally tore up his wager slip, paid the house and began to peoplewatch.

". . . no easy time was had by Darwin and those who followed him. His modest claims on behalf of a new schema for biology were fanned by religious paranoia into a hundred-year debate, not resolved until . . ."

"Stop it," hissed Marcie Brooke, in response to a not-so-gentle nudge in the ribs."

"Lopez is here."

"Where?"

"Back row, near the aisle."

". . . rather than going away, the challenge to the radical thinker has been internalized into the very fiber of modern science. The radical thinker will find it nearly impossible to find outlets for his views; his only real chance is a professorship at a school desiring to display how broad-minded they are . . ."

Brooke twisted her head for a quick glance back. "So what?"

"So I'll be able to ask him about his project."

"Ride him about it, you mean."

". . . the greater question is whether these radical thinkers, who can alter not just the details but the substance of our outlook, are in fact an extinct species, driven under by the relentless selling of our scientific dogma . . ."

The approach of a glowering proctor ended the discussion, but Towne kept an eye on the back row with an occasional over-the-shoulder glance. Then, almost before he realized it, the Assembly was over.

". . . can a goldfish who has spent his whole existence in a round bowl conceive of a square one? I fear science is losing its capacity for serious self-doubt, and with it, its hope for a new conception of the universe that will free us from the prison of the solar system."

Towne had forgotten how quickly students moved during Recess; he watched helplessly as the aisle before him filled with people. By the time he reached the back row, Dayton Tindel Lopez was gone.

"GOOD!" LOPEZ thought fiercely as the first reference he had requested rippled into focus on the Data-Tap display. "Now what about the others?" He tapped two keys, and several titles appeared in place of the earlier information. After each title was the word "Available".

Recalling the first reference to the screen, he began to take notes. It came unexpectedly easily; so easily that he permitted himself the thought that he might finish early, several days before Exposition.

The idea he had struggled to capture had finally come to him, quietly, in an unguarded moment during Assembly. He knew what it was he wished to bring into the Grand Hall on Day Thirty. He also knew that four precious days had been stolen by his indecision.

Lopez wiped every extraneous thought from his awareness. Each moment of concentration, each half-minute he could steal back would help.

BY EVENING of Day Four, Dayton Tindel's optimism had vanished.

The pace of his work had slowed down abruptly, beginning just after the lunch he hadn't stopped for. It might have gone faster if he had ever learned how to use a minicomp comfortably. Before Hziu-Tyu, Lopez had always done his math on paper or in his head. Where his father had found the credits to purchase one for him was a mystery. That he had found them was a minor tragedy; the minicomp sat in a drawer while Lopez filled page after page with equations.

Later, near suppertime, there had been a disturbance outside his door.

"Lopez!" shouted a distressingly familiar voice. "Let me in. I want to talk to you."

Dayton Tindel laid down his pen and said nothing.

"I won't take very much time, Dayt. I know you're busy. Just open up for a minute for so."

Concentrating on the pattern of lines across his knuckles, Lopez tried to shut out the sound.

You've got to be in there, Lopez, I've checked everywhere else. Why make it such a big affair?"

"Just go away," Lopez thought fiercely.

"I know what everyone else's project is, Lopez — except yours. That's all I want. Just tell me and I'll leave you be. I'm not going to steal your idea — I've already got a project underway."

Lopez could hear someone else in the hall talking, but the words were indistinct. How long would this go on, he wondered. Badgered at every meeting, interrupted at work in his room — was making it a surprise worth the trouble? He decided not.

"Hyper-Light Travel," he called out.

Laughter — two, no, three people. "All right, Lopez, you win," Towne called back. "I get the message — you don't want to tell me." The laughter moved off down the hall and became a faint blur of sound.

Dayton Tindel Lopez picked up his pen and resumed writing. Somehow, some of the pleasure was gone.

"WHY SHOULDN'T it work?" Dayton Tindel wanted to scream. "Don't geniuses ever crib? Don't they have limits? Damn you, Einstein, wherever you are."

Angrily he crumpled the last piece of paper on which he had written. It was useless — a quarter page of unresolved equations followed by ever larger questions marks. The question marks had started appearing that morning, and with each succeeding one, some forward momentum of the project vaporized. Now it was a dead thing, with three blind trails leading back to a mass of careful, logical data that was somehow thoroughly wrong. It had to be wrong, or the equations would resolve. Yet it had to be right, or the whole project was a failure. He had approached it the only possible way, taken only the certain information and made only the legal, logical inferences. But the results were meaningless.

It was Day Eleven; Assembly would begin in a half-hour. Lopez flipped the sheaf of notes over, to the first page with the bold, jarringly confident notation: "Day One." Selecting a different color pen, he shifted to a new position in his chair. Assembly would have to start without him.

"DO YOU understand why you're here?" Blaine asked.

"I missed Assembly this morning."

"Exactly. Why?"

"No excuse, sir."

"I was not looking for an excuse. There are none. I *was* looking for a reason. Never mind, though. The answer is self-evident. There are always a few who think their project is more important than eating, sleeping or Assembly."

"I didn't mean to say . . ."

"Of course you didn't. I saved you the embarrassment. Next door is a holo viewer; in it is the recording of today's Assembly. When you have finished watching it, record a five hundred word summary and leave it with my secretary."

"But . . ."

"It is not open for discussion."

"Yes, Lord Master Blaine." Dismissed with a wave, Lopez headed for the door.

"Dayton —"

Lopez stopped at the door. "Yes?"

"Are you having difficulty with your project?"

Lopez hesitated. What good would it do to tell him? Faculty were forbidden to assist — and proving something to Blaine was one of his strongest wishes wrapped up in the project. "Not really, sir."

"Good. I hope for good things from you. Get along, now, and watch that holo."

"DAYTON? THE voice was clear, feminine and friendly.

"Yes?" Lopez leaned back in his chair, and fifty muscles cried their thanks.

"This is Marcie . . . can you open the door?"

Lopez hesitated, then complied.

"Thanks," Brooke said, smiling tentatively at him. "Are you doing okay?"

"Fine. What do you want?"

"We — I — haven't seen you for a while. Did you skip lunch today?"

"And breakfast."

"And lunch and dinner yesterday."

Lopez nodded. "I've got some things," he said, waving at the table where he was working.

Marcie Brooke peered in the direction he had waved. "Crackers. Brain food, eh?"

Lopez laughed lightly, and it felt strange. How long had it been?

"It's getting late — how is it coming?" she asked.

"All right."

"Is it, really . . . a lot of us are done, and we were wondering about you. You've been so secretive."

He shook his head, too fast. "Just busy." He knew neither of them believed it.

"I was just wondering — Dayton, please don't be insulted, but I thought if you were having trouble, maybe I —" She stopped, seeing his expression change. "I'm sorry."

"It's all right," he said. "I know you didn't mean anything by it."

"It's just that I know how it can be — that sometimes talking about it makes it come clear for you."

"Do you know what I'm working on?"

"No."

"Hyper-light travel."

"Oh! Reggie said that you'd said that. He thought you were kidding."

"Let him keep thinking that."

"I will," she said quickly. "What — what are you trying to do with it?"

He smiled. "Square peg in a round hole, I guess."

"Does it fit?"

"Not yet. Marcie, I need —"

"I'll get going. Good luck — scholarship."

It sounded different, coming from her.

"SIT DOWN, Lopez." Blaine's tone was icily polite.

"Yes, Lord Master."

"Are you aware of how many days are left until the exposition?"

"Eight, sir."

"Exactly. How are you coming on your project?"

"Well enough, Lord Master."

"Comforting news. What is your project, Lopez?"

"Must I tell you, sir? I thought the rules . . ."

"No you don't have to tell me."

"Then I'd rather not, if you don't mind."

"Of course I mind," the professor roared suddenly. "You're the Blaine Fellow. What you do is very important to this school. Or, should I say, what you don't do?"

"Sir?"

"You have not signed up for a single hour of laboratory time since Recess began. You have not used a nanosecond of your computer credits. You refuse to discuss your project with me, your professor and benefactor. I'm beginning to think you don't have a project at all! And if that's true —"

"It's not," Lopez said hurriedly. "I have a project. It's theoretical, though. I won't be using the laboratory."

"What about the computer, then? Are there no correlations to be done, no equations to be checked?"

"Well . . . none that the computer can handle."

Blaine leaned forward, interested. "That's saying quite a bit, young man. There is no computer anywhere the equal of ours. Yet your project is beyond its capability?"

"Or outside it."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't think I can explain it."

Blaine took a deep breath. "Let me put this as strongly as I can within the rules. I would very much like to know what your project is, and to discuss it with you. I think such a discussion would benefit you. It would certainly relieve a certain amount of my anxiety."

"I'm sorry, but I'm not ready to talk about it yet —"

"Blast it, Lopez! I'm trying to help!"

"I know that, sir."

"Your project carries extra weight. The Blaine Fellow's work is always noted in the science newsletters. It reflects on the school as a whole, and on the Blaine name in particular."

"I'm doing my best to meet your expectations."

"I'm sure you are," Blaine said tiredly. "Get going, then. Back to it, whatever it is."

Lopez made it back to the confines of his room without encountering another student. The door locked behind him, he shuffled the stack of papers on his desk, searching for the last one. Having found it, he stared at it in disbelief. The equations had to resolve. He had been so careful, so thorough. There couldn't be a mistake. He had checked it too many times. But still the equations wouldn't resolve. Eight days left. It was too late to change projects.

Dayton Tindel Lopez went to bed, but not to sleep. That would have been asking too much.

IN THE real world, it was a glorious day. The sun, well-rested from winter, put in a long appearance to remind the masses what it meant to be warm.

At Hziu-Tyu, it was Day Twenty-Seven, and sun notwithstanding, Dayton Tindel was miserable. It had become clear that the equations could never resolve, at least not as stated.

There were three unattractive choices. He could write up the project exactly as it had developed — as a failure. That would leave him trying to explain why he had spent so much time trying to disprove something any third-grader knew was an incontrovertible fact. Whose sarcasm would be more cutting, Blaine's or Towne's? Better that he had tried to disprove the gravitational laws than to face them with this.

Alternatively, he could admit failure privately — to Blaine, who seemed so eager to preserve reputations. An extension would permit him to undertake a new project. Whether they would grant one was an unknown. He had not heard of it happening, but surely there had to be allowances for this sort of thing? Perhaps not — they had been soberly warned on the first day of classes to look around: one in five would not make it to graduation.

The final choice at least offered the opportunity for style. The limiting factors were the Einstein equations. Assuming that any solution needed to satisfy them posed the problem. But if they were to be ignored —

Such a move would remove the last obstacle; the equations would at last mesh into a meaningful solution. Meaningful, and probably invalid, for they would describe a solution in a different reality.

The decision was not really that difficult. To accept the outcome and admit failure; to request an extension and admit such a glaring error — both were unacceptable. He would push the project to a conclusion, bending and breaking whatever rules were troublesome. He would prepare a defense for every such move, and then debate them on a plane higher than personal inadequacy. Perhaps that way he would survive.

It was the Big Lie, and it had worked for greater scientists than he.

"DAYTON?"

He let her in quickly. "Hi."

"Hi. How are you?"

"A little shaky. I didn't sleep at all."

"We saw that your light was on late. Are you finished?"

"Except for the writing. It's strange, Marcie. I think I was a little crazy last night. I had decided to fake it — to fudge the equations and try to bluff them out. It was a total dead end." Lopez sat down on the edge of

the bed. "But as I started to make the changes, they began to make sense. Einstein doesn't have to be right. No one's ideas hold up forever."

"You think you have it, then."

"I really do. I really believe it. And they will too."

"Maybe."

"They will. They'll have to."

"Not if you don't get it written. I'll see you at Exposition." She shut the door behind her, and Lopez moved to the table. He was tired of rushing, but it was almost over.

LORD MASTER Blaine was always up early on Exposition Day. The evening before he had seen to the preparation of the Grand Hall. There were a hundred-odd booths to be set up, some specially equipped with holo viewers, power feeds, or shielding as requested by the students. Now he wandered up and down the rows of empty booths, wondering which students would be the ones to excite him with the creativity of their work. Within an hour, these booths would all be filled —

In the middle of that thought, he came to booth thirty-eight, that of Dayton Tindel Lopez. Something was lying on the table. Blaine stepped closer.

The bundle proved to be a thick manuscript. Blaine scanned the room for Lopez, without success. He was alone in the Hall.

Could this be his entire project? No display, no holo summary? Blaine picked it up.

"The Mathematics of Hyper-Light Travel." A surprisingly short title. Was it merely a research report? Flipping to the first page, Blaine began to read:

"Hypothesis: that hyper-light travel in the real universe is possible. This paper contains a mathematical model for large-body high speed physics that may be used to describe and achieve hyper-light travel."

Stunned, Blaine riffled through the pages, stopping occasionally for a longer look. "How dare he?" he said aloud, without realizing it. When he reached the end his hands were trembling. "Lopez!" he bellowed.

A timid voice answered from the main entryway. "Sir? Are you looking for Dayton?"

"I am. He isn't there, with you?"

"No, sir. I haven't seen him this morning."

"Find him!! And bring him to me here!"

"But my project, sir!" It was only then that Blaine noticed the student's arms were full of labware.

"Forget it! This is more important. Find Lopez, and quickly."

"Yes, sir," the boy said unhappily.

Twenty minutes later the student returned with Lopez trailing a few steps behind. The hall was becoming crowded, as project after project

took shape in the booths.

"May I see to my project now?" the student asked anxiously.

"Yes, go," Blaine said, and the boy departed at a run. "Good morning, Mr. Lopez."

"Good morning, Master Blaine. I didn't think we were required to be here until —"

"I've been looking at your project. At least I think it's your project. Is it?"

"Yes, that's it."

"I find that hard to believe." Blaine owned an extraordinary sneer, and he was using it now. "You see, this project ignores several physical laws that I'm sure you're familiar with. It contains extensive mathematical blunders. In fact, it seems to be the work of a lightly trained animal, NOT a Hziu-Tyu scholar and a Blaine Fellow." Blaine's voice had risen to the point that nearby activity had stopped. "By Darwin, Lopez, this paper claims that the speed of light can be broken!"

"It can be, sir. If you read it —"

"Who taught you Einsteinian physics?" Blaine demanded, interrupting.

"You di-"

"And don't they have a word or two to say about this?"

"But if you step outside of certain of those assumptions —"

"Who are you to throw aside Einstein?"

"If you'll just point out what you think are the errors, I can expl—"

"You'll explain! I already know the explanation, and it's an ugly one. You couldn't think of a project. Time ran out on you, and to try to preserve your position in this school you threw together in a few hours —"

"I've been working on that since the first week!"

"— a poorly thought-out fraud that you hoped would overwhelm us on audacity alone —"

"If you would just *read* it —"

"I have read it twice, and reading it more won't change anything. It is garbage!" With three quick movements of his hands, Blaine shredded the manuscript. "You have disgraced yourself, the school, and me. Go pack your things — you will not be remaining here as a student." He turned to the hushed students in the aisle behind him. "Get this booth disassembled. I want it out of here before Dr. Avidson arrives. And find a trash can for this," he said, proffering the wad of scrap. "Quickly now — move!"

