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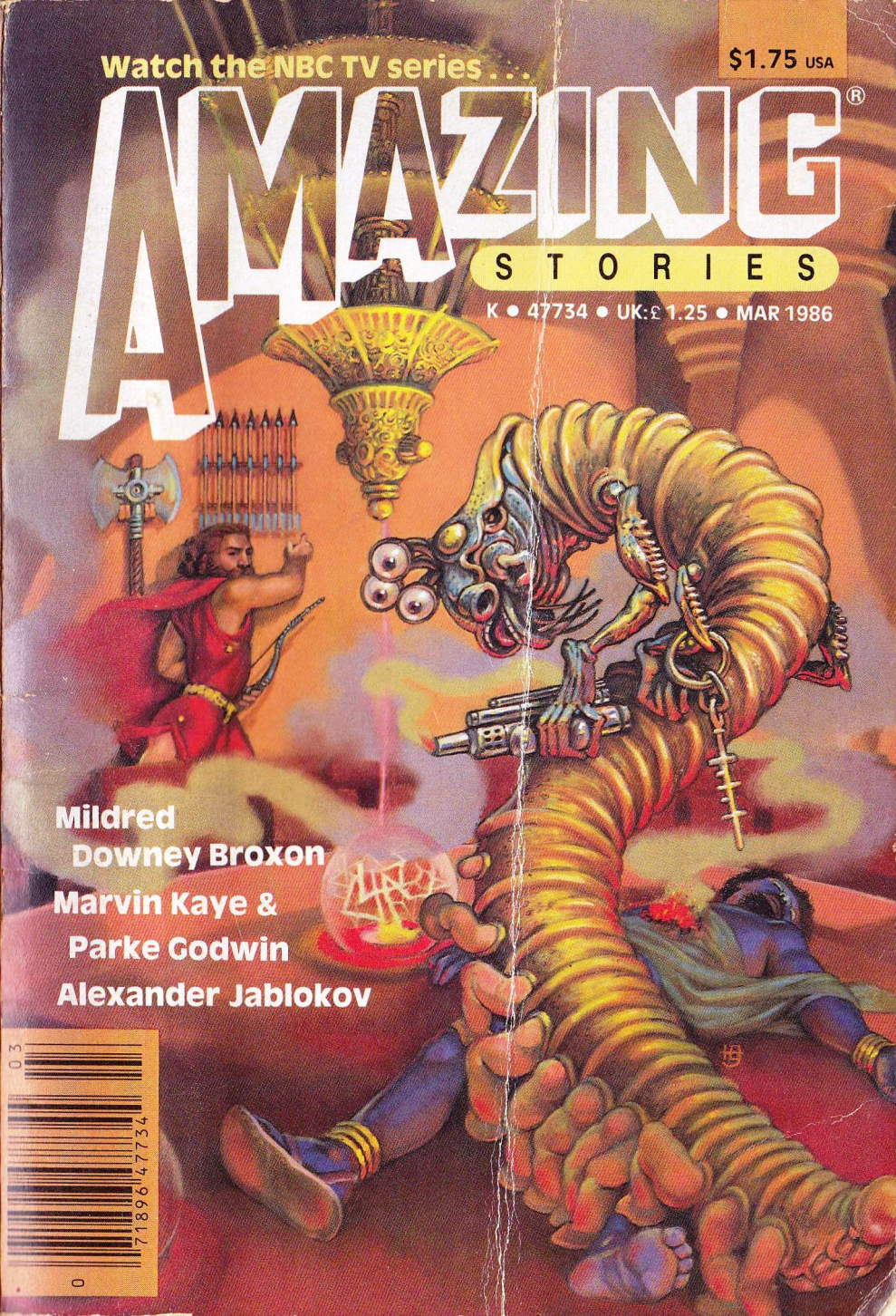

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MARCH 1986

DEPARTMENTS

FICTION

FACT

COVER: **Hank Jankus** for "Stormwindrising"

Opinion
by Robert Silverberg

The vague but persistent confusions of jet lag still hover in my mind — along with more pleasant things — to remind me that I am newly returned from the 43rd World Science Fiction Convention in Melbourne, Australia.

The strangeness of life here in the late twentieth century could hardly have been better exemplified by the manner of my coming home from that convention. At ten minutes to three in the afternoon on Monday, August 26, 1985, I was seated at the platform in the Australis Room of the Southern Cross Hotel in Melbourne, taking part with Frederik Pohl, Gene Wolfe, and Australian writers Lee Harding and Jack Wodhams in a panel discussion entitled "Being a Science-Fiction Writer." I asked for the microphone, explained that I had a plane to catch, thanked everyone in the room for having helped to make my stay in Australia so pleasant, and bade farewell to the convention. And got my luggage from my room, and hopped into my car, and drove (on the left-hand side of the road!) to the airport, and in a couple of hours set out for San Francisco. Where I landed at six in the evening *on that very same Monday,* thanks to the swiftness of jet travel and some help from the International Date Line.

It was Australia's second round as host of the World Science Fiction Convention, and there was general agreement that this smoothly run affair was a worthy successor to the historic first Aussiecon ten years before. Some 1300 people were in attendance, twice as many as had been to Aussiecon I. (That may not seem like such a big deal when compared to the 9000 or so who were at the 1984 Worldcon at Disneyland, California; but bear in mind that the population of Australia is rather less than a tenth that of the United States, spread over an area just as large.) Something like a hundred American science-fiction fans, maybe more, made the journey from the States for the convention, along with such writers as Frank Herbert, Anne McCaffrey, David Brin, Larry Niven, Jack Chalker, Bob Shaw, and Hal Clement.