"I'll take it," said Reginald Towne, stepping forward. "It'll be my pleasure."

THE FRAGMENT of paper that fluttered to the hallway floor in Towne's wake was a relatively small one, but James Avidson was a tidy

man. He stopped, stooped and picked it up.

"Young man!" he called to Towne, retreating towards the far end of the hallway. "You've dropped something."

Towne stopped and turned, hesitated a moment to see if the stranger would bring it to him, then reluctantly walked back.

In the meantime, Avidson tried to read the scrap. It bore a few words, one half of an equation — nothing meaningful. When Towne reached out to take it, however, Avidson pulled it back.

"What is this?"

Towne stared a moment at the old man's face. The portrait in the main hall . . . his parents' houseguest of three years ago . . . "Are you Dr. Avidson?"

"Of course. What is that you're carrying there?" he asked, gesturing towards it.

"Just some trash I was cleaning up," Towne said, shifting his weight from one foot to the other. He had only been four steps from the recycling chute, and now this . . ."

"Clear enough. But what was it before it was trash?" Towne hesitated again, and there was some bite in Avidson's tone as he asked, "Don't you know?"

"It was a project report."

"Ah." Towne reached for the slip of paper once more, but he had hardly begun the motion when Avidson moved it smoothly out of reach. "Tell me, where was that shouting a few moments ago coming from? The Grand Hall?"

Towne nodded, uneasily.

Avidson smiled suddenly, disarmingly. "Some last minute panic, no doubt." When Towne nodded again, Avidson continued: "Aren't you Director Towne's boy? L-5 Operations?"

"Yes." Towne brightened at the recognition.

"Ah. Well — Reggie, isn't it? — I'm early and you probably have some final touch or two to make on your display. I'll dispose of this for you." Before the younger man could protest, Avidson plucked the wad of paper from his hands and was past him, heading down the hall.

From that point on, there was an uncomfortable feeling deep inside Towne's belly. Lopez and his project failed to make a dramatic reappearance; Towne's terraforming work earned him a perfect score, putting him in the running for the grant. Still, Towne could not shake the feeling that something unplanned was going to upset his well-ordered vision for the near future.

"YOU CAN admit the parents and the press now," Blaine said, then switched off the phone.

"That first form is the best in years," Avidson said, leaning back in his chair. A drink was cradled in folded hands before him; the faculty

lounge was small, but provided basic human comforts.

"I've been excited about them all year," said Blaine. "Though I keep them from knowing it, I hope."

"Still enduring 'Blaine the Brain'?"

"Till the day I retire, I suppose. Thank you again for taking the time to come out."

"You know I do it for pleasure — and for the memories it stirs."

"It's still a lot of time from a busy schedule. In any case, just one task left — to choose the research grant winner. Your pick?"

"I'll abstain again, as you know I do. It's your decision. Though I hope I've made it difficult, granting five perfect scores."

"If it *was* your choice —"

Avidson shook his head. "It's your grant and your department, now. Still — there's one I would *not* give it to."

"Who?"

"Towne. He has the potential to be a fine scientist. But he won't be one unless he learns how to work on a small scale."

"I agree." Blaine sighed quietly. "It's not been a perfect day, though. I'm embarrassed by something —"

"Dayton Lopez."

"You know?"

"I could hardly forget the name of the Blaine Fellow, could I? I noticed his work was missing. Sickness?"

"No," Blaine said, shaking his head. Illness was the only valid reason for a project extension. "I'm afraid not."

"Ah. A great disappointment to you, I'm sure, to have a student falter at this point. Still, there have been others — a few through the years. The pressure becomes too great, and the student gives up — crumples."

"Yes," Blaine said, uncertainly.

"He'll be leaving Hziu-Tyu, I suppose."

"Yes," said Blaine more firmly. "Yes, he will."

—

EXPOSITION, JUDGING, interviews, parents: they added up to a long day. Blaine opened the door to the master's lodge with the same anticipation a hungry man would open a refrigerator; the action promised relief.

Blaine was surprised to see the hall and living room lights already on; with the house empty, the computer would ordinarily have them off. Five steps took him to the living room and the explanation; seated in a large chair, hands folded on crossed legs, was a student — Dayton Tindel Lopez.

"How did you get in? And what are you doing here?" Blaine demanded. "Never mind," he continued, throwing his coat over the back of a couch. "I don't care. Get out."

"I lied to the custodian. I'm waiting here for you."

"I ordered you off the school grounds ten hours ago."

"I refuse to go." Lopez stood. "You're going to listen to me. You're going to make me see where I'm wrong, or admit I'm right. You're a teacher — *my* teacher. You owe me that."

"Would you also like me to demonstrate the Pythagorean theorem and prove the Earth has a positive gravity?"

"Just space travel and Einstein, thank you." Lopez did not return the sarcasm that had colored Blaine's question.

"What do you see yourself as, another Alexander Freidman?"

"As a student who had a question and tried to answer it."

"The question, 'How best can I make a fool of my teacher?'"

"No. The question 'What if?' Relativity put the universe under a speed limit — and man in a box, trapped by the fact that we die so soon. Einstein had his assumptions, and his math follows from them. I don't question it — too many people smarter than me have picked at it. But I started with a different assumption — that the speed of light *can* be exceeded in normal space. Then I worked out the mathematics to describe it."

"A waste of effort. Einstein's assumptions were correct."

"They haven't all been proven. Gravity waves for one — the binary pulsars were supposed to settle that, but they didn't."

"More important to you are parts that *are* proven — such as the mass increase as you approach lightspeed. The particle accelerators have established that beyond question."

"No, they haven't. As you've told us more than once, reasoning by analogy is tricky. A gram of plutonium behaves differently than a metric ton of it."

Are you saying large bodies won't increase in mass, even though particles do?"

"I'm saying the particles don't prove a thing about spaceships."

"You have an answer for everything, don't you?"

"If I had, I wouldn't be here. If I was sure I was right, after the way you treated me I'd have told you off and gone to someone who would listen. But I *don't* know," Lopez said. "That's why I need you. Sit down with me and work through it. If it's wrong, I've got to know why. If it's not . . ."

Blaine looked at Lopez, hard. All he saw was intensity; no animosity, no guile, no vindictiveness. He saw a student with a question and a need-to-know reaching the point of pain. "All right," he said. "Let's use the kitchen table."

TWO HOURS stretched out, then two more. Blaine used, then abandoned a minicomp. At last he pushed the mass of papers away, his own scrawlings mixed with pages of Lopez's report. Leaning back in his chair, he moved his head in a circle to relieve the tightness in his neck.

"Well?" Lopez asked timidly.

Blaine looked troubled, sighed. He rubbed his forehead. "I don't know," he said finally.

A grin spread across Lopez's face; not triumph, but relief. "Can I use your phone?"

"On the wall." Blaine gestured.

Lopez consulted a scrap of paper from his pocket, tapped out the number. "Come get me," he said after a pause, then switched off.

"What was that about?"

"You'll see."

Chimes called Blaine to the front door ten minutes later. On opening the door, he knew he should be surprised, but he had lost the capacity to feel it. "Ted. Come inside."

Dr. Avidson moved past Blaine and into the living room with the familiarity of a resident, rather than a quest. "Dayton?"

Lopez appeared at a kitchen doorway. "Yes?"

"Collect your things and go on out to the car."

"What's going on?" Blaine asked, already working out the answer for himself. Avidson said nothing until Lopez had passed them and headed outside.

"He's coming to work for me," Avidson said finally.

Blaine nodded. "Now I understand why he came in here the way he did. You must have set this whole thing up. What was it, his final employment interview? Or did you tell him what to say, let him take a last shot at me . . ." Avidson was watching him calmly, not taking offense, and Blaine's hastily manufactured indignation collapsed. "All right — how *did* it happen?"

"I happened to overhear your exchange of opinions as I was getting near the Grand Hall." Blaine winced, realizing how loud they must have been. "I went to see Lopez in his room. He refused to open the door, refused to let me read his carbon. I persuaded him. When I finished reading, I offered him a chance to bring himself and his ideas to the Space Administration — told him we'd give both a try."

"No wonder he was so confident, here. He pretended not to be, to get me to —"

"He turned down the job. He said that if you didn't believe him, he must be wrong. Told me I was wrong, in fact. I persisted. Finally he told me that he would come see you again. If he made any headway with you, he would come with me. If not, he would destroy the other copy and go home."

"Do you really believe he has found an error in relativity theory?"

"I'm not yet ready to say. But can you name any idea that has remained unchanged since the time it was proposed? If he's right, it will only require an adjustment of the theories. Not an abandonment." Avidson smiled. "He's different from us, Richard. A different

background, different preconceptions — probably necessary for him to have done what he did. But he and I are alike in one way at least. Neither of us wants to think that man is to be limited to just this little backwater of the Universe. There are too many exciting things going on out there. No matter how much we can learn by telescope, being spectators at this distance just isn't going to be good enough. And who knows, Richard? If I'm feisty enough, I may live to see the interstellar barrier broken."

"By one of my students," Blaine said, slowly shaking his head. "And I should have known!" he said sharply, his voice rising. "You were the worst teacher ever. So annoying, — so superior. You were always right. We knew nothing. I *swore* I would never be like you. But I am, and I enjoy it! And here *you* are, still being superior, still correcting my mistakes." There was no anger in Blaine; just wistfulness and affection. "Aren't you ever going to leave me in peace?"

"I wouldn't count on it," Avidson said. "This could be the advance notice to a fantastic show. I know I can't stay for the whole thing, but I'm not about to miss the opening number."

"And if he's wrong, and this is all there is for us?"

Avidson's smile was small but confident. "Then Dayton will complain bitterly to his God, and I'll tear up my tickets to the show. But I don't expect we'll need to. The Universe can't hold us here, Richard. We're coming out, whether the gods and the physicists like it or not." ■

WHY WE CHOSE THIS STORY

Mr. Kube-McDowell's sensitive story captures Albert Einstein's shining example of courage in the search for knowledge; the willingness to break beyond traditional absolutes in order to discover the truths of the universe. In 1905, at the age of 26, Einstein prepared four papers containing four major contributions to the world of science, including the Special Theory of Relativity. These extraordinary pieces of work by an obscure clerk were at first ignored and then disputed and even denounced before they were finally recognized and accepted as revolutionary insights from one of the greatest minds the world has ever known. One can't help but feel that the brilliant physicist himself would have sided with our young hero for his insistence in looking beyond what was accepted for possible solutions. At the end of his life, Einstein himself was still working on his Unified Field Theory, an answer to his doubts about quantum physics . . . but he never reached a solution. We felt compassionate admiration for Lopez' persistence in the face of rejection and even expulsion from school. He typified the spirit of the very man whose theories he was attempting to transcend.

THE SPECTROSCOPE

by Robert Wilcox

ONE CLAIM science fiction makes above all others is that it looks to the future and to the remote in space. Most of the stories we read deal with problems of galactic empires thousands of years from now, often involving far-out life forms possessing skills and properties beyond our current understanding. We thrill to dazzling feats of science and technology, cheer as "our side" brings down the invaders from another star system. In many of such stories all mundane problems have been solved. There is sometimes a conflict between ruling and ruled classes, but even the least privileged citizen of the future enjoys benefits we covet.

In "Antithesis," however, we seem never to have left home. Here are students much like many we know today, preparing for an examination which will determine their fitness for higher academic levels. The situation might fit that in any competitive science program offered by institutions on our planet in the twentieth century. Paradoxically, the similarity of conditions makes "Antithesis" worthwhile reading for the modern science fiction fan. It is the recognition of certain timeless forces that power the story which most of us today find highly appealing.

One of these elements is the feeling of alienation which springs up early in the story with the baiting of Lopez, a scholarship student. His tormentors come from upper intellectual and social levels, boast of very high test scores, but resent Lopez because he had outscored them all to win the Blaine Fellowship. This pariah appears not to fit in, for his mind seems to work more slowly than class pace demands. He asks many questions of his teachers, which amuses his more nimble peers, and he wishes he had their facility so that he might enjoy the free time they evidently have.

Some of us as students have had a Lopez or two in our classes. From the name on, his differences have set him off from the crowd. We make many judgements by ethnocentric means, and meeting D.T. in the story actually creates a time warp allowing us to straddle present and future. Ours is a time of racial tension, so that we can accept the dissonances of family difference in the story. If we sympathize with outsiders and underdogs, we are conditioned to engage with Lopez and we struggled with him to prepare for that crucial examination.

At the base of the ethnic problem, of course, is another: the need to conform. It isn't just that a boy comes from another ethnic group, but that he doesn't fit the expectations of other students in this elite school. He doesn't match their patterns of thought, of prejudices, of attitudes. Note, as an example, that he alone had not laughed at Towne's impersonation of Blaine. Such a variation makes the group uneasy. All of us today run into this sort of thing. We must laugh when others do; must approve the same classes of food, clothing, and activities; must be acceptable to the crowd. We must belong, and most young people (and some old ones) will do almost anything to win the approval of persons around them. It requires great character strength and courage to resist the pressure to conform and, as we journey through the story, we begin to see just how different Lopez is. It's not so much that he thinks more slowly than other students. Rather, he thinks differently. He uses only his brain to reach conclusions, while the others rely entirely upon their computers. It is an interesting and ironic switch of backgrounds for, as his father was only a lab technician and his mother a computer operator, one would expect the boy to depend on mechanical equipment for help. In class he asks many questions which bore and bother, but it is evident that he does not accept standard knowledge and attitudes of science. A plan for that all-important project did not easily occur to him, simply because he could not comfortably accept principles on which such a project might be based. So Ein-

stein's suppositions concerning mass and the speed of light disturbed Lopez. He knew that scientific giants—Blaine, for example—regarded that mathematician's theories as absolute, and he worried that his own position could scarcely be supported. He should go along with the crowd, should belong. If the speed of light could not be surpassed because of accompanying increase in the mass of a vehicle involved, then so be it. Man would be forever bound to Earth by such limitation.

But Lopez was *different*. He just didn't see things in the ways that other students were accustomed to. And so he suffered a kind of exile, torturing himself in his room for days to work his own way around this tremendous obstacle. His willingness to undergo such pain is a tribute to his strength of character as well as to the potential intellect which the scholarship achievement had already hinted at.

Being different in attitude and background, Lopez brings into focus one of the most important questions of our times. What should education contribute to our culture? Millions of children and adults pass through the osmotic membranes of academe each year, and more money is spent to support this process than goes to maintain almost any other activity. It is understandable that many questions arise concerning this classroom ferment. Should a student be permitted to select programs cafeteria-style, or should studies be directed and controlled by experts? Does a first-class education guarantee proficiency in a career? Does classroom theory properly relate to the real world?

Most schools lay out curricula theoretically, with the hope of preparing students to adjust to a broad range of life possibilities. Standards are set and tests given to group candidates where they "belong." But how valid are such tests? Lopez should have been an outcast, yet he trimmed the other students and won the coveted scholarship. He asked questions when other students yawned and accepted the conventions of education. He was willing to "buck the system," to risk ultimate rejection and failure, because he could not accept widely held scientific theory. He was fortunate in our story, for another nonconformist recognized the boy's real worth, and he was saved from what might have been an academic scrap heap.

There seems to be an important lesson for us in "Antithesis." If we continue to accept, without question and demand for substantiation, what might be termed pat principles, then the state of our understanding is bound to deteriorate. Lopez performs a great service by reminding us of the need to cherish differences, to examine more closely the person who appears to be out of step. Much public education does not do this. Instead, it stresses a dangerous conformity to existing patterns, often punishing students who can't or won't measure up. This is not to condone or excuse the ornery student, but rather to be willing to accept variations from norms when they have genuine worth. Reginald Towne and the rest may have gone on to reshape Ganymede or some other remote celestial body. But Lopez, by attending to a much nearer object, is the kind of student upon whom all mankind had better place its fondest hopes. o

AMAZING FACTS

by Thomas A. Easton

FUTURE SHOCK is the effect of a scientific and technological progress that changes the conditions of our lives with a speed beyond our comprehension. It is the stunning sensation that our senses are not to be believed and that we must blindly attack or flee the world around us. It is a feeling that our expectations have been betrayed because the present cannot be extended beyond the moment and our future arrives before we have grown used to the past.

And it's no wonder. We are hardly used, for instance, to the life-saving wonders of modern medicine before they become potential destroyers of freedom, to jet lag before men land on the moon, or to atomic power before fusion researchers promise us Hoover Dams in our basements. We grow dependent on automobiles, and a growing energy crisis threatens to snatch our wheels from beneath us. We grow up believing our nation to be good and just, and the miracle of instant communication brings vicious wars and corroding trials into our living rooms. We live indeed in a time of constant, sudden change. Our future is shockingly and continually upon us.

But even though the causes of future shock are all around us, there is no need to suffer its trauma. There *is* a vaccine against it, and immunity requires no prescription. It is available for the asking. It it is not often asked for, it is only because few of us both know that it exists and believe it worth taking.

This vaccine is so effective that for some people "future shock" is actually a mysterious term. For them the future holds few terrors. They find all possible futures, if not familiar, at least thinkable, for they have seen their seeds. They *expect* the future to be as different from the present as the present is from the past, and they are usually surprised only by the details of the difference. They are people with an interest in science and in projecting the nature of their future.

The vaccine is science, for in the news from the world's laboratories lie the seeds of all possible futures. Many features of today's world — the automobile and the energy crisis, plastics and pollution, jet lag and modern medicine and moon shots — could be foreseen decades before their arrival by anyone with the wit to see. That they weren't, however, is not really a failure of the idea. Public attention tends to focus on the spectacular, so that once the future of air travel seemed to lie with dirigibles and the future of war with the atomic bomb. That these futures never came to pass means only that the power of a knowledge of science is the power of a shotgun. Science foreshadows the future. It does not predict it. It supplies hints and clues, and while some must miss — not everything can happen — a few must be on target.

Anyone who keeps up with the science news can therefore be prepared for whatever the future may

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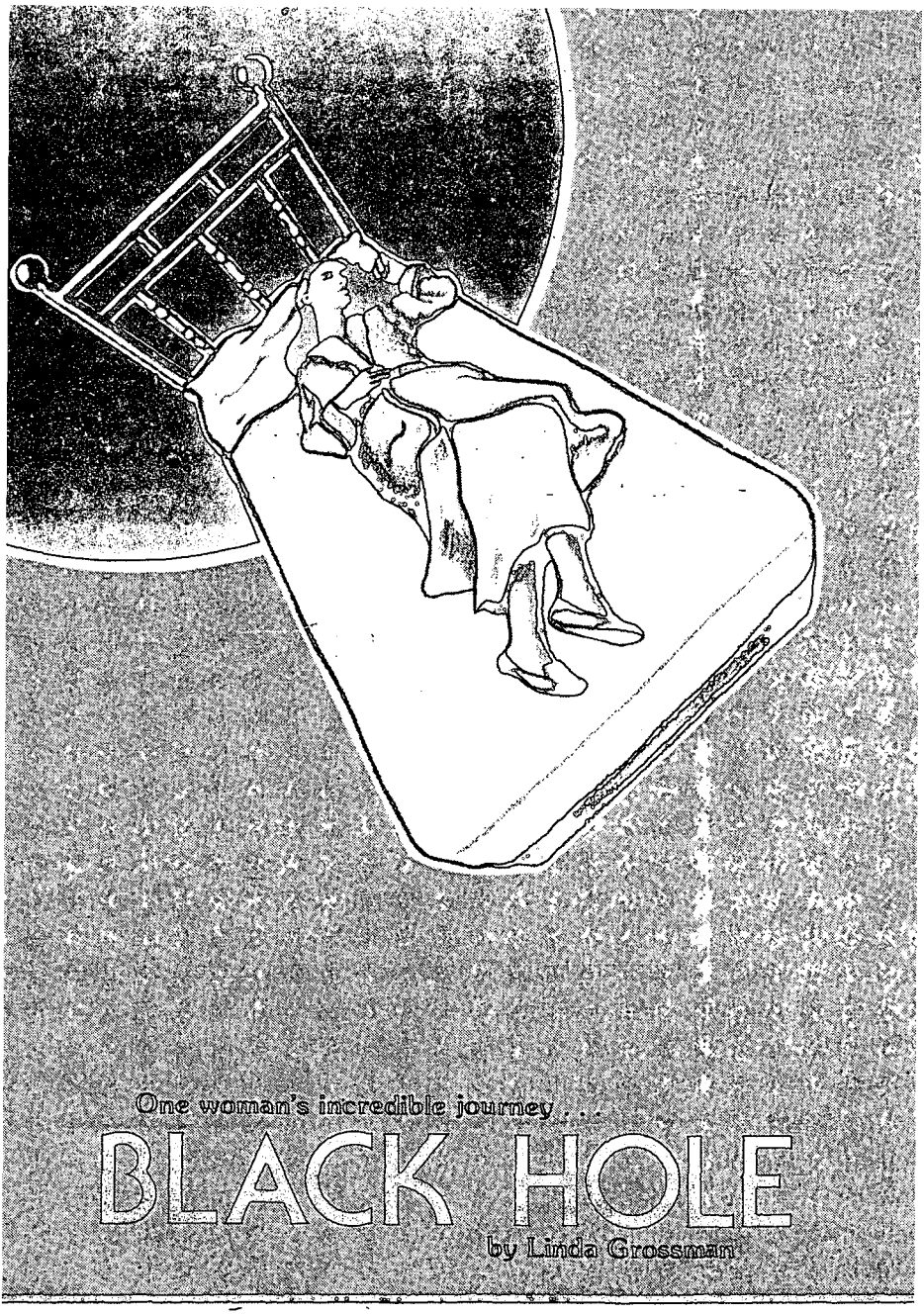
Illustrated by Nancy Koch



One woman's incredible journey . . .

BLACK HOLE

by Linda Grossman

NANCY KOCH—79

WHEN I woke up, my husband was rummaging through the bureau drawers and the children had already begun to fight. I held still. The radio announced a yellow ozone alert; people who were sick at heart should stay indoors.

"Honey, where are my clean shirts?" Frank's voice was half sheepish, half angry. I could imagine his face: the almost permanent line between his eyebrows, the quirked smile, blue eyes cheerful and dazed: like a husband in a commerical. I didn't answer him.

My dreams had been of Canada, the way I saw it once in a magazine, wind crinkling the saltmarsh, geese strung toward the pole. "Honey, you awake?" Three-quarters angry. The radio told guys and gals that Bermuda was where it was all happening this summer for fun in the sun. Blair and Kelly, in full cry by now, burst through the door. Seven and nine years old, each would cheerfully have staked the other out for the wolves, or whatever fills the wolf's ecological niche in Queens.

"Mom, make him stop bothering me!" First they wail, then they say No all the time, then sulks, then shouts. Kelly had just got the hang of whining. For about six months, though, around age three, they are so beautiful that your heart knots constantly.

"I am not bothering her! She took my comic book. I paid for it with my own money, and it's mine!"

"Now you kids leave your mother alone! She needs her rest. Kelly, give his book back, and Blair, you share it with her." My protector. He stroked my hair.

"Come on, hon, where'd you hide my shirts? I'm late for work."

"Homemakers!" cried the radio, "does your family get the vitamins their active life demands?"

It was warm in bed. My breath stirred between the pillow and my cheek. If I opened my eyes, they would all rush in at me.

"He said you have to share it!"

I decided not to move.

AT FIRST it was a whimsical retreat, in hope they might find they could do without me and so go away. The escalation of our struggle surprised me at each step. While they poked me and shouted, yanked away sheet and pillow and called the dog into bed with me, I discovered my resolution: that I would not this time give in to what they wanted. Happily, I am not ticklish.

After fifteen minutes or so, they let me be. I knew they were planning something. As if a knife were to my neck, slowly I tilted my head up. Blair stood watch, but I have long natural lashes, and he did not see me peer at him as he picked his nose and wiped it on the carpet. Faint rattlings came from the kitchen then a hiss of water.

When Frank and Kelly returned, I had my hands locked between my knees. They lifted the pans; holding a deep breath I bit my cheeks; the

water hit me. It was tepid, I think, because other possibilities had not occurred to them. If I moved, one guess who would get to clean up the water. I did not move.

On Long Island, only veterinarians make house calls, so Frank drove all four of us to the hospital. The children found me a perfect excuse to miss school. On the way, I reached a critical moment. The body, though an excellent place to hide, does have its limits. I must admit I had not anticipated the problem. As the pressure built, I decided my impulse had been rash. I was brainstorming explanations — Transcendental Meditation? — when Frank spoke.

"Settle down, you two. Everything'll be all right. You behave now, and when your Mom's okay, we'll take some time off. What do you say we go fishing, like last summer at Lake George?"

Inside my half-closed lids appeared a sunfish, the only thing I had ever caught, delicate and fretted as a leaf, with my hook snagged through its pouting upper lip. Frank had broken it with a fish bat. Cramps pinched my body. I thought about fishing. I let the pressure relieve itself.

Toilet training must have been my first self-conscious experience, but I can't remember it, however deep I reach. I'd like to know how it went, because all my assumptions about the way things work began then, then I was first good or bad. When I cut below those lessons, soiling myself so that I had to be scrubbed like a pink shrimp by my husband and a Puerto Rican nurse who giggled, if I could do that, then everything was possible. Curled on an emergency room table, I felt the wind sweep me open.

AFTER BROOKLYN College, I went across the river to Columbia, where I took a pro-seminar in Elizabethan literature and wrote my master's thesis on Sir Philip Sidney. I financed my studies by the sale of my body — to Schrafft's, who wanted only my arms and legs. One hot day in May, staring through sooty leaves at the Jersey haze across the other river, I had my epiphany: academic life was a bearpit. Either I learned to savor pain, or I went back to Schrafft's and hoped for promotion to cocktail waitress. By fall I was a crash-certified Bronx high school English teacher.

Six hundred and seventy-five thousand spelling errors later, I let Frank pick me up in a Food Fair cleansers aisle. Frank is an engineer for a company which distracts shoppers with music until, unhinged, they lose the power of choice and buy whatever they see. Good looking in a preoccupied way, he was very pleasant company when he was happy.

Then a slow dissolve—a different supermarket; add Kelly and Blair; subtract Frank. I have mahogany hair spun like floss, an allergic headache, and a basset slavering in my Country Squire. What I want, as I compare pickle values, is out. I want to be in a musty furnished room over Riverside Drive, to make espresso on my hotplate and blue the air

with Gauloises, and to be in love once more with that parfit gentle knight who hoped poetry might deliver the golden world and who died shot through the thigh in a rainy Dutch skirmish.

THE HOSPITAL staff kept asking me if something was wrong. I held my peace while they took bits of me off for analysis. Eventually they shot me full of tranquilizers, which made it easier to be tranquil when a resident with nothing better to do gave me a pelvic and examined my breasts for lumps. What did worry me was anything like a lie detector, but I guess hospitals don't have such equipment. At last I was put to bed in a noisy room with wired glass windows.

Holding still is a craft, even an art form. It is important to make yourself comfortable at the outset, and to pay careful attention until the skills become habitual. Although I rise from sleep heavily, like a whale to an expected harpoon, I was afraid I might stretch or leap to my feet before memory found me. I soon realized, however, that I could simply stop again. At worst, someone would make a note that I had shown progress.

There are various methods to release tension. I have heard that the Marines who guarded the Mona Lisa during her American appearance relaxed while at parade rest by systematically locking and loosing their knees. Inside a hospital gown, with patience, a whole series of isometrics is possible.

Holding still is a truce with the body. In motion, the body is a domesticated animal, obedient unless in pain, liable to skittishness and uncontrolled appetite, whose manage we all must learn. A body at rest is a habitat. One can move about within it. Given reasonable upkeep, it will provide the occupant with shelter, reassurance, privacy.

Deprivation was the reason we had come, for a chance to catch our lives up. The woman across from me who lay wrapped in a wet sheet, tied to her bed because otherwise she would worm off and beat her swollen forehead on the floor — how disentitled she must have felt before pain became her self-assertion. I congratulated myself on my own technique, though I did admire my neighbor who laughed for hours without intermission. I wished I'd thought of that.

Everyone suspects that madness is a deliberate refusal, an attempt to shirk the responsibilities of being in the world. Perhaps we were all pretenders there, following patterns we'd heard about. Perhaps this withdrawal has always been imitation, back to the first who decided she had rather stick straws in her hair than worry about her figure, her cooking, her man, or her wash. I was tempted to ask the others, some night after lights out, but what if one of them were a spy, hiding here to crack our cover stories? I put the question off until I had finished what I wanted.

What I wanted, I found, was to think about Diane Silber. Diane was

my closest friend once. Amid the constant aroma of baked goods, we improved each other's hair, irregular verbs, and diaries. Diane was nineteen when her mother developed Huntington's Disease. The first symptom was an irregular twitch. As the movement shook her, Mrs. Silber grew quick to anger. Her memory failed her. She could not think straight. By the time the disease was identified, she lay flailing the air, beyond speech. Huntington's has no cure. Mrs. Silber went to a state hospital, where her brain chafed itself until she was paralyzed and demented and then dead.

The reason I wanted to think about Diane was that Huntington's Disease is hereditary, a genetic dominant. Onset is around age forty. Diane had moved after graduation, and we had lost touch. Now we were both thirty-six. Holding still, I imagined how it would be, like a feather drawn along the nerve, the first pulse in the face, the tremor in the hand.

Diane and I had grown up together from kindergarten on. I took a long time recalling her. And when my emotions had found their own level, it astonished me how much I could remember. The way a mark on the wall will swell if you keep yours eyes on it, take form and reveal a constellation of smaller shapes, my life unfolded. Not in a rush or all at once. Not in sequence, either. The past came back jumbled: a wrong answer I gave in Bible class, a hillside full of quartz crystals, the green plastic circle pin that little Phil Rohr gave me one Valentine's Day.

Longer parts followed, like reflections seeping into a pond as the ripples fall. My first summer at camp, when a hurricane dropped sheets of water so that we were flooded in and I came home after two weeks with green mold, my pride, between my toes. Then most of June, Nineteen Fifty-Nine — I finished high school; my sister Norma got married -- up to one muggy afternoon at Rockaway Beach, shells crunching underfoot while I wished college would start already, and wondered how I would know when I was in love, and what it meant that we should never be again as we were.