For me the Worldcon always feels much like a family reunion, for I have very little in the way of a "real" (i.e., biological) family, and over the last thirty-plus years the world of science fiction has come to play a surrogate family rôle for me. I find that each year's convention is not simply a chance to haggle out business deals with editors and publishers and agents or to meet and talk with the readers whose passion for science fiction keeps the whole thing going, but also is my annual opportunity to see dear friends of many years' standing who live in widely scattered regions of the country (and the world). As one of the very few Americans to attend both the Australian Worldcons I felt a particularly keen sense of reunion with a remote branch of the family, one that I had never really expected to see again; I greeted old friends from my 1975 visit

with great warmth and pleasure, and spent much of the convention exchanging news of the changes that the passing of ten years had wrought in their lives and mine.

And then we voted on the site of the 1987 convention — which was awarded, without much of a contest, to Brighton, England. It will be another return visit for me, since the 1979 Worldcon was held there. And it will mean — most remarkably — that the Worldcon will be leaving the United States twice in a three-year period.

I was too young to attend the first World Science Fiction Convention, held in New York in 1939. But I suspect that few of the hundred or so attendees at that grandly named but actually quite modest little event had any notion that a time would come when future World Science Fiction Conventions were held in distant lands; and those who imagined such a thing probably considered it a mere utopian fantasy of the far future, especially with the storm clouds of an approaching world war already beginning to gather that summer. Most of those who were there, though, must have considered their convention to be something as American as the misnamed World Series.

Not long after the end of that war the Worldcon did, in fact, go to another country — but just a quick hop a few miles across the border. That was the sixth convention, in Toronto in 1948. Not until 1957 did a convention truly go overseas, to London; and we all regarded it as an extraordinary thing to be holding the Worldcon in another land. (I recall how astounded the American attendees were when the convention banquet began with a toast to the Queen!) No one, I think, thought that the London Worldcon of '57 would soon be repeated; but repeated it was, in a much grander way, in 1965. Then came an even more surprising event: the Heidelberg Worldcon of 1970, the first time the convention had left the English-speaking world. (If indeed it did. It seemed to me that nearly everyone at that convention spoke English; and virtually the entire proceedings were conducted in that language, except for the Hugo Awards ceremony, presided over in fluent German by the very English master of ceremonies, John Brunner.)

Heidelberg, with its delegates from a dozen or more European countries and Japan, dramatically demonstrated the international nature of science fiction as no convention could have done before. But by then most of us realized that SF had hordes of avid readers in those countries. What caught us by surprise was the site of the next overseas convention, the 1975 Aussiecon; for Australia, that remote land of kangaroos and wombats and eucalyptus trees, nearly a full day's journey by plane from our West Coast, is not a place that has impinged much on the American consciousness. But the Aussies came to our convention; they told us they wanted to put on a Worldcon of their own; gradually they overcame our skepticism and won our support, and in 1975 we loaned them our big annual festival, much to our own astonishment and theirs.

Here in the wake of the second Australian Worldcon, though, we can no longer speak of "loaning" the convention to anyone. Already it is destined to go to England once again in 1987; there is serious talk of a Swedish bid for 1990, the Australians are already gearing for Aussiecon III some time soon after, and there is open speculation about when the fiercely dedicated SF fans of Japan will enter

the bidding.. And then? Amsterdam? Budapest? Mexico City? Shanghai? In another decade no location will seem too surprising. The World Science Fiction Convention — once a parochial little party that we passed around from Boston to Chicago to Los Angeles and back to Boston again, with occasional side trips to Philadelphia or New Orleans or Cleveland, has at last begur to live up to its grandiose name. Science fiction belongs to the world; and so at last does the Worldcon.

✂

Well, yes; we *are* looking for stories, and from people who have never sold a story before as well as from long-time professionals. But no; we do not want to see you make the same mistakes, over and over again. So; we wrote and printed an 11,000-word booklet, *Constructing Scientifiction & Fantasy*, to assist you with manuscript format, cover letters, return envelopes, and other details of story submission, along with some ideas on Plot, Background, Characterization, and Invention. These cost us two dollars each, with mailing and handling; we'd appreciate receiving this amount (check or money order, please; it's never wise to send cash through the mail). If you want two copies, send us $2.50; three copies, $3.00; and so on: in other words, 50¢ for each *additional* copy after the first one, which is $2.00. If you subscribe to AMAZING® Stories today, we'll send you a copy of the booklet free.

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Book Reviews
by Robert Coulson

The Proteus Operation
by James P. Hogan
Bantam Spectra, $16.95 (hardcover)

This is the best of the lot, this time. Keep it in mind for next year's Hugo voting. It opens in an alternate world in which Japan attacked Vladivostok instead of Pearl Harbor, the U.S. kept its neutrality, Churchill never focussed England's will to resist, and now, years later, the U.S. faces an Axis-dominated world. A team is sent back to undo the process, aid the Allies, and shut off Hitler's pipeline to an alternate future world and future weapons. The combined machinations from the future, of course, result in our own world. The history is excellent, the plot well-handled, and the characters interesting.

The Cat Who Walks Through Walls
by Robert A. Heinlein
Putnam, $17.95 (hardcover)

This is essentially a sequel to *Number of the Beast*, though it's shorter and better. Which may be cause and effect. Our hero is recruited by a group that's trying to keep order in a multiplicity of universes, though it's never made clear why they need him. (The computer picked him, but the computer apparently didn't provide reasons.) Once picked, he's pursued by the Enemy, and spends the rest of the book running. He never acts; he reacts. Even the final confrontation is offstage. Various characters from earlier and better Heinlein novels get walk-on parts, and the alternate universe theory allows the author to shift his earlier Future History stories into one of the alternates, but the best parts of the book are the chapter headings. The story is interesting enough to keep one reading, but not enough to avoid disappointment at the finish.

Eon
by Greg Bear
Bluejay, $16.95 (hardcover)

Alternate worlds are popular these days; quantum theory has made them at least temporarily respectable. This story involves a hollowed-out asteroid which appears in orbit around the Earth-Moon system. First, it proves to be larger inside than it is outside, so they send for a mathematician. Then it appears to have come from the future — or from somebody's future, not necessarily ours. Then it proves to be inhabited. The science is accurate, the background fascinating, the plot adequate, and the characters totally unmemorable. The interest is almost totally in the physics and math involved. It kept me reading, but it's not one of my favorite books of the month.

Little Known Game Animals of the World
by Dean A. Grennell
Gallant/Charger Publications, P.O. Box HH, 34249 Camino Capistrano, Capistrano Beach, CA 92624, $6.95 (trade paperback)

This includes descriptions of some

forty animals, their capture, and their lifestyle. The beasts include the Crying Shame, the Spitting Image, the Big Hairy Deal, the Screeching Halt, the Crashing Boar, the Biting Retort, the Yawning Chasm, etc. The series started, as I recall, in Dean's fanzine *Grue*, though a majority of these are from his prozine, *Gun World*. There's an illustration for each animal, and Bill Mauldin does the cover. There was a similar series in *Mad* for a while, but these are much better. Highly recommended to anyone who doesn't take fantasy — or hunting — seriously.

Late Knight Edition
by Damon Knight
Nesfa Press, Box G, MIT Branch P.O., Cambridge, MA 02139-0910, $13.00 (hardcover)

This little volume includes two articles, "What is Science Fiction?" and "Good-bye, Henry J. Kostkos, Good-bye," plus an introduction by Kate Wilhelm and a humorous autobiographical sketch from 1948. Stories are "The Third Little Green Man," "Definition," "I See You," "Tarcan of the Hoboes," "La Ronde," and "The Cage," the latter previously unpublished. Considering that I've always regarded Knight as a better critic than a writer, it's interesting that I enjoyed all the fiction and disliked both of the articles, as well as the introduction. I don't mind Knight being opinionated, I mind him being wrong. This is a limited edition of 800; if you want a copy, act now. The fiction is worth having.

The Great SF Stories 13 (1951)
edited by Isaac Asimov and Martin H. Greenberg
DAW, $3.50 (paperback)

I keep deriding ideas of "the Good Old Days," and then I get something like this. Fifteen stories, all from the same year, and they include six all-time classics: "Null-P" by William Tenn, "The Marching Morons" by C. M. Kornbluth, "Angel's Egg" by Edgar Pangborn, "The Quest For St. Aquin" by Anthony Boucher, "A Pail of Air" by Fritz Leiber, and "Dune Roller" by Julian May. The remainder are all excellent, and include a few that other reviewers might call classic. They are "The Sentinel" by Arthur C. Clarke (the story on which "2001" was loosely based), "The Fire Balloons" by Ray Bradbury (one of the stories used in the mini-series *The Martian Chronicles*), "The Weapon" by Fredric Brown, "Breeds There a Man —" by Asimov, "Pictures Don't Lie" by Katharine MacLean, "Superiority" by Clarke (one of my personal favorites), "I'm Scared" by Jack Finney, "Tiger by the Tail" by Alan E. Nourse (one of Juanita's favorites), and "With These Hands" by Kornbluth. Plus a mention is made of Wyman Guin's classic, "Beyond Bedlam," which was too long for the editor's format. The editors in their introduction rather belittle "The Marching Morons" as an example of Kornbluth's tragic pessimism, but then the newspaper articles about universities "dumbing down" to accommodate their current students appeared after the introductions were written.

Okay; I give up; there was a Golden Age of science-fiction short stories, and 1951 was part of it. There haven't been fifteen short stories of this caliber published in any one year since at least 1970; probably not since 1960. Go buy a copy and see for yourself.

Amazing™ Stories: 60 Years of the Best Science Fiction
edited by Isaac Asimov and Martin H.

Greenberg
TSR, Inc., $7.95 (trade paperback)

The title is hype; there have been years and even decades when *Amazing®* didn't produce anything readable at all. But it's a pretty good anthology. Copyrights range from 1928 to 1983; the stories cover the period when scientific/technical ideas were all, to the present period when sociological ideas are all, and all the points in between. The stories are "The Revolt of the Pedestrians" by David H. Keller, M.D., "The Gostak and the Doshes" by Miles J. Breuer, "Pilgrimage" by Nelson Bond, "I, Robot" by Eando Binder (the one classic story in the collection), "The Strange Flight of Richard Clayton" by Robert Bloch, "The Perfect Woman" by Robert Sheckley, "Memento Homo" by Walter H. Miller, Jr., "What Is This Thing Called Love" by Isaac Asimov, "Requiem" by Edmond Hamilton, "Hang Head, Vandal!" by Mark Clifton, "Drunkboat" by Cordwainer Smith, "The Days of Perky Pat" by Philip K. Dick, "Semley's Necklace" by Ursula K. Le Guin, "Calling Dr. Clockwork" by Ron Goulart, "There's No Vinism Like Chauvinism" by John Jakes, "The Oögenesis of Bird City" by Philip José Farmer, "The Man Who Walked Home" by James Tiptree, Jr., "Manikins" by John Varley, and "In the Islands" by Pat Murphy.