It is transitions that are hardest to sort into sense. The wave grabs you and hurls you and then falls flat, and there you are, drying tangled on the beach, with no idea of how you came. It all moved so fast. That is why I love the Elizabethans. Their old order crumbles, a larger earth and a longer past breaking it open, different as a chick is from an egg, until it's everyone for herself, mind against the world. And as the wind rises and the ocean rolls, there they stand, poised on the toppling wave, faces alight with eagerness, sharpened by loss; and what the tide means, they sing.

ELECTROSHOCK WAS perfectly straightforward. It was meant to violate me, to force the world inside me. I had just turned from *The Wind In the Willows* to Mendelssohn — everything that ever really

interested me is till there if I wait — when something, I knew, was not right. Then the walls fell in.

I came to in the ward, twitching like Galvani's frog. My thoughts wouldn't keep together. I needed to get up, work the shakes through me, do the St. Vitus jitterbug till I could fall in a heap. Two doctors watched me. *Don't move, I shall not be moved, but it still moves, I shall move the world, everything flows, rocking and reeling, twist and shout.* I bit warm salt out of my tongue. My jaw shook. Even after the watchers left, quietly debating further shocks, I hung on. Any sound would bring them back.

I had seen torture simulated in movies, read about it in the newspapers and the appeals that came in my mail along with requests to help animals, refugees, wilderness, hunger, the wretched of the earth. Policemen clip electrodes to the ear, the genitals, the nipple or lip, douse their prisoner, then let the power flow. I had written to three South American presidents about this. They had now answered.

I swallowed my blood. My tongue hurt. I wanted to cry, but they would see me. It was time to quit. I would get up and walk to the white swinging doors. I just got myself back, the words were ready, here I am, where am I? They would let me go home. My little fling was over; Con Ed had welded shut another psychotic break.

Damned if I would. I'd kill first. I'd pounce from my stillness, scratch their smiles and bite their hands, scream until the walls rang — they'd have to bind and gag me too, locked off by myself. I would show them a mad woman if that was what they wanted.

Rage held me together. I fantasized violence until the pictures tired me. By then my body had calmed down some. Still too shaken to reach my stories or music, I tried to feel the trembling as internal massage. But I could not be still. They would come for me again unless I surrendered, whip my mind to a permanent froth. No rage could stop them. I needed something more deliberate, resilient and stronger.

I pulled away from my body to the problem. How could I refuse to twitch when they said frog? They had me trapped. Legally, they owned me. I would find no underground road to freedom.

I would not accept that. I refused to believe in a world of cattleprod therapy. Yet it was all very well coining slogans; I had no more choice than a television set jangled by a vacuum cleaner. While the physical jolt drained away, my cloudy mind got fuzzier. Each splintered thought lodged there, repeating until I forgot I was thinking it. So now I contemplated blankly my family's first television set, a wooden block big as a packing crate with a screen four inches square. Time and again the image recurred. I found myself in a wish that the channel would change.

In my mind then I made a room. Nothing complicated, just a single picture that I could hold steady. If I kept to the room, the rest would follow. It was a place to stand.

DUSTY SUNLIGHT gilded the furniture: a kitchen chair at an elderly gateleg table, a madras-covered daybed, bright throw cushions, a poster of the Unicorn in Captivity, stacked books and papers. The room was hot, and it reeked of ammoniac smoke. Outside, traffic growled.

I stood by the doorway, against a plank bookcase, and felt my heart race. I had made my way back. This time, I would do it right. No matter the cost, never again would I let go my desire, knowing what the loss was like. I had won the second chance, to live it over, and the relief was as if a car had screamed to a stop inches away.

Footsteps climbed the stairs. That would be the landlady, Mrs. What? Something Italian. I should remember. On the table I found a draft manuscript, the top page full of references to Sidney's *Arcadia*. I had work ahead of me. The steps came toward my room, and I turned. Light picked out the gold on a university press binding, like a harbor beacon.

A woman pulled aside the curtain that covered the doorway. She stepped into the room before she saw me. I could not place her. Some friend from school, probably. It was going to be difficult picking up the threads. I would follow her lead, or say that I felt sick. That was the best idea: to hole up for a couple of days while I went through the papers and address book and got my details back.

"What are you doing in my room?" she asked. Everything inside me stopped, as it is supposed to during a sneeze, then toppled forward.

"I'm sorry," I stammered. My tongue hurt. I had to say something gracious and get out of there. "I know it's a liberty, but I . . . lived here myself once, and since I was in town I thought I'd just take a look. I'll go right away."

"I don't understand." She put her books on the windowsill. "Why are you dressed like that? Are you all right?"

The hospital gown, of course. This was distinctly awkward. I took my head in my hands. My hair felt like rope. I didn't want to think how my face looked. I wanted to leave.

"No," I said. "I don't know. Please, I need help. Can you get help for me?" She would borrow Mrs. Crocetti's phone.

Bio-Sketch——— Linda Grossman

Born in Boise, I left two weeks later, never to return. My family ran a carnival Ferris wheel and ring-toss booth; we travelled a lot. I am 39, a chemical engineer, active in prison reform. Most of my writing to date has been about extruded plastics, but I am at work now on a novel based on the life of Amelia Earhart.

"I guess so." She squinted, feeling that she ought to know me. I let my face hang slack and stupid. My arms trembled. All at once she smiled. "Okay, I'll call someone. You stay here, and we'll take care of you." She touched my shoulder.

When she was gone, I found jeans and a T-shirt in our laundry bag and some change in the table drawer. There wasn't time to do anything about the way I looked. I wanted to write a message, some watchword, but nothing I thought of would make any sense to her. With the robe bundled under my arm, I crept down the stairs.

". . . her in my room. No, nobody I know. At least forty, her hair is grey." She was in the kitchen with Mrs. Crocetti, whose clucking obbligato would cover my noise. I made hotfoot lightfoot for the front door. With any luck, they'd go up again before they called the police, and when they found me gone—she wouldn't miss the clothes for a while—they'd bolt the door, worry, then forget me. Everything in New York is strange.

The street was cold, bright, March or early April afternoon, no place for bare feet. It was time to move. Since the hospital was not yet built, it seemed unnecessary to preserve its property. The robe went into a garbage can under the stoop, and I set out for the subway.

A couple came toward me, people about my age, unremarkably comfortable in hats and topcoats. As my glance met theirs, they focussed past me, and their lifting chins slid sideways. The man slowed, dropped behind the woman, and moved up to her near side, nudging her over, his body a shield from any unpleasantness I might offer. The maneuver, dance-step smooth, told me they were good and married. It told me also how ugly I was.

Propped against a Corvair, children yelled at me to go away, bums belonged downtown. Their laughter shattered. A curly girly pouted at me through a Rexall's window, relishing her pity. My reflection was raw angles and fluff, like a junked armchair. Everyone stared. My naked feet shamed me. Arms across my chest, face down, I made myself walk shivering to the subway burrow.

On a southbound train, I looked for an empty corner, but the passage from car to car was too much for me. As I sat, newspapers rattled up on either side. I felt like explaining how little I wanted their precious attention. I felt like singing hymns and telling the car my life story. So I read placards for the World's Fair, skin lightening cremes, a secretarial school, while panic furled itself in my stomach.

When I looked down, eyes fell from mine. Two women and a man, all in their twenties, turned abruptly to speak together. On the man's lap sat a girl four years old, her playsuit green as the barrettes in her pale hair. She stared at me unembarrassed. Without thinking, I stuck out my tongue, rolled like a tortilla. She hid her face against the man's chest.

Precise as a latch, the instant emptied me. I could not remember how

to breathe. Air shook in my throat, and the newspapers snapped stiff. I pulled my eyes shut. Years in the future, I had ridden this subway home from the park with my babies. I missed them. I wanted to go home. What would happen when my money was spent? Where would I stay? I could not think. Lost outside, I would never get back, never, derelict, be safe any more. My place was closed.

The train stopped. I heard people get on, yelling at each other; cigarette smoke made pins and needles in my nose. I worked to ignore it all. Perhaps I could recover the ward. The train swayed, and I braced myself. The lights went out. Uproar made darkness hideous. Concentration was impossible. I looked up angrily as the light returned.

Four black teenagers jostled in the aisle. What struck me first was their short hair, the partings cut in. Then I felt the tension: newspapers lowered, their pages unturned, furtive glances, restless mouths. Two of the youths shuttled side to side, feinting past each other's guard. There was trouble due. I kept swallowing.

One of them rushed the other. His target dodged around a stanchion, nearly into someone's lap, while the attacker barreled straight at me. I flinched, gasping. He caught a strap, loomed over me, and rebounded away. Where his bulk had been, I saw the little girl held tight to her father. She gurgled with merriment like a sunlit fountain.

I looked again, and she was right. They were at play. *Oh,* I thought. *Oh.* Although I did not feel like crying, suddenly my eyes were wet.

Almost everyone got off at Times Square. Because I wanted well out of my former neighborhood, I rode down to Fourteenth. Dusk had set-

tled when I came upstairs; the store lights were on. At a hotdog stand, the man gave me coffee from his thermos and refused money. His radio played "Who Wears Short Shorts?" followed by the latest hit from England's grand new brand new band, the Dave Clark Five.

Across the Avenue of the Americas, two policemen sat smoking in a prowl car. I had kicked the habit without noticing. The policeman in the shotgun seat decided as I neared him that I was not dangerous, just bothersome. His face, dark and aquiline, lost all expression.

"Excuse me, officer." A yard from his window, I bent so that our eyes were level. "I'm afraid I have a problem. You see,"—I laughed nervously—"I can't think who I am. I mean, I've tried, but it doesn't work." My hands fluttered ineffectually. "Can you help me?"

He jerked his thumb toward the rear seat and turned to watch me get in. The driver looked up at his mirror.

"Are you in a hurry?" he asked my reflection. "We're on our break."

I shook my head. One still facing me, they took up their discussion whether he should pay to have his basement finished as a rec room or try the work himself. I stared at my feet. Amnesia should go well. Nobody was likely to claim me. The state could provide me with an official identity, and the rest, I imagined, I would make up as I went along. ■

WHY WE CHOSE THIS STORY

An incredible piece of writing craftsmanship, "Black Hole" takes us on a journey through a woman's mind as it is disintegrating. The story caused much discussion here as to whether or not she merely went insane, or actually received deliverance by escaping into another time continuum . . . a parallel universe perhaps available through the mysterious void of a black hole? This raised other questions; for instance, if a person hallucinates during a schizophrenic episode, are his images imaginary—or perhaps very real things that actually exist in the alternate dimension the person has attained? We on the other side will probably never know.

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bring. No one who knows what the scientists of the world are doing and saying will panic at the thought that our government might soon be equipped with electronic mind-reading devices (they may be possible). Nor will they eagerly and uncritically accept the boon of immortality (it would be more of a curse). Nor are they inevitably astonished when "quick and easy" solutions and technological "fixes" conceal nasty, tricky surprises (psychosurgery, pesticides, pharmaceuticals, drugs, the automobile, even irrigation — the list is endless). They know that the scientists can perform miracles, but they also know that bureaucracies are inherently incompetent, that everything is connected to everything else, and that there is no such thing as a free lunch. They are often optimistic skeptics.

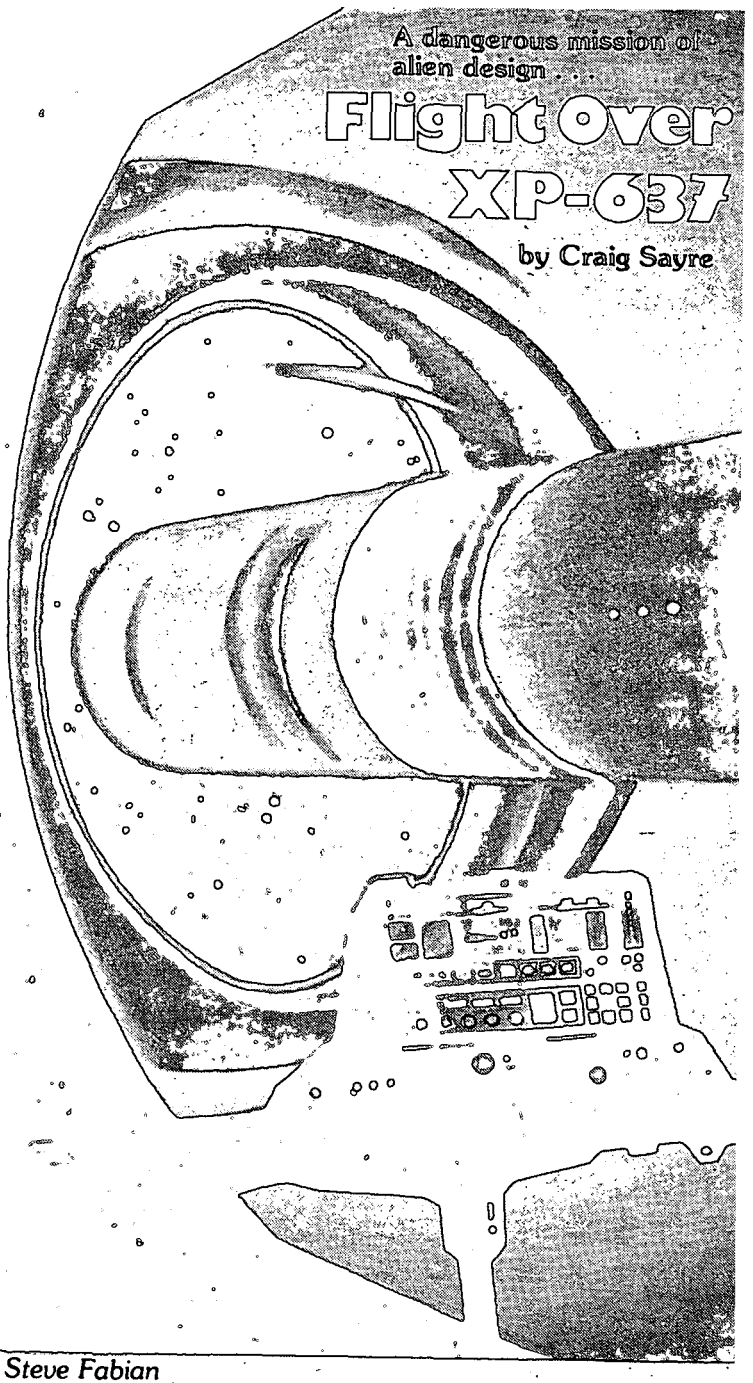
The knowledge of science is not a vaccine available only to an elite few. It is not published only in scientific journals and monographs, but also in the specialized science magazines, in newspapers, in general-circulation magazines, and in books. It is available to all the various levels of the reading public, and some of it is even on television. All of these sources warn of the future to some extent, though the more general publications can be more often a cause of future shock than a cure of it. By the time the newspapers discuss a scientific discovery, for instance, the future it may bring about is already so near at hand that it is shocking. And neither the newspapers nor the magazines explore possibility so much as they do probability. They're into gene transplants now, but the scientists have been discussing the possibilities of repairing damaged genes and supplying new ones for decades.