They're not all what my choices would have been, but they may not all be the first choices of the editors, either. An anthologist can't just pick any story he wants. The author has to agree, at least currently; in the Bad Old Days when magazines bought all rights, authors had little to say about it. It generally can't be in another current anthology, it shouldn't have been anthologized too often previously — not too much of a problem with *Amazing* — and it has to be the right length. One of the best stories *Amazing* ever published is Ward Moore's "Transient," but it took up 80 pages in original publication and would have filled over a quarter of this book. It might have improved the book, though. Still, all in all, this is a worthwhile selection and a good bird's-eye view of the magazine's history. There is a 16-page portfolio of covers from the pulp and digest issues; none from the early, large-sized issues.

An Edge in My Voice
by Harlan Ellison
Donning, $9.95 (trade paperback)

This isn't strictly about science fiction, though quite a bit of it is. The book contains Harlan's columns from *Future Life*, *L.A. Weekly*, and *The Comics Journal*, plus readers' letters in some cases. Harlan, of course, had made his reputation by being "controversial," and he seems to be getting more strident as he gets older, so there's a lot of yelling about outrages in here. Well, I suppose most of them are outrages. I can't get too worked up because I see maybe two movies a year and two TV programs a week, and the industry just doesn't mean much to me. Anyone who is media-oriented should certainly get the book; it might educate you. Anyone who plans a career of script-writing *must* read the book. No, it's not all about "The Industry." But a lot of it is. It's about firearms, and unions, and writing and government and freedom — and Harlan. It's enjoyable in small doses, as it was originally published. It's a long way from the Revealed Word, but it's worth reading.

White Wing
by Gordon Kendall

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Distributed to the book trade in the U.S. by Random House, Inc., and in Canada by Random House of Canada, Ltd.

Tor, $2.95 (paperback)

A far-future story, with Earth destroyed and the planet's survivors fighting her destroyers in a huge interstellar alliance, and being despised by their allies. It's a fairly obvious allusion to the Jews, especially if you know the author, and I sort of halfway do; the military situation, however, puts me more in mind of the Czech Legion in World War I. In adapting to their situation, each fighting wing has become, literally and legally, a family — another cause for misunderstanding by the allies, who appear to have more Earth-normal living arrangements. Emphasis is on the interplay of characters, which is just as well because the military tactics are out of *Star Wars*, and short of an inertialess drive you can't do that in space. The characters do react as family members: probably members of a big city family, considering their intenseness. What they do not do is react like professional soldiers, despite having been in this situation for over 200 years. It's an interesting book, but only a partial success.

Brain Wave
by Poul Anderson
Del Rey, $2.50 (paperback)
Earthman's Burden
by Poul Anderson and Gordon Dickson
Avon, $2.95 (paperback)

Two classics back in print. *Brain Wave* is, in my opinion, one of the best and certainly the most entertaining description of superior intelligence that we've had in science fiction. *Earthman's Burden* is a collection of very funny short stories, in which a group of small furry aliens (the Hokas are probably the originals of the Ewoks) delight in imitating the human activities described in various works of fiction. If you haven't read either of these books, do so immediately.

A First Dictionary and Grammar of Laadan
by Suzette Haden Elgin
SF^3, Box 1624, Madison, WI 53701-1624, paperback, $7.00 saddle-stapled or $8.00 spiral-bound

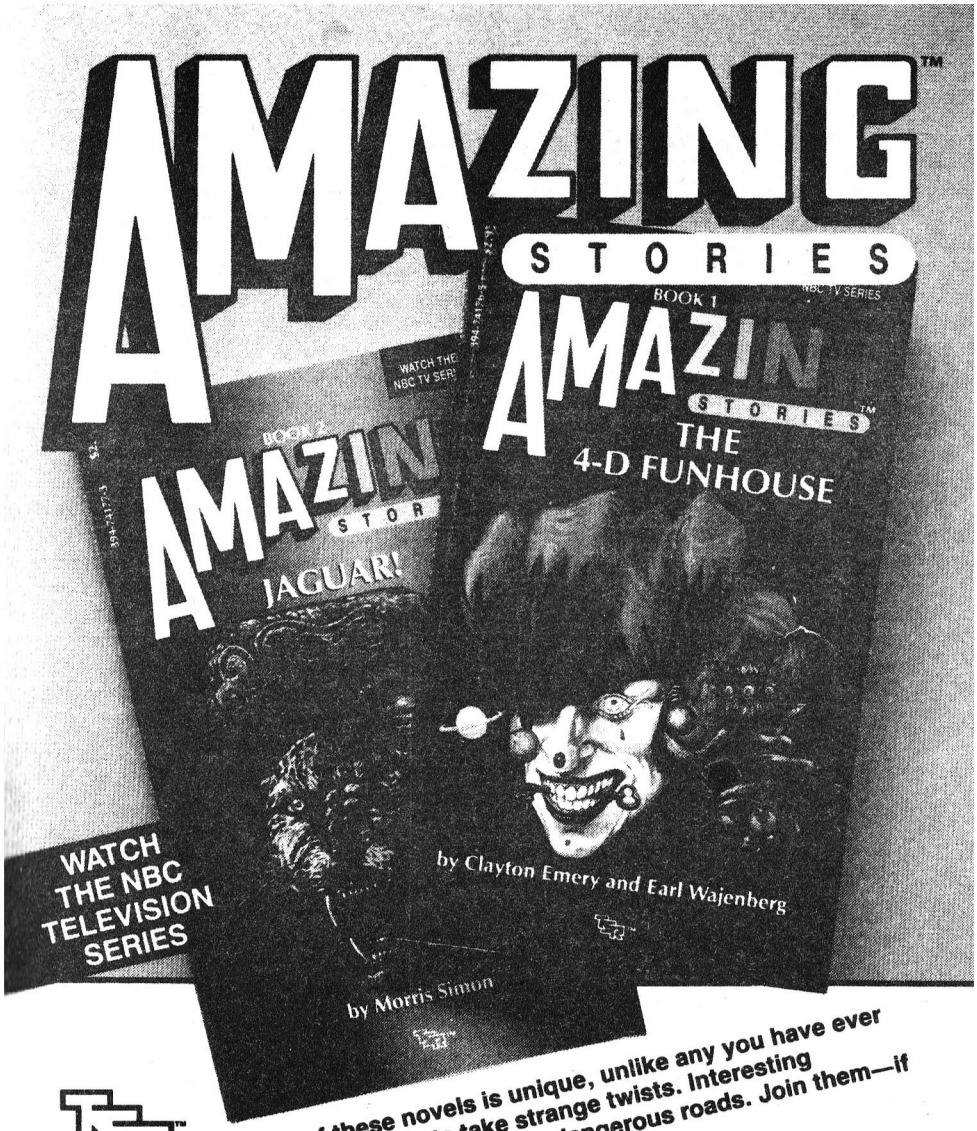
Laadan is a constructed language for women, in case you hadn't heard of it before. Despite Elgin's quite logical arguments, I doubt the language's necessity, but I'm positive it can be a new toy for the people who played with Elvish and other fantasy languages (or even Esperanto). Also, at least some of the Laadan words could be usefully adopted into English — and if enough people become interested, they might be.