Still, the vaccine against future shock is available to each and every one of us. If we are to live happy and trauma-free lives, then, it behooves us to be alert to the scientific influences that will shape our future. ■

A dangerous mission of alien design . . .

Flight Over XP-637

by Craig Sayre



Illustrated by Steve Fabian

AINST UTHORITA paced ruminatively about his behavioral observation laboratory on board the star vessel Orrespone, now in a deep circular orbit about exploratory planet 637. Uthorita was a scientist, considered one of the best planetary theorists and researchers of extraterrestrial behavior on Giate. He had pioneered the concept of studying alien creatures by molecular trans-alteration, a process by which the molecules of one's body could be altered and rearranged such that one could assimilate the physical appearance and characteristics of an alien creature. Uthorita believed that the best way to study the behavior of a new alien species was to become one of them and live as they did.

The aging reptilian paused in front of the battery of electronic equipment that monitored the physiological functions of his research assistants on the planet below.

When first used, Uthorita's theories and experiments had proved stunningly successful, yielding a wealth of new information on strange and exotic creatures throughout the star system. But in recent years, there had been a rising chorus of opposition to his methods, particularly when they were applied to the study of creatures living in a violent environment.

The recent events on XP-637 would surely strengthen the hand of Uthorita's opponents. So much had gone wrong with this project. And now, Uthorita had just received word that one of his ablest assistants had almost been killed while investigating a species of creature on the planet.

Uthorita slowly continued his walk, tugging at the lapels of his open white lab coat while contemplating the consequences of this latest adversity.

It mattered little to him that the Chancellor of Science could demand his resignation. Uthorita was primarily preoccupied with the fate of the injured Saff Enever. And beneath his concern for Enever was an underlying fear of failure. He and his associates had put so much work into this project, and so far they had obtained a considerable quantity of invaluable data on many of the creatures on XP-637. But all that would be lost in the clamor for his dismissal, that incessantly rankled his scales.

Awakened from his thoughts by the gentle sigh of the laboratory door opening, Uthorita stopped pacing and watched his adjutant step briskly into the sterile room.

"Where have you been?" Uthorita snapped in a crusty voice. "Never mind, never mind," he continued before Oistur Rotect could answer the question. "How is Enever?"

Rotect perused the withered saurian features of his mentor; the large, oval, protruding eyes that struggled to remain alert, the hesitating nostrils that fought to draw an even breath, the flinching

corners of the mouth that never smiled, all told of the months of excruciating work in space without relief. Rotect knew Uthorita was too old for this type of project now. This would be Uthorita's last mission into deep space. And Rotect, like everyone else on board, had steadfastly remained loyal to Uthorita and wanted this final project to end in success.

"The medicals think they can return him to his own form now. An hour ago, they weren't so sure. Enever is in the molecular recombination chamber at present." Rotect paused, then added, "If all goes well, he will have his own body by the end of the day. After that, no one knows what will happen."

"Well, if he is to die, at least he will die as himself, and not some sordid alien," Uthorita speculated sadly. "I should never have let the two of you talk me into such a dangerous course. I should not have allowed Enever to be transformed into that creature."

"We needed the data to complete the project," Rotect defended the move, and Uthorita knew he was right. "We have to collect data in whatever manner possible. You know better than I, the recombination chamber can only do so much," Rotect commented while jamming one of his gnarled fists into his lab coat.

When Uthorita failed to respond, Rotect continued, "Of the thousands of creatures on XP-637, the chamber can transform us only into those that are approximately the same size as we are. That limits us greatly in our research. Enever and I believed that it was a reasonable risk, in view of the fact that no one had ever been transformed into that species before." Rotect bowed his wrinkled head. "I guess we were wrong."

"No," Uthorita replied. "I am to blame for any failure. I should have known better. I should have assigned Enever another creature, one that leads a less violent life."

"That would have been very difficult," Rotect stated. "On XP-637 life feeds on violence and death."

"Perhaps you're right," Uthorita agreed, then pondered aloud, "A most baffling planet, this XP-637. It is the first one we've encountered where the mammals, who were the last to arrive, are the highest order of life, while the reptiles are one of the lowest. Even the birds are more evolved. On all the other planets we've encountered, where mammals, birds and reptiles coexist, the reptiles evolved before the mammals and birds, and consequently advanced the furthest. Do you suppose that could be an explanation for all the violence on XP-637?"

"That is a possibility," Rotect replied. "That's one of the items we're trying to determine."

Of the 637 exploratory planets studied, Rotect had personally explored fifteen and participated in the exploration of another twenty. He knew that Uthorita had headed planetary projects of at least twice that many.

"It's tragic, but we may never find out," Uthorita sighed. "We have over a hundred transformed researchers on the planet's surface now and this latest incident may condemn the entire project."

Uthorita subconsciously began rubbing the virescent scales on his forehead, and Rotect automatically glanced at the five shriveled fingers on Uthorita's hand. The sixth had been lost in a recombination chamber malfunction years ago.

"I stopped by Communications on my way here," Rotect stated.

"And?" Uthorita flared, startling Rotect.

"A complete report of the incident has been sent to the Chancellor of Science," Rotect continued.

Uthorita hissed in exasperation. "Then indeed, it is the end of the project." He slammed his good hand on a cluttered counter top.

Rotect jumped at the unexpected crack, and almost dropped the folder he'd been carrying. "Not necessarily. The Chancellor must review all the facts."

He tried to sound as optimistic as possible, but his statement failed to offer any encouragement to Uthorita.

Rotect tried again. "He may just redirect the project." Uthorita's somber expression remained intact. "The communicators gave me the transcript of Enever's last transmission."

That recaptured Uthorita's attention. "I didn't think they could make any sense out of it."

"They were finally able to computer-enhance the recording several times. It's still garbled in places, and the beginning was beyond retrieval, but you can still get a feeling for what happened."

Rotect opened the folder and handed its contents to Uthorita.

Uthorita glanced at the first page, than at Rotect. "What do all those creatures down there call XP-637?"

"Earth," Rotect answered.

"Earth," Uthorita repeated. The word seemed to stick in his throat. "That's a very odd name, but then, there are many odd creatures there." He returned to the first page and began to read:

Bio-Sketch — Craig Sayre

I live in El Cajon, a suburb of San Diego, with my wife, Laurie, and our two sons, Sean and Scott. I work for the Navy in San Diego as a research physicist, testing and evaluating infrared detectors for the Army, the Air Force, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

For most of my life, I lived in Northridge, California, near Los Angeles. I attended Loyola University of Los Angeles from 1965 to 1969, and received a bachelor's degree in physics. For the next four years, I spent most of my time attending the University of Southern California, or employed as a member of the U.S. Army in Stuttgart, West Germany. After declining an invitation to re-enlist, I returned to USC and completed my work for a Master's degree in physics. I began work at the Naval Electronics Laboratory Center, now the Naval Ocean Systems Center, in 1973. Although I have had numerous scientific reports and papers published, this will be my first non-technical publication.

. . . (INCOHERENT) . . .AND flying in three parallel V-formations at . . . (unintelligible) . . . altitude. There were thirty-eight others in the flight, besides myself. I was between Formation Leader Stanley and Wing Guide 2nd Class Wignan in C-group. Flight Commander Montgomery was leading all three formations. Except for routine navigational instructions, no one had broken silence since we took off.

Within an hour of our departure, the first soft pink rays of dawn were emanating from the southeast horizon, lending some definition to the achromatic landscape below. High overhead, the scattered puffs of cumulus clouds gave stark contrast to the emerging sapphire sky. The weather appeared to be holding and we had a slight tail wind.

Far below, two sweeping highways merged into one at a congested junction. Most of the creeping vehicles had extinquished their lights by now. We made a slight course correction in order to fly parallel to the highway that ran north. We continued to follow it until it angled to the northeast.

As the sun began its journey across the early spring sky, the serene countryside took on the form of velvet marshes stretching in all directions, broken only by an irregular pattern of small farms connected by narrow, unpaved roads.

Montgomery motioned for us to veer a little more to the west. Blue Flight lost four birds yesterday while flying over that clump of mangled trees just ahead. All three formations banked into a gentle turn to the left, then straightened again. Everyone stared at the serried undergrowth far to our right to see if there would be any response to our maneuver. But all was quiet.

Ahead of us, I could see over three dozen distinct objects spread out in a line, traveling at our course, speed and altitude. We were now following Red Flight, which was about a mile in front of us.

Our anxiety rose as we approached the shallow stream ahead, the southern boundary of Demon's Strip. Everyone felt the tension, the fear, as we began our flight over the hundred mile wide stretch of bogs and marshes, over which there have been more losses than any other comparable portion of land. We instinctively began to go a little faster, push a little harder. We were more alert, scanning the swampy terrain below for the slightest hint of trouble.

The strain was particularly telling on those who had made these flights many times before. These hardened veterans knew what could be expected. They had repeatedly lived through the horrors of seeing their fellow comrades blasted from the skies. One notable old flier, Wing Protect 1st Class Curtis, was making his last flight. He had amassed many stories of courage and heroism which he would tell over and over to the younger fliers during the long winter nights when no one could fly. Much of what I have previously reported has come from Curtis' recollections. He longed to spend his final days in peace and

solitude.

The younger, greener fliers, though still afraid, relished the thrill and excitement of risking their lives to reach their home waters. Several had stood around before takeoff, boasting of their abilities to outmaneuver anything that was thrown up against them. I myself, having never made the flight before, tended to be very apprehensive about it all, and I had no intention of proving how brave I was.

Suddenly, the silence was broken. "Did you see it?" Wing Guide 3rd Class Gilman called out. "Low, and just ahead, next to that small patch of water." He waited for someone to verify his sighting, then said, "A flash, or reflection, right where the sun hits the shoreline."

Everyone strained to catch a glimpse of the light. Binoculars? Perhaps a gun sight? Or was it merely a tossed aside beer can?

Montgomery wasn't taking any chances, even though Red Flight had passed uneventfully over the pond. He knew it was a common tactic to allow the first flight to pass unscathed, then ambush the following one. He began to lead the group in a wide arc to the left, while dispatching Wing Protect 3rd Class Longly to fly reconnaissance over the area. Longly quickly rolled out of formation and dove towards the shallow water. He buzzed the shoreline several times at high speed while the flight continued its detour, then climbed hard and fast to rejoin his formation. He hadn't seen anything unusual.

By the time we were back on course, Red Flight was far ahead and just barely visible.

The sun was well on its way towards mid-morning and the subtle hues of the dawn light were now sharply contrasting shades of green and brown. The sky above was a solid, brilliant blue, interrupted occasionally by the high, white puffy clouds.

Then, without warning, several flashes of light twinkled directly below Red Flight. Almost immediately, two of their fliers tumbled wildly out of control, then plummeted to earth. We watched helplessly as another was hit. That one tried to keep up but, exhausted and mortally wounded, he soon began to descend.

Montgomery gave the order to climb and turn west. Another detour. I looked towards Red Flight as we headed for our new course. They were taking a terrible pounding. By now, they had lost almost half their flight, yet they still held their formation and pressed on through the withering fire.

Each among us must have shared the same thought. Would it be our turn next?

But we flew on without interruption. However, we had lost precious time again by avoiding dangerous air space, and there was little we could do to make it up.

"Flak ahead!" Flight Leader Stanley shouted.

I could see nothing in the sky, but there were the telltale flashes on

the ground. They seemed to be everywhere, sending up a barrage of shot. But what were they firing at?

Montgomery hesitated. Should he order another detour, or risk flying through? Finally, he dipped his wings, the signal for the group to turn.

But as we straightened out on our new heading, the entire area below errupted with the deadly orange flashes.

"I'm hit!" cried Flight Leader Byron as he dropped back from A-group. He struggled to remain with us, but it was hopeless.

"Commander, help me!" screamed someone else. It was Wing Guide 3rd Class Dickinson. His entire left wing had been shot away. He spun crazily earthward and crashed into a shallow pool of stagnant water.

"Come on! Keep up! Keep going!" Montgomery shouted encouragement to everyone.

We could hear the hideous pounding of the dreaded guns below, while straining for every ounce of speed we could muster. The eerie snaps of the projectiles breaking the sound barrier were all around us, and the air was filled with a foul, acid smell.

"Get back in formation!" Montgomery yelled to a couple of green fliers from B-group who had just broken away in panic and were diving wildly for any cover the ground could provide.

Yet both ignored Montgomery's command and continued their descent. Midway down, one took a direct hit, and was blown apart. The other managed to reach the swampy terrain, but was quickly blasted into oblivion.

"Stay at altitude!" Formation Leader Stanley ordered everyone. "Keep up!"

But Curtis could not. He was dropping back further and further.

"You go on," he yelled to everyone. "I'll be all right."

But he wasn't. Within seconds he was struck twice. He coughed and slowed, stuggling to keep his nose up, then rolled and deliberately dove right at one of the gun positions. For an instant, it seemed as though every weapon was trained on old Curtis. He let out a terrible raging shriek just before all the guns fired simultaneously. It was doubtful that any part of him ever hit the ground.

He did not die in vain, though. He bought us the precious seconds we needed to reach a small, low hanging cloud for cover. When the flight emerged from the other side, the air was silent and peaceful again, as though nothing had happened.

For the remainder of the day, we flew on unmolested. No one would talk about what had happened, but we all knew we had been extremely fortunate. The flight had lost only five birds, which was a remarkable achievement for the Demon's Strip run at this time of year.

I wondered what had become of Red Flight, which I hadn't seen since we took evasive action when they came under fire. Had any of them

made it at all?

. . . (pause in transmission) . . .

IT IS late afternoon now and our landing site looms on the horizon ahead. There will be much jubilation when we reach our destination, so I have compiled the events of today during the previous hour and transmitted them to you, rather than wait until I've landed. Celebrations after a flight such as this one are in the grand tradition and I may be unable to send any more data for a few days. I have tried to be as thorough as possible in the allotted time, and I will answer all questions at a debriefing when I return. I will however, transmit the landing proceedings as they occur.

. . . (pause in transmission) . . .

We are circling over the site now, and there are several who have already landed. They must be the remainder of Red Flight. They appear to be very quiet though.

Montgomery motions for A-group to begin their approach. One by one, they break away from their V-formation, roll and begin their descent.

. . . (pause in transmission) . . .

The first ones are touching down when Montgomery signals B-group to follow.

. . . (pause in transmission) . . .

Finally it is our turn. I am watching two fliers on my right roll out. Now I am rolling and heading for earth. It's so beautiful up here, I really . . . (incoherent) . . .

. . . (too much static) . . . Two fliers from A-group are scrambling to take off again. That seems very strange. I am at less than a thousand feet now and I can't locate anyone nearby to find out what is happening.

Perhaps I could — no wait! They're yelling something. "Decoy, decoy!" I think that's what they're saying.

Now everyone is trying to take off. Oh my . . . (sounds of gunfire and explosions) . . . It's an ambush! We're under attack from all sides! . . . (more gunfire, cries for help in the background) . . .

. . . (incoherent) . . . desperately trying to get airborne, but they're being shot down almost before they lift off. It's horrible! . . . (unintelligible) . . . a massacre!

Those in C-group that are still flying have aborted their landing approach and are scattering in all directions . . . I'm starting to climb and turn south . . . smoke everywhere.

No! Montgomery is going down!