The Christening Quest
by Elizabeth Ann Scarborough
Bantam Spectra, $2.95 (paperback)

This is an amusing light fantasy and I enjoyed it, despite an ending wide open for sequels, and an opening which is a continuation of an earlier novel, *Bronwyn's Bane*. The protagonist is human enough to stumble into trouble, and the heroine is intelligent enough to get him out of it — and vice versa, occasionally. Recommended for a change of pace from our more ponderous "important" novels.

Arthur C. Clarke's World of Strange Powers
by John Fairley and Simon Welfare
Putnam, $19.95 (hardcover)

A big illustrated book taken from the British TV show. As such books go, it's fairly conservative; some of the strangeness — like firewalking and stigmata, even — I'm willing to believe in. (Others, I'm not.) Very light; possibly entertaining.



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by John Gregory Betancourt

Last issue I promised to talk about Novelizations as a Necessary(?) Evil(?), so I will. There are other things I'd like to talk about, too, but I guess you can wait till next time.

So. Novelizations — turning a movie (or TV) script into a book. James Blish did it. Joan Vinge continues to do it at a prodigious rate. And Alan Dean Foster, and Mike McQuay, and — and — well, *lots* of people.

But *why*? Isn't it both a waste of a good writer's time and talent and a bastardization of the script-writer's original intent? Foster claims to add an additional third to every script he novelizes, so the reader gets his money's worth of new material; I suspect Vinge does the same — scripts are notably thin things.

One writer I know says he'd like nothing more than to do a novelization, since the hard part — the initial creation — has already been done. He views it as hack-work, good for a fast buck and nothing more. He thinks it would take him two or three weeks to turn a screenplay into a passable novel — for, say, five or six thousand dollars . . . which is about what he makes every year from selling his serious fiction.

"Wait!" you may be saying. "He can make as much from a month's hack-work as from a year's serious writing?"

Yep. Trash pays. And now you can see why novelizations are much fought-over among writers; one yuw-wie [that's a young, upwardly-mobile writer, for those who didn't know] even fired his agent because she promised him a novelization — and then gave it to a different client instead. And that was for a *minor* novelization.

Guess how well a major film's novelization pays? Well, one well-known, award-winning SF author is rumored to have received $80,000 for novelizing a Really Big movie. Another is said to have gotten $30,000 for a Medium Sized one.

A year's income for a month's work . . . money that can allow a serious writer to write what he wants. . . . Yes, I'd say novelizations are necessary to the field. They allow a certain amount of creative freedom. And I'd say they're certainly not evil; I can't imagine them hurting an author's reputation in the slightest — and some (Joan Vinge's, for instance) have even helped careers. Now Vinge can say she's a New York Times best-selling author (in small print: 'for *The Return of the Jedi Storybook*').

Er . . . Mr. Lucas? Mr. Spielberg? Mr. Romero? If you have any spare scripts lying about that need novelization, I *am* available. . . .

Review copies (since I haven't mentioned it before) may be sent to me through *Amazing®*'s editorial offices, or directly at 410 Chester Ave., Moorestown, NJ 08057. Requests for novelizations should go to my esteemed agent, Donald Maass, in New York City.

And now to the books. These last two months have been rather hectic, to say the least; I have an *Amazing™* book (68,000 words of interactive-fiction for adults) due the same day as this column and, as you've probably guessed, I'm not done with either one yet. So my reading time has been rather limited, and I've picked only books that really interest me, or had other things going for them (like lots of pictures and few words).

The Man Who Never Missed
by Steve Perry
Ace, $2.95 (paperback)

The Man Who Never Missed is a diverting little why-dunnit, with the plot device being the question, "Why is one man playing the part of an entire guerilla army and fighting a war he can never hope to win?"