I've got to . . . (impact sound, static, Enever has been injured) . . . I'm hit! I . . . I can't move! I'm falling! . . . I'm going in! Rotect, help me! Rotect! . . . (impact).

Uthorita sighed as he slapped the stack of pages down on the counter. What a foolish thing to let Enever do, he thought. "Did you

have much trouble getting him back?"

"When his emergency finder signal stopped, we immediately instigated a search. He wasn't hard to locate," Rotect answered. "But we had to wait until dark before we could recover him. At least those dogs didn't get him though."

Both scientists turned as a medical entered the lab. "I thought you'd want to know," he said, then smiled. "Enever is out of danger. He's going to be all right."

A wave of relief overcame the old researcher. "Thank you," Uthorita said in a low, raspy voice.

"It will be some time before he can return to his work, though," the medic said.

"Perhaps all of us could use a rest," Uthorita responded.

The medic started to leave, then paused. "Oh, I almost forgot. A communicator gave me this to pass along to you."

He handed the message to Uthorita, then departed. Rotect could see the top priority seal on the outside.

Uthorita suddenly looked bleak again. "It's from the Chancellor of Science," he muttered as he slowly opened the envelope.

But as his tired eyes scanned the contents, his expression lightened considerably.

"Well? Well?" Rotect asked excitedly.

"It seems as though the Chancellor isn't too pleased with some of our techniques and decisions," Uthorita paraphrased, "But he is giving us ten more days to complete the project."

"I'm sure we can be finished by then," Rotect said enthusiastically.

"Yes, I believe you're right," Uthorita answered musingly and Rotect detected just a hint of a saurian smile. "You know, it's really a pity we couldn't become the hunter instead of the hunted."

"Sir?" Rotect asked, having no idea what Uthorita was talking about.

"Think of it, Rotect," Uthorita was already mapping his next project. "We have only one side of a classical confrontation that takes place all the time on XP-637, that of the hunted. Suppose we could see it from the other side, the hunter's point of view. What a thesis that would be."

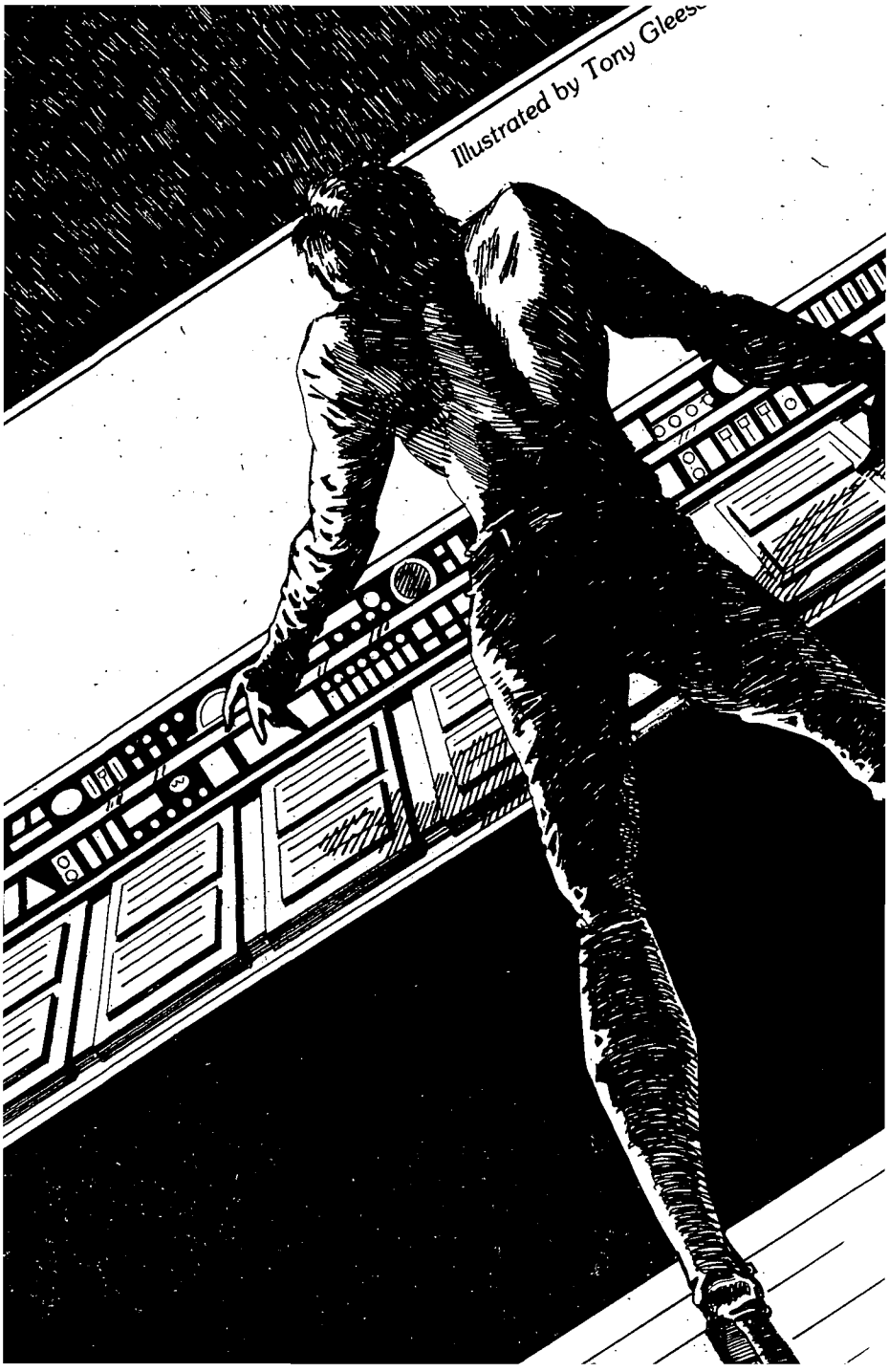
"You know that's impossible," Rotect said. "None of us could ever be transformed into a human. They're much too large. Why, we had enough trouble transforming Evever into a migrant duck."

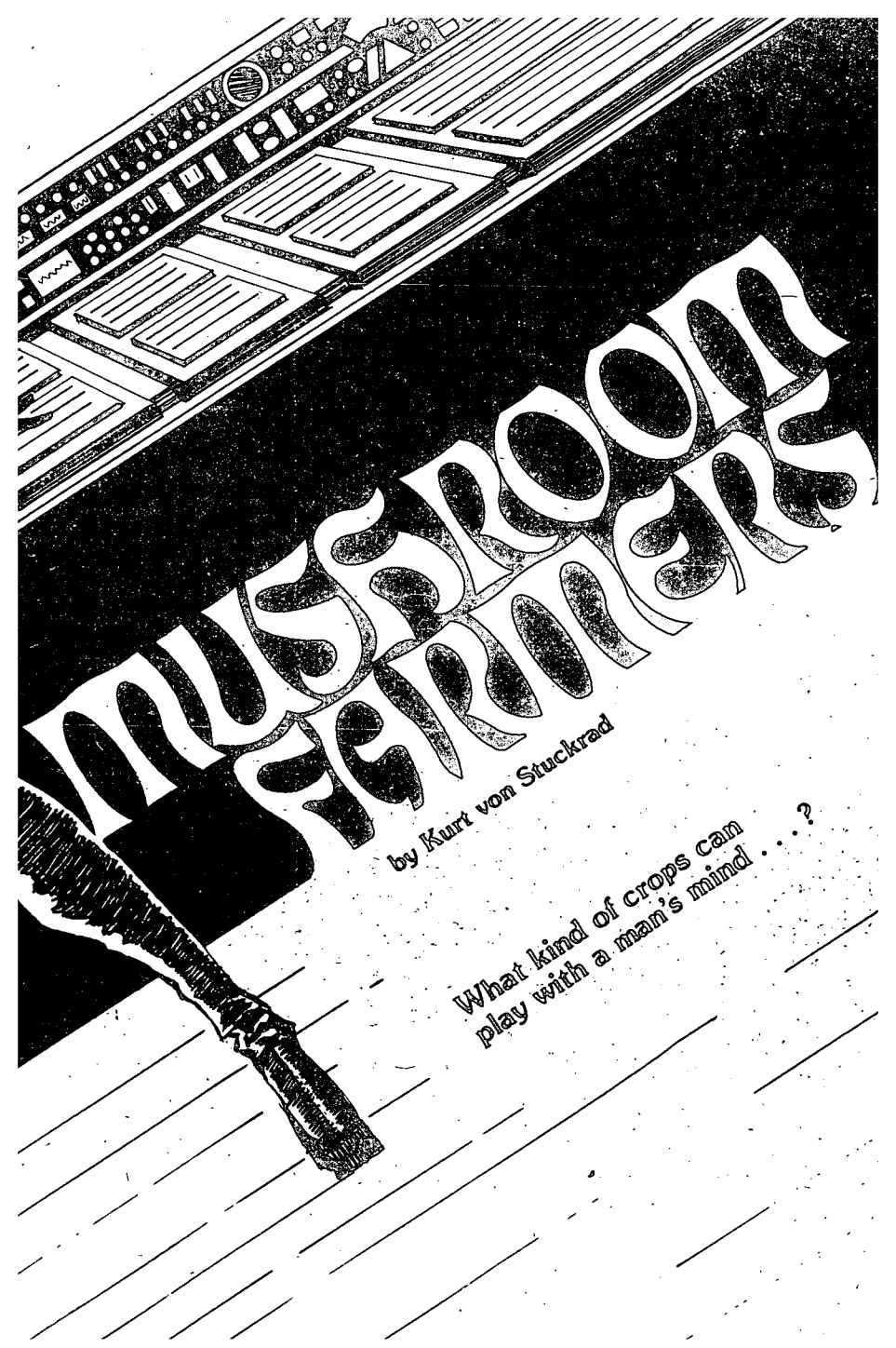
"Well, like I said, it's just a pity, that's all," Uthorita said. "Strange creatures, those humans. Someday, though, we'll devise a way to actively study their behavior too."

"Some day," Rotect echoed. ●

WHY WE CHOSE THIS STORY

This one was very well written, and we simply couldn't resist the twist!


Illustrated by Tony Glees


MUSHROOM FARMERS
by Kurt von Stuckrad
What kind of crops can play with a man's mind . . . ?

ROGER AND I casually presented our identification cards to the almost laughable guard at the main gate. He began to give us the once-over. I found it indeed ironic that two seasoned mushroom farmers like us had to identify ourselves to this runny-nosed draftee barely two months out of boot. We had never seen this guard before, and for all we knew, he might not even belong here. What gave him the authority to so brazenly challenge us? Perhaps it was the M.P. band on his arm that commanded our respect. More than likely it was the M-10 strapped to his hip that halted any protest.

I curled up in my jacket and decided not to worry about something as trivial as a new gate guard. After all, the hands on this farm changed faster than diapers on a newborn. Still, didn't I deserve a little more respect than a sloppy salute and a dirty look? The past six years of my life had gone into farming. I was a real pro, an expert, a vet. Worst of all, I loved it.

"WAKE UP, Zeb!"

It was Roger's deep voice that prodded me to full awareness of my surroundings. His use of my middle name, Zeb (short for Zebulon), was particularly annoying today. If I ever found the loud-mouthed clerk that blabbed the meaning of the infamous middle initial, I would surely break the point of every one of his pencils: preferably in his ear.

"Why so sour, Zeb? It's a beautiful day; rain, wind and a dark sky. The weather man said hail before noon. Let's face it, it's a perfect day to be on the farm."

My normal early morning blahs were always tempered by this bundle of wild, carefree wit. How he had put up with me for the past five years I'll never know. I forced a thin smile and replied in my best "Down East" accent, "Ayup, Sure is."

We dismounted our van and sloshed up the wet gravel path that led past the silos. The rain was turning cold and icy against our unprotected skin. I noticed the grass around one of the silo hatches was a little taller than it should be. A mental note was recorded in my brain to include this in my report. Some poor hand would get chewed out good for his little oversight, but that was the way it had to be on a farm.

When we reached the armored farmhouse, a small slit slipped open in the exclusive door.

"I.D.'s, sirs?" came the curt request from within.

Again we handed over the infernal piece of plastic that so neatly compressed our lives. The opening vanished even more rapidly than it had appeared. A moment later came the clicks of the dual electric bolts and the hum of the door's extra duty motor. The massive vault-like door swung open.

We entered quickly as the door was already starting to close. The guard inside snapped a salute somewhat smarter than the boy at the

gate. We returned the salute as the door slammed shut behind us. The thundering sound seemed to have a finality about it; the finality of the grave.

"Captain Roger L. Haines?" spoke the hand.

"That's me," smiled Roger as he took back his card and signed the register.

"Captain William Z. Helmbold?" he said, handing over my card as I signed.

"Thank you. First day on the job?" I asked.

"Second, sir," replied the airman while displaying a full set of snow white teeth. "I'm Danny Turner, sir."

"How do you like the job so far, Danny?"

"Duty's dull but I like the country." He smiled wider and continued, "I was born and raised here."

"The hell you say!" chortled Roger. "I didn't think anybody came from Shin Pond, Maine."

"Just me, sir."

"As for it being dull, just remember, if it gets lively it could well be deadly."

Danny nodded wide-eyed, and whistled as we turned for the elevator. The doors closed behind us and Roger hit the down button. Our stomachs jumped into our eyes as the car began its rapid descent down the seven-hundred-foot shaft. In the darkness beyond, bedrock, flint, concrete and steel formed our shield. Man and nature had combined to form a defense that the engineers claimed could withstand a direct hit from one of the "Big Boys." I hoped I would never find out if they were right.

The doors opened on a small, brightly lit room. The rectangular cell was completely bare save for the far end. There, two short pillars stood like sentries by another set of sliding doors. Fresh air scented with rain flowed from the illuminated vents on the floor. One could hardly believe the depth we had reached. It seemed the doors before us should open onto the same rainy day we had just left.

We walked to the pedestals; Roger to the left, I to the right. From around our necks we fished our silver keys. Simultaneously we inserted the keys in the holes at the top of each pillar and turned. The doors before us slid open.

"We have come to free you!" shouted Roger. "Arise, you have nothing to lose but your chains!"

"I don't get those 'till I get home!" responded a cheerful voice from inside. "Get your asses in here! You're five minutes late, you know!"

"My fault, Black Jack!" I replied rather sheepishly. "I overslept."

The towering Black man laughed loudly as he stood to shake my hand.

"you haven't changed a bit from school!" He gripped my hand hard

and pressed until I made a face. "Still can't take it, can you?"

"The Academy was eleven years ago and I just got older, not stronger."

The former Air Force Academy all-star end smiled widely with satisfaction. If anything, Jack's strength had become even more impressive than it was back when he won his nickname.

"Where's your partner?" I asked, looking around the electronic "farmhouse" room. Just then the door opened from the bunker's bathroom. Out stepped a ravishingly beautiful, young female captain. Her skin was the same dark shade of brown as Jack's. Without a doubt, she filled out the standard tan coverall uniform better than any soldier I had ever seen.

"Gents, meet Emma White, my new partner." Jack was grinning wider than ever now.

"Who did you do what to to rate this?" asked Roger before letting out an approving whistle.