Emile Khadaji is that man. He kills numerous Confederation soldiers on the small, backwater planet of Greaves with a dart gun, and he never misses — one dart, one corpse is his motto. (It seems he's been trained in various martial arts, so there *is* a reason why he's so good at killing.) So, since he kills everyone he sets out to kill, the Confed forces search for an army consisting of thousands of people . . . a humorous situation which the book capitalizes on fully, since Emile is the owner of a bar which soldiers frequent.

It's a diverting read; I rather enjoyed it, and look forward to Perry's next. The ending actually made me sit down and think, which seems rare enough these days.

The New Devil's Dictionary
by J. N. Williamson
W. Paul Ganley: Publisher (P.O. Box 149, Amherst Branch, Buffalo, NY 14226), $5.00 (trade); $15.00 (hardcover); add $1.00 p/h.

This slender volume is subtitled "Creepy Clichés and Sinister Synonyms" and contains an alphabetical listing of horror fiction's over-used words and phrases, along with Williamson's acerbic definitions. An example:

> **Mewling.** Usually, it's a dreadful noise but disgusting enough to be interesting.

With the foreword (by Ray Russell) and preface (by Williamson) and illus-

trations (nice ones by J. K. Potter) and all, the definitions (in a large typeface) take up only 21 pages . . . that's right, less than half the book. I don't think it's worth five bucks, but you be the judge; it's your money.

Black Star Rising
by Frederik Pohl
Del Rey Books, $15.95 (hardcover)

Pohl's a good writer; he has the ability to bring his characters to vibrant life. Usually when you see a new book of his in hardcover, you know it's going to be great. *Usually.*

Black Star Rising has an intriguing opening: Castor, a young white male in an America dominated by the Chinese, is working in the rice paddies when he discovers a head without attached body. The Chinese police — including the lovely Tsoong Delilah — arrive to investigate. Castor, who has been educating himself, and who is fascinated by space and the possibilities of space travel, finally gets to go to the big city, where he must testify in the investigation.

So he makes friends with powerful people, becomes Delilah's beau, and finally gets to go to college. Just as things are working out great, an alien spaceship arrives and demands to speak with the President of the United States — a post which hasn't existed since the Russia-U.S. war that left China in control of the Americas. Guess who gets elected President?

You got it. Up until Castor actually meets the aliens, the book is excellent. Sadly, though, *Black Star Rising* is only half a great novel — Pohl blew the ending by turning it into a sort of prose cartoon for rah-rah flag-waving militant patriots. Whoopie.

The Darkling Wind
by Somtow Sucharitkul
Bantam, $3.50 (paperback)

Although packaged to look like a self-contained novel, this is really the fourth book in Somtow's *Inquestor* trilogy. (One of the earlier books was so long it got split into two.) *The Darkling Wind* stands very well by itself, and can be read without any knowledge of the Inquest and its grand designs for the human race. This is the story of the fall of the Inquest, of Arryk and Kelver and Zalo and those who were there at the end.

The charm of this book lies not in its breathtaking spectacle or its galaxy-spanning plot: it's in the prose. Somtow's writing is beautiful, poetic, lyric . . . crystal-perfect here. The characters are intricately drawn; the action is fast; the plot is almost as stunning as *Dune* in scope.

I recommend it.

Artifact
by Gregory Benford
Tor Books, $16.95 (hardcover)

I thought, when I began reading *Artifact*, that this would prove to be a major novel. It's the story of Clair Anderson, an archaeologist in a Greece gone militantly socialist, who makes a great discovery and smuggles it out of the country, eluding Greek secret police in the process. The evil archaeologist Col. Kontos tries to discredit her. Her scientist friends in Boston study the artifact — a large stone found in a tomb — and make the standard amazing discoveries.

If nothing else, Benford does his homework; I could spot no errors in his details of Greek archaeology. (My father is an archaeologist who specializes in Greece; I've worked on several excavations there.) But the chases are routine, the characters familiar, and the book didn't hold my attention toward the end as it should have. I've

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The Dark Tide
by Dennis L. McKiernan
Signet, $2.95 (paperback)

Avoid this book like the plague! I reviewed its hardcover edition in a small-press magazine distributed only in Arizona, so most of you won't have heard what I said about it. Therefore, I will repeat myself in the interest of public welfare:

The Dark Tide is Tolkien-imitation at its worst. The protagonists — called "Warrows" — are clearly hobbits, albeit somewhat militant and twisted hobbits, in description and habits. They even live in holes . . . not deep, dark holes full of oozing things and the ends of worms, but Warrow-holes. . . .

McKiernan even has the gall to say in the foreword that his book is for people who like the works of Tolkien (and Le Guin, and Kurtz, and McKillip) and can't get enough. Well, maybe so — but I would've thought he'd want to disguise his literary theft, rather than publicize it.

He's style-deaf and doesn't know English from a hole in his head. (He insists on using 'thee' and 'thou' without modifying verbs accordingly; as a result, his characters all talk like Quakers[!].) People don't say much here, either. They exclaim, shoot back, sigh, and flare words. (Don't ask me how!)

This book should not have been published, ever, under any circumstances — let alone by ~~once~~ respected houses like Doubleday and Signet. It makes *The Sword of Shannara* look like the epitome of style and invention.

Shame on all involved!