"It's one of Great White Witch Doctor Anderson's new ideas," responded Jack. "He's always coming up with some crazy new experiment."

"This one is not so crazy," broke in Emma. "The theory is simple: if a member of each sex is used to make up each team, tension will be greatly reduced and expected performance levels should be equally improved."

Roger cut in, "Yeah, and we can start up the whole bloody world again, don't forget that."

"My wife will never go for it," I added.

"Don't worry captains," Emma said firmly. "All the ladies involved are just like me—strictly business."

Jack rolled his eyes at that remark. He had also been the class stud and no woman known had ever turned him down.

"Shall we debrief, gentlemen?" asked Emma.

We set about the task of exchanging data files. Next we made a joint inspection of all the equipment. The whole operation was in class A order, just like always. All the right lights glowed and all the needles pointed to the right spots.

Jack and Emma unstrapped their holsters that contained the short-barreled .357 magnum revolvers and presented them to us. We drew, checked the cylinders and replaced the powerful weapons. Once the arms had been transferred, full control of the farm went over to the new crew: Roger and I.

"See you again, boys," mimicked Jack in Down-Eastern, his own southern accent blending comically with the Maine brogue. "You best be good or Anderson might set you up with one of these." Jack winked and pointed at Emma.

We escorted them to the inner doors and then watched as the pair

boarded the elevator for the ride topside. Emma hit the up button but as she did, Jack threw his massive arms around her waist.

"Now I got you without that gun, woman!" he exclaimed, firmly.

The doors slid shut just as Jack prepared to plant a wild kiss on her protesting lips.

"I wonder how our businesswoman handled that!" howled Roger.

"We'll have thirty-six hours to guess," I replied. "But if she really is all business, Jack could be in a lot of trouble."

The inner doors swished shut and clicked into their locked position. We were on our own.

WE STARTED setting up our checking schedule and locking in our code verifiers and alert frequencies. Then it was time for a close look at the farmyard and we turned our attention to the softly glowing monitors before us.

There were all the chicks in all their silver glory. Inside them, the seeds they digested were ready to sprout into mushrooms at a moment's notice. We looked hard and long at the spectacle, silently pondering our awesome responsibility.

What we called chicks, anyone else would refer to as Hercules missiles. We had six of the sleek, finned beauties sitting primed and ready for launch. Each missile had a range that could take it to any spot on Earth. In fact, they could be fired at a speed that would allow them to break free of Earth and go on their merry way through the solar system and beyond.

The mushroom seeds were the M.I.R.V.ed warheads crowded into the nose of each chick. In the years since the Cold War of the Fifties, the intended yield of the seeds had constantly been changing. One series was of moderate blast and radiation. Another was of large blast and no radiation. Still another group was just the opposite. Regardless of how clean or dirty, or how big or small the blast, the same ominous mushroom cloud always resulted. Hence, mushroom seeds; and we, the people who sent seed-filled chicks from silos to yield a harvest, just had to be "farmers."

The series of seeds in the chicks today were the worst in history. Each chick carried six warheads of six megatons each. To make them extra deadly they were beefed up with residual Plutonium radiation. So not only would the weapons kill at time of detonation, but go right on killing for fifty years thereafter. Now Roger and I were in charge of this threat to human life. Two-hundred and sixteen megatons of blast fire and death all at our fingertips. Thirty-six different targets would be atomized should we ever "harvest" our crop. A normal man would crumble under the pressure; a farmer, therefore, had to be more than a normal man.

This shift, Roger and I were not worried in the least about unleashing

doom upon our fellow man. In fact, today all seemed right with the world. For a change, almost everyone was at peace.

The Russians had settled their trade differences with West Europa; the Chi-Coms had peacefully absorbed Taiwan, and South Africa had reenfranchised the minority population. Granted, the Mid-East was mad enough to spit oil. At long last, the West had perfected a cheap alcohol-based gasoline substitute. Since laser and microwave power had replaced fuel oil, and new synthetics were not including petroleum elements, the Arabs' only real market was gasoline. Now we had taken away the tool they had used to blackmail us. But there was no threat of the Mid-East using their nukes against us; at least not while we grew their food for them.

But it wasn't always so easy. Five years ago, just after Roger came on, we spent three shifts staring wide eyed at our fail-safe boxes. The Russians had launched a conventional offensive on the West German frontier. The U.S. warned them to back off or else. Our threat didn't even slow them down. About then the Common Market nations joined to form West Europa. As a common power, they counter attacked. By issueing each soldier a single shot anti-tank weapon called a "Panzerfaust," they neutralized the Russian threat in two weeks. Not only did they beat them back but they also retook East Germany. While the war only lasted two weeks, two lifetimes passed for every farmer on duty. We had never come so close to a nuclear war, and I'd prayed to God we never did again.

Bio-Sketch — Kurt von Stuckrad

I was born August 27, 1954.

While in high school I recall being told more than once that I had absolutely no aptitude for writing whatsoever. Perhaps it was a wish to prove that statement wrong that motivated me to submit my first story.

I spent four uneventful years at Wright State University majoring in sociology. I have always had a tremendous interest for people and the way they interact in society. In 1976 I graduated with my Bachelor of Arts degree.

In October of that same year I married my college sweetheart, Sue. We decided to make our home in the Dayton area as well and now reside in a lovely little house in a quiet, wooded setting. We are both interested in gardening and nature, so for us our home is truely a paradise.

My heritage is pure German. In fact, my ancestors were of the ranks of German nobility; the military order. If our country remains at peace, I may well have the distinction of being the first male member of my family not to enter some branch of the military in over five hundred years.

For recreation I very much enjoy target shooting. While I in no way can be considered a hunter (I fear I'm too soft hearted for that sport), I am a pretty fair paper puncher. On a few occasions I have even been known to launch an arrow or two.

I am an avid reader of history; subscribing to the theory that by understanding man's past mistakes we can prevent future ones. When finances allow, I enjoy collecting weaponery and military momentos from past human failures.

I use science fiction and fantasy purely as an escape from reality. I consider it my opiate and find myself completely addicted. One of my greatest thrills was being notified of the acceptance of my first story by *AMAZING*.

I plan to keep writing whether or not anybody publishes it, so stand warned world; here I come.

This shift was proving to be normal, calm, almost restful. Every fifteen minutes, either Roger or I would run through the check list, assuring the chicks were in perfect order. The rest of the time was devoted to eating, sleeping, talking, thinking, reading and an occasional game of cards or chess.

There was no outside communication with the exception of the alert channel. The alert channel was a pre-set radio frequency changed at the start of each shift. It connected only to NORAD launch control. Final harvest instructions would come over this band. So far it had only been used for drills.

Between our alert channel, scramblers, and the fail-safe verifier, supposedly nothing could go wrong. That is, unless the President went "bananas," and a few former presidents had come very close.

Outside TV, radio and telephone were all denied us. It was believed such outside influences might be used to subvert our judgement and cause us to hesitate or fail in our duty. Any entertainment we wished had to be provided by ourselves.

We did have an emergency button that could summon help if a situation arose we could not handle ourselves. It had become a point of pride not to use this, however. The last time anybody had hit the darn thing was in 1982, and they only used it then because some fool had almost choked to death on a fish bone. Since then, the button was known as the "boner button."

So the watch went on. Everything was smooth and normal. Another ten minutes and our relief team would be in and Roger and I could drive back home. I was more than ready to get going.

I put on a fresh pot of coffee for the next team. It smelled so good I poured a cup for myself. I called over my shoulder to ask if Rober wanted some. I got no reply. When I turned around to ask him again, I noticed why he had not answered me. Roger was caught in a trance, his full attention fixed on the monitor before him. He was staring, transfixed before the image of the steaming missiles.

I had seen him like this once before but had failed to report it. This time was different; he was too far gone. He didn't respond to my voice at all. I hated to admit it, but I knew what was wrong; Roger had come down with a bad case of "Mushroom Poisoning." He had all the classic symptoms; the fixed gaze, failure to respond, sweating, and dilated pupils.

"Oh, Lord!" I shouted as I dumped hot coffee all over myself. "Not you, Roger!" I knew he didn't hear me.

Every once in a while, some poor farmer would suddenly fully realize the awesome power he held over life and death of so many people, really seeing how people would die in agony under the atomic fire, and sensing the terror of those who saw the blast and could only wait for the lethal shock-wave to snuff out their lives. The farmer would see it all and know the fault was his.

Until now, we had always been lucky. The other cases had happened just before or after duty. This time, however, the luck had vanished. The operations manual had a clear-cut solution for this situation; hit the emergency button. I knew this was no time for pride but I hesitated just a second to glance at my watch. Our duty time was up.

On the control panel I saw a blue light flashing. It indicated the elevator was on its way down. I could not get help any faster by hitting the button so I aborted that idea and instead rushed to the inner doors. The blue light burned steady now; the elevator was down.

I waited for the new team to open the doors. There was no way for me to unlock them from inside. I looked back at Roger; his gaze was still fixed on the monitor. I heard the door locks click open. The hum of the motors started. Help had arrived.

Then all hell broke loose. The room was suddenly bathed in blood red light. A shrieking siren split the room like a sword. The sliding doors slid shut with a vengeful clang. The situation was now worse than anything I could ever have dreamed. Not only did I have a sick partner, I also had a red alert on my hands.

"DAMN, NOT now!" I bellowed. After a moment of shock, I figured that the alert was only a drill. Anderson must have pulled it right at shift change just to keep us on our toes. I knew there was no hope of saving face now. In fact, if I wanted to remain a farmer, I had to hit the "Boner Button;" only it could override the drill.

I crossed the room and my hand struck the red button. I swallowed hard waiting for the drill to stop and the doors to slide open. To my horror, nothing happened. I instinctively hit the button again. The red lights still flashed, and the siren still wailed. Worst of all, the doors remained sealed. For the first time, I noticed the air was no longer fresh. It was a bottled mixture flowing through the vents. There was only one reason for all those factors to be true; this was the real thing. Full scale nuke war.

The moment I had waited and trained for most of my military life had come at last. My heart was pounding wildly; sweat was beginning to seep from my pores. I felt dizzy and nauseous. I could not believe this was all happening to me. My mind was filled with jumbled thoughts: Roger's condition, my family's welfare, who was the enemy, my duty. Finally, my duty won first place in my mind.

I turned on my heels and nearly took myself down. I looked at Roger and wondered if I could get him to respond. I knew I had to make him act. The doors were sealed until the ordeal was over. It was just the two of us. Two men for a two-man job. I fought off a wave of panic.

My fingers hit the switches to turn off the lights and noise. A relative calm fell over the room. Summoning all my wits, I prepared for action. I grabbed Roger by the shoulders and shook him as hard as I could.

"Roger!" I shouted. "Do you know what's happening?"

He looked up at me and answered calmly, "Yes, I know."

I didn't like the sound of his voice one bit, but it had to do. I assumed my position to Roger's right, then reached over to open the alert channel. Next I used the verifier to make sure it was not a hoax or mistake. It wasn't. I did both our jobs with Roger watching all the way. All the green lights glowed, all the dials were set, all systems were go; except Roger.

"Roger!" I tried again. "This is it! It's the real thing! You can't give out one me now! I need you!" I found I was screaming at the top of my lungs, but I don't think he heard a word I said. "It's harvest time!" Still he just sat and looked at me.

The room was suddenly filled with a voice neither mine nor Roger's; it was the metallic voice of the speaker.

"This is NORAD Launch Control. This is NORAD Launch Control. This is not a drill. Repeat, this is not a drill. All Hercules missiles have been fed target coordinates. Prepare to key in. Prepare to key in."

That was the order to unlock the fire button control circuits. They were mounted on panels on either side of the control station. The eight-foot span between them insured no one man could fire the chicks alone. The keys we wore around our necks had to be inserted into the controls, then turned simultaneously. If they did not turn at the same time, the controls would not function.

"Key in now," came the disembodied voice.

I pulled my key from around my neck and pushed it in place. I noticed my hands were trembling slightly. I urged Roger to follow my lead but my pleas fell upon deaf ears. Reaching around his head, I fumbled with the chain that held the activator. I tangled it trying to lift it over his ears, so in desperation I yanked hard, snapping the chain. The key hit the floor and bounced at my feet. In a second I had retrieved it. My cold, clammy fingers closed about it as though it were a moth I could crush in my hand and end its existence. With some difficulty I slid the key into Roger's box.

Now, I knew I was stuck. I could not reach both keys at the same time in order to turn them. I had to get Roger to help me.

"Roger, you have to get ready to fire." My voice was quieter now but still cracking and becoming raspy. I stared deeply into Roger's eyes, searching for solace and aid. At last he spoke.

"No," came the single word from his pale lips.

"What do you mean, no?" I exploded. "This is our job, our duty!" I slapped him hard across the face but he didn't seem to feel it. "We're under attack for God's sake! We have to fire!"

"Not for God's sake," he said calmly. "Thou shall not kill, saith the Lord."

"By God, *somebody* is sure as HELL trying to kill *us!*"

"Good. Let it end this way. War's over, they win, we lose, we can all go home."

His voice had become sing-song and childlike. He was now chanting

his last words, over and over.

"Keys to position one," came the NORAD order.

"Roger, I can't do it alone!" He heard my words but responded like a small boy.

"No blood on my hands. Mushrooms kill everybody . . ." Tears were streaming down his face. He was totally lost in his own world. ". . . Even little children fry, and puppies and kittens, all gone . . . gone forever . . ." His voice trailed off into loud sobbings.

I knew it was all up to me now. How easy it would be to join Roger in his world. It was so inviting, so tempting; but I had my duty. Above all else I had my duty. I tried to span the void between the two keys with my arms nearly pulling out of their sockets. It was impossible. I had to think of a way to fire my chicks; I couldn't let the farm down.

My mind raced for a solution, but I couldn't help but think of my family instead: my lovely wife who had just proudly announced she was three weeks late; my little boy, so peacefully asleep in his bed as I left the house. I had just bought him a set of toy tools and he had instantly made up his mind to be a mechanic when he grew up. Now, he would never have the chance.

A mechanic. Tools. The words floated in my head looking for a place to land.

"Tools!" I shouted out loud. "Tools!"

I crossed the room in a single leap and threw open a small hatch. A great, blue tool box rested inside. Jerking it open, I searched for devices to extend my reach. I found a vise-grip, long channel-locks, and a pipe wrench. My confidence grew as I returned to the controls.

Hastily, I applied the vise-grip to the end of Roger's key. Then I tightened the wrench on mine. Next I used the channel-lock to grab the wrench, and stretched to span the gap.

"I know what you're doing!" cried Roger's voice. "I won't let you. You can't kill all the children!" He shoved me violently into the panel. Pain and the taste of blood made me lash back wildly. The channel-lock struck him on the side of his head.

His body withered to the floor. He was severely injured and blood was flowing freely from his left temple clashing horridly with the deep blue carpet. I paused for a moment in shock as I saw what I had done. My best friend was squashed on the floor like some no-account insect, all because of me. And next, half the world would die at my hand. Worst of all, I didn't seem to care. I had just one thought: *Bring in the harvest.* Mega-death, enough for the whole world.