Baaa
by David Macauley
Houghton Mifflin, $4.95 (trade pb); $12.95 (hardcover)

This is one of those cute picture-books with only a line or three at the bottom of each page. It's also an allegory on 'The Human Condition,' with sheep as protagonists. After mankind has vanished from the Earth, sheep wander into human towns and gradually take over, dressing and acting like people. Then they develop all the same problems as humans, and pretty soon they're involved in labor strikes, socialist movements, riots. . . .

It's amusing. It might make a good gift to a mundane who doesn't like to read much. You could also skim it in two or three minutes in a book store, if you wanted, but (of course) I'd never suggest such a thing. . . .

Kelly Country
by A. Bertram Chandler
DAW Books, $3.50 (paperback)

Here's a good book, fully as satisfying as anything Chandler's ever done before. When John Grimes, a reporter and SF-writer modeled after Chandler himself, goes back (through a machine that releases his racial memories) to relive a crucial point in Australia's history as a newspaper assignment, he finds he has the ability to change events — and saves Ned Kelly's life. (Kelly, by the way, was either an early Australian freedom fighter or, if you look at it differently, a cutthroat and bushman bandit. If things had worked out right, he might've been Australia's George Washington.)

When Grimes returns to his own time, he finds that things *have* worked out differently. Kelly *did* live, *did* free Australia from Britain's rule, and *did* set himself and his descendants up as Australia's hereditary Presidents.

And Grimes keeps going back and changing more things, and events get more and more complicated . . . the

world never quite got back to the way it was.

I recommend *Kelly Country* heartily. This ought to be the book for which Chandler is remembered.

Lyonesse: The Green Pearl
by Jack Vance
Underwood-Miller (651 Chestnut St., Columbia, PA 17512), $60.00 (signed, boxed hardcover)

If nothing else, *Lyonesse II* is an elegant production: there's a beautiful dust jacket by Stephen Fabian, maps on the endpapers, a nicely-fuzzy gray slipcase; and the book itself is well-bound with heavy boards and acid-free paper. This is a sequel to *Lyonesse* (which, I must confess, I haven't yet read), and is pretty well self-contained.

Vance has invented his own historic pseudo-France, which is where the narrative takes place. The rambling start follows a cursed green pearl as it kills victim after victim; then a good knight, Sir Tristano, happens upon it and resolves to get rid of it . . . and finds he can't. He discovers the pearl's power for evil only works when its owner touches it. Therefore he resolves not to — and a good deal of humor results.

Cut to King Casmir and various other nobles, who are getting ready for war with other nearby powers. The situation is a complex political mess, and you know the green pearl is going to get involved. . . .

I enjoyed the book. This is the only edition yet published (limited to 500 copies, mine being #420); I imagine it will be sold out soon. If you want it, you might have to buy it from a huckster at an SF convention — that or wait for the first trade edition, which should be out soon from Berkley. Purists please take note: Berkley's edition will be shortened; this is the preferred text.

The Custodians
by Richard Cowper
Gollancz, $12.95 (hardcover)

This is a British book, but it will have some distribution in the U.S. (You can also probably buy it at any major SF convention.)

It's a collection of short stories: "The Custodians" (the best in the book; it won a Hugo), "Paradise Beach" (amusing, but slight), "Piper at the Gates of Dawn" (also good), and "The Hertford Manuscript" (Victorian in flavor; fairly good). Since my column is already running far too long, I can't say more. If you're familiar with Cowper's work, you've probably already read all these stories in magazines or anthologies. If you're not, this is a good place to start. Watch for it.

In short:

Corroboree Press, best known for its Lafferty collections, has issued a rather remarkable Philip K. Dick item — the screenplay Dick wrote for his classic novel, *Ubik*. It would've been a really *strange* movie had it been made. If you're interested in P. K. Dick, this is a must-have book. Price is $24.50 (post paid) from Corroboree Press, 2729 Bloomington Ave. So., Minneapolis, MN 55407. . . . *A Checklist and Bibliography of the First Appearance of the Novels and Short Stories of Stephen King*, compiled by Owen Haskell, is available for $6.00 from: Other Worlds, 197 Wickenden St., Providence, RI 02903. It's not complete; it doesn't list King's pseudonymous work. . . . *H. P. Lovecraft Illustrated in Ichor*, by Robert K. Knox. This is a series of 11 prints of squamous and gibbering things, plus a foreword by Ben Indick. The art isn't