"Twenty seconds to launch," shrieked the speaker. The distorted voice brought me to my proper senses. It all seemed so ice-cool and clear. I was a soldier. I was trained to follow orders. What I was about to do was not my responsibility. The decision came from far above me, from my superior; the commander in chief. I was nothing more than a flesh and blood relay in a massive circuit system. I was *innocent.*

I again applied my tools. Then, stretching as far as I could, I found a grip on the vice-grip. I pulled; the keys turned to the first position. That opened the hatches topside and began the automatic launch sequence. An orange light burned brightly before me; all were ready to fire.

"Ten seconds," came the speaker.

I tensed, awaiting the firing order.

"Nine."

The count might not go all the way. There was still time. It could still stop.

"Eight."

I never knew how I would react to this moment. No one did. No one could. This was the first time. I knew it was also the last.

"Seven."

I was soaked with sweat. My whole body was trembling. I was nauseous, dizzy, light-headed. I didn't want to fire, but I had to. I couldn't help myself. I was too good a farmer not to bring in the harvest.

"Six."

I heard a click behind me, then a thundering explosion cracked my world wide open. My right side seemed bathed in fire and I crumpled onto the console. Pain was shooting through my side like it had been thrust from one of my chicks. Blood flowed from a gaping hole ripped open by a bullet from Roger's revolver.

"Five."

It didn't matter, now. I couldn't even reach the keys. I was off the hook. No good. It just didn't wash. I was still breathing, wasn't I? I still had a job to do.

"Four."

I staggered about trying to find my tools that had been jarred from my hands.

"Three."

My fingers found the channel-locks.

"Two."

I refitted the pipe wrench.

"One."

Painfully I stretched and made my connections.

"Fire! Fire! Fire!"

I CLOSED my eyes and jerked the keys over. My heart stopped as I waited for the vibrations and muffled sounds of the thrusting chicks. I just stood there, hanging suspended from my tools. I was no longer aware of my pain.

For a split second I felt drawn out of my body. I was surveying the room from above. There I was, standing, arms spread wide. I looked like Christ on the cross, bleeding from the side. No, not Christ; the Anti-Christ.

Could it be? It all fit. I had just violated the primary law of God. I had

sent a death of Hell to millions of my fellow man. My six missles, with six warheads of six megatons each, had been cast by my hand. My mushroom seeds were about to grow to their full blooming maturity.

I returned to my agonized body, still listening for the sound of rocket thrust. Instead my ears were subjected to yet another loud booming. My vision left me. I could feel my head burst open in hot, wet pain. I crumpled into a tiny ball on the floor so far below me. I was still alive and aware, still searching for the sound of thrust, but it never came.

In the faraway distance I heard the doors slide open. Footsteps, many footsteps, were rushing to my side. Too many people for the relief team. Had the farmhouse been invaded? Had the enemy sabotaged my chicks? *My* chicks dead? *My* seeds left to rot? I felt more pain from this thought than from my torn, bleeding body. The thought that I had failed in my duty; the ultimate sin.

I felt body heat close to my side. Voices called out orders.

"Get a doctor in here! This man's still alive!"

The invaders spoke English. I vainly sought a glimpse of my company. The voices sounded strangely familiar but they seemed so far away and so soft. Could they be friends; other farmers? I knew it really didn't matter now. I didn't even care. I had done my duty. I had done all I was supposed to. I had been a good farmer.

Then hands were upon my body. More voices came from a far-away, deep, cold well.

"Get a stretcher! Move!" shouted an angry man. The man continued in a rabid tone. "You've finally done it this time, Anderson! You and your damned experiments! I'll see you in irons for this blunder!"

A higher, desperate voice replied, "But, sir, there was no way to predict Haines would . . . "

"Stow it for your court martial, Anderson." A moment of silence, then hushed voices followed.

"Captain Helmbold." It was the same voice that a moment before had vowed punishment to Dr. Anderson. Now it was soft and comforting and aimed at me.

"Don't worry, son. Everything will be all right. Just lie still. Help's on its way."

I tried to move my lips to speak but I couldn't.

"Don't try to talk, son. Just take it easy. This is General Patterson."

I knew his name: "Pappy Patterson," chief of staff of the Air Force. Why was *he* here? My mind swam with more confusion than ever.

The higher voice came again. "Please, General. You can't hold me respons . . ."

"I can do any damn thing I please. You screwed up, Mister, and I'll have your ass for it."

The high voice of Dr. Anderson began to crack as he continued to sputter. "We had to test the human factor, General. We had to know if

we could count on our farmers if it went all the way."

"I don't deny that for a second, Anderson. But with all your monitors and detailed planning, how could you overlook disconnecting the door locks? We couldn't get in here! We couldn't even stop the bloody thing!"

"General . . ."

"Sergeant, get the doctor the Hell out of here!"

There was the sound of a brief struggle; then again all was silent. I still didn't understand. What happened to my chicks? Why didn't they fire? I forced a word from my lips. "Harvest . . ." I coughed blood.

"No, son," came the voice of the compassionate General. "No harvest today. It was only a test to see what might happen if we ever did have to harvest. It was just an experiment; an experiment that went very wrong."

"Roger?" I gasped.

"We'll take good care of him, son. He'll be just fine; and you will be, too."

I knew his last words were false. Even if I lived I could never be "just fine". I could never again be a mushroom farmer. I wasn't sure any man could be. They probably would find some kind of machine to take our place. We farmers would all have to move to the big city.

Still, I had a harvest. The first one; and it was all mine. I didn't have to share it with anybody, not even Roger.

I felt myself being lifted up . . . ●

WHY WE CHOSE THIS STORY

The idea of push-button nuclear holocaust is one that terrified us fifteen years ago and has become absorbed in the fabric of our consciousness today; another facet of a technologically advanced society, fraught with super dangers as well as super challenges. This story reminded us of what may take place if we don't meet the challenge of attaining a real, lasting peace throughout the world. We thought the author's opening metaphor was well handled . . . offering an element of surprise as you realize just what deadly "crops" these men were being asked to "harvest". The ending was at once tremendously relieving and immensely tragic, as the cost of such a hideous responsibility was realized in the form of death and insanity; and this was only a test.

 Continued from Back Cover

own the place, you're bound to get caught somewhen. So I didn't try nothing. Besides, since my stabilizers were gone I couldn't risk any swing-time 'til I knew exactly when I was going.

The man in the green uniform was walking toward me when the field settled. I mean, of all the lousy fuzz to run into, I had to hit a ToPol. They're Feds and there's not a lot you can do about that.

The man kept coming the whole time I was hitting myself over the head for going bc. You can trigger all kinds of things going back then, or so they say. After they found out that someone stole Adolph out of his bunker, just to see what kind of a nut he was, the ToPols didn't like anyone getting any closer than three thousand on the a side.

"Hey flurb, trying to crash the time barrier? Let me tell you your rights . . . You can keep your trap shut 'til we get up-time to court and you can find a lawyer. Else, you can talk to me an' abide by my decision. If I believe whatever you have to tell me, I erase the tape and you get off with no vio. If I don't believe your words, I can do anything from arranging one night in jail to a lifetime backtime, depending on your situ. Which way you travel?"

The man wasn't being what you would call nasty, he was just being good, old fashioned, bored protector of the peace. I've seen the same style in a dozen ages. He was a big man for being this far up-time, assuming he was from around this-when, and his uniform was spotless. He wasn't wearing his cap; so I figured we weren't being tved, 'cause you're supposed to wear it on duty. My man was sort of smiling, sort of frowning. I guess he found his work interesting.

"I'll waive." I mean there's not a whole lot of reasons why I should've thrown myself on the non-existant mercy of a professional jury.

"Good man," he said, grinning. "I wouldn't trust a jury a nano-second more than I have to."

"When am I at, anyhow?" I'd been swing-timing my way up-time at random, not going anywhen special. The inhibitors hadn't given my calendar time to catch up.

"We happen to be in the year seventy-seventy, date and day escaping me for the moment. But," he said, and the *but* sounded real ominous, "we tracked you 'way downtime. In fact, I'd say you might have even been just slightly bc."

He had a printout on a blue paper with about twenty pink squiggly lines on it, so I assumed he did know pretty close.

"Well, when you been?"

"I swung into nineteen-eighty or so, maybe a bit earlier. Wanted to see some of those real gas-powered motorcycles. I think that cycles must be in my blood, you know?"

While I was talking, I was looking up at his machine. It was one of those Luxotime Police Specials from way up-when. It really must have a pretty quick swing-time to stay up with my TR when they were tracking me. Has more off-path power than any other PS I've ever seen. My

timecycle is pretty convenient about going off-path downtime, but that Luxotime must have lots of power, too. After all, the more mass you swing, the more power it's going to take.

"I don't see where those things would have that much in common with your machine here. This thing has a lot more power; you can go anywhen with it, long as you're willing to pay the price. But those motorcycle things, they wouldn't even get out of stable-table, all they could do is move you around where, not when."

"I bet you never drove one of 'em, have you?"

"No." He shook his head. I think he envied me.

"Did you ever swing a tc?" I asked him. He got a faraway look in his eyes before he answered.

"Yeah. I used to patrol LA around five thousand. Swung an H, a big one, mostly after the petty thieves that pop downtime or uptime a few years trying to be cute."

By now we were both leaning against my machine, and he even had his ticket book back in his pocket.

"Then you know what I mean about how a timecycle is. You can sort of feel the time flowing on your face. Well, a motorcycle is sort of like that, except you get the flavor of a place better. You can smell the grass and alfalfa in a farm town, and you can almost eat the smog in the cities back when. It's almost like you're part of the machine, and it's part of you. It's a good feeling to have."

He looked at me and I could see he was a little bit jealous. He nodded with that faraway look again for a minute.

Bio-Sketch

Steve Miller

Steve Miller has been active in the SF world since 1968 when he joined the science fiction club at UMBC with fellow Baltimore fans Gary Svehla and Dave (Charlie) Ellis. Already interested in writing, he contributed a number of articles and book reviews to fanzines and magazines over the years and later became involved with the Baltimore Science Fiction Society and their annual convention, Balti-Con.

While at UMBC Steve reacted to a challenge from a faculty member and developed and taught the first SF course at the University of Maryland. He later went to the Clarion SF Writers Workshop in Seattle. On returning from the workshop he taught a science fiction course at Towson State University and then joined the UMBC Library as Curator of SF for the embryonic SF Research collection there.

At the SF collection Steve was responsible for acquiring the typescript for Isaac Asimov's "Foundation" as well as initiating a large SF and Fantasy Fanzine collection which is available for fan and academic research today. During his tenure at UMBC Steve also became the first President of the Instructors of Science Fiction in Higher Education, the group who grant the yearly Jupiter Awards.

Steve left the collection to pursue his writing career and since then has edited several newspapers, had a book of poems published (it sold out within six months), and contributed both fiction and nonfiction articles to a variety of publications. Steve has been a guest at several SF conventions and is at work on a novel which should be published shortly. Steve has been an active lecturer on SF and Fantasy and recently gave several lectures at Johns Hopkins University.

"When else you been?" I think it really hurt him to ask. He already had enough to send me backtime without a break if he kept to the letter and not the spirit of the law.

"I did go bc."

He shook his head in agreement, looking at the graphs and lines of pink squiggles. He seemed sad now. I mean I knew he had to do something.

"What happened, I mean, what made you go that far back? If you have your license you must know the rules."

"I wanted to see some of those things in the history tapes for myself. I only swung in for a day or two. Met some real weird people, too. 'Course, I didn't understand what they were sayin' to me, but I got by OK. At least until that kook stole my stabilizer."

The man in the green uniform sighed.

"You left an artifact back there? Somebody actually saw something strange? Man, you might be one of those anomalies they keep trying to track down." He shook his head again and sighed.

"Well, I didn't do it on purpose. When I gained stable-table after my swing, I was sitting on the water. I switched on the stabilizers, and when the field broke, there I was in plain view of this beach. This guy is watching me, so I brought the tc to shore right near him.

"I wish I had that guy's nerve. He came right up to me and offered me some wine out of a strange looking bottle. I took some and sat down. The guy looked at me, then went right on about his business. He'd take this net he had, walk into the water a little, and throw the net in. Each time he pulled it out he'd get a couple fish. I felt sorry for him, so I took my stabilizer off the tc, walked out to where I could see a good-size school of fish, and pulled the ropes behind me. Then I'd walk back in, cut the stabilizer, and we'd drag in a *lot* of fish."

The ToPol broke in.

"How did you lose the stabilizer?"

"Oh, yeah. Well, after we had lots of fish in I drank some more wine, and went to sleep. When I woke up, it was gone. I don't know what he wanted to do with it. He couldn't have gotten more than another twenty minutes out of the battery that was on it. Yeah, and when I woke up, I saw these other guys, about five of them, with swords and sticks. So I hopped on the tc and swung uptime real quick, stabilizer or no."

"That must have been when we picked you up on the instruments. You made quite a ruckus for a year or two."

"I guess so. Anyway, I had to stall out here before I gained stable-table, you know, just pick an instant to check out that I wasn't sitting on another ocean. That's when you got me, just when I started gaining."

"I had to pick you up," he said, almost defensively. "You know that."

"Yeah, I know. I'm not mad at *you* or anything. I mad at *me* for getting caught."

I grinned at him and he smiled back.

"That's the way the clock works," he said.

"Yeah."

We talked for a few minutes about everything from weather in swing-time to the Solar Series of freefall baseball out on Merican Field orbiting Mars. That was the one in eighty-one seventeen, which is when I'm from. We both talked longer than we should, trying to put it off.

"It's time, sport," he tried a smile, but it fell through.

I tried to smile, too; it wasn't going to be easy to stick to one time.

"If I take you in, they'll drop you 'way back into bc. I think right now they're hittin' around ten or twelve."

I cringed. That was the same as a death sentence.

"But," he said, and this time the *but* didn't sound so bad, "I can drop you myself, officer's discretion. When do you want?"

I had almost ten thousand years of history to choose from. Times of war, times of peace, times of stagnation . . . but once I got when I was going, the chance of getting back uptime were really low. Whenever I wanted, but just one pick.

"Can you give me, say, 1960 or so? I want to catch the motorcycles while I have a chance."

So, we went swing-time in his Luxotime. He stalled out, gained, stabilized for a bit of rain, and then reached out to shake my hand.

"Good luck," he said, "I mean, with your cycles. And, whatever you do, have fun."

"I will. I'll try," I said as I moved out of the field.

I heard a ghostly "Enjoy yourself" and then he stalled out of stable-table, leaving me with myself and the rain.

I'm going to try and have a good time. I really am. In fact, I'm going to try to have enough fun for two people. After all, he might come swing-time somewhen to watch. ●

WHY WE CHOSE THIS STORY

We are always looking for extra special short-short stories to use as back cover grabbers or change-of-pace pieces between longer stories. Here is one we thought everyone would enjoy. Miller's wingy language creates a nice, offbeat mood appropriate to his "somewhen" tale. And we liked the idea of a space cop allowing a time traveler to talk his way out of serious trouble; of course he had something in common with the cop going for him, the cycle-mania, something most of us couldn't share.

Illustrated by Scott Mavor

by Steve Miller

WHEN I GAINED, they dropped me. Popped up the inhibitor real quick so I couldn't stall out of then. It shook me, but I wasn't really surprised. I mean, when you go charging all through time like you

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