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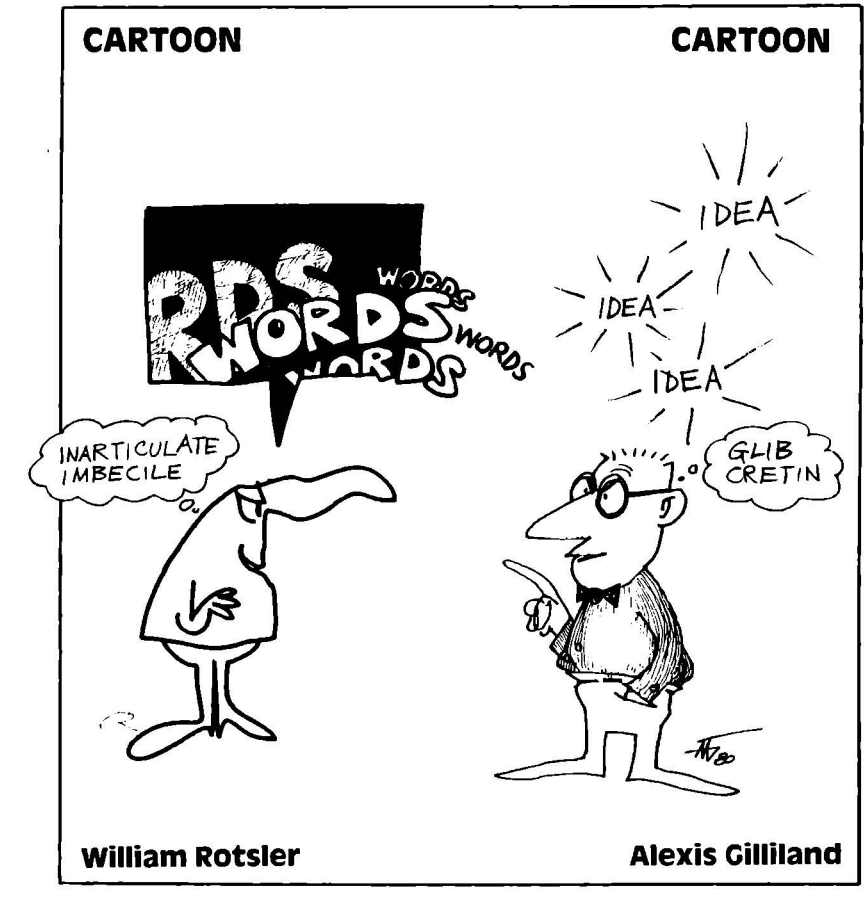
of professional quality and isn't worth $10.00. But if you want to support an amateur artist and Lovecraft follower, you can order it from: Niekas, RFD #1, Center Harbor, NH 03226. . . . *Risque Stories* (#3) and *Shudder Stories* (#3) are now available for $4.00 each. These are both small-press magazines with contents of interest to fans of pulp magazines: new work by Robert E. Howard, Justin Case, Carl Jacobi, Lin Carter, Hugh B. Cave, and others. Order from Cryptic Publications, 107 E. James St., Mount Olive, NC 28365 — and ask about their other magazine, *Crypt of Cthulhu.* ✂



Discussions
by the Readers

Since there seems to be a lot of discussion of religion in this particular letter column, we hope it won't seem too presumptuous for us to come down from the Mountain of Manuscripts and present the following Commandments for Addresses:

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2. Subscriptions with payments therefor should go to Amazing® *at P.O. Box 72089, Chicago IL 60690.*

3. Manuscripts should be sent to Amazing® *at P.O. Box 8243, Philadelphia PA 19101-8243, provided that you have checked a* current *issue of the magazine to see if this address is still valid. We do not want the Philadelphia address to get permanently placed in reference books and market reports: it is* only *for people who regularly* read *the magazine. If in doubt, you can always send a manuscript to the Lake Geneva address. We will still receive it.*

4. Letters to the editor should be sent to the Lake Geneva address, so the staff there can read them before mailing them to Philadelphia.

— George H. Scithers

Dear Mr. Scithers:

John Barnes's "Finalities Besides the Grave," in the September 1985 issue, spoke to me on several levels fairly strongly. A relatively new writer myself, I was envious of Barnes's light-handed treatment of a theme screaming for fist-pounding didacticism: the danger of religious subversion of American democracy. I expected a lynch-mob scene or at least a book-burning. His avoidance of these familiar clichés showed that he knows how much more effective understatement can be than direct confrontation as a conveyor of horror.

As an ex-fundamentalist Christian, I was disturbed that there were no "good" Christians in the story. When I was a Bible-believer, I knew lots of folks who deplored religious hypocrisy as greatly as any atheist, and who tried sincerely to show love and caring to everyone they met — whether they believed our preaching or not. I remember how we helped each other, protected each other from the cruelties of the intolerant, and prayed for a world we really felt needed the Hope we thought we'd found. It was all fresh and new to us, you see, this world of faith. Most of us had been converted to Christianity as adults, in the high-energy days of the Jesus Movement (late '60s, early '70s, for all you young 'uns out there). So part of me remembers, and hurts when I read a story about those bad, oppressive religious nuts. They were *people*; to me, brothers and sisters.

But there's another part of me that Barnes disturbed for an entirely different reason: the part of me that recognizes where Fundamentalism was leading me. We said we wanted the same right of speech and worship

anybody else in the U.S. had; no more, no less. But that wasn't entirely true. We rejoiced when an abortion clinic closed, though none of *us* would have gone to it. We decried the abomination of an openly gay minister, though his teachings shook neither our faith nor the faith of our children. We lobbied for prayer in schools, although we taught our children that it did not matter to God when or where or how they talked to Him, as long as they did so honestly and regularly. And we voted for any politician who claimed he was one of us. Everyone not with us was against the light.

I imagine you'll get a lot of flak for "Finalities Besides the Grave," lots of cries of "Unfair! Unfair!" As I see it, it's a pretty clear glimpse into one alternate probability. And the tragedy of it is that the *real* Christians, the people who *really* love their fellows because Christ loves them, will be swept up in the maelstrom of hatred and oppression along with the rest of us *"lost."* Jesus said, "Not everyone who says 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of Heaven." And folks, he wasn't just whistling Dixie. He knew what he was talking about, firsthand.
Rand B. Lee
Key West FL

The thing to remember about Fundamentalists is that, contrary to what they seemingly would have us believe, they aren't the only Christians around. As some recent decisions against anti-Evolution laws have demonstrated, our best defense sometimes comes not from the scientists and secular humanists, but from the Catholics and Presbyterians and Lutherans, who are not about to be quietly relegated to the Outer Darkness with the rest of the "unconverted."

— George H. Scithers

Dear Mr. Scithers,

Once upon a time this community valued highly the natural authority of common sense.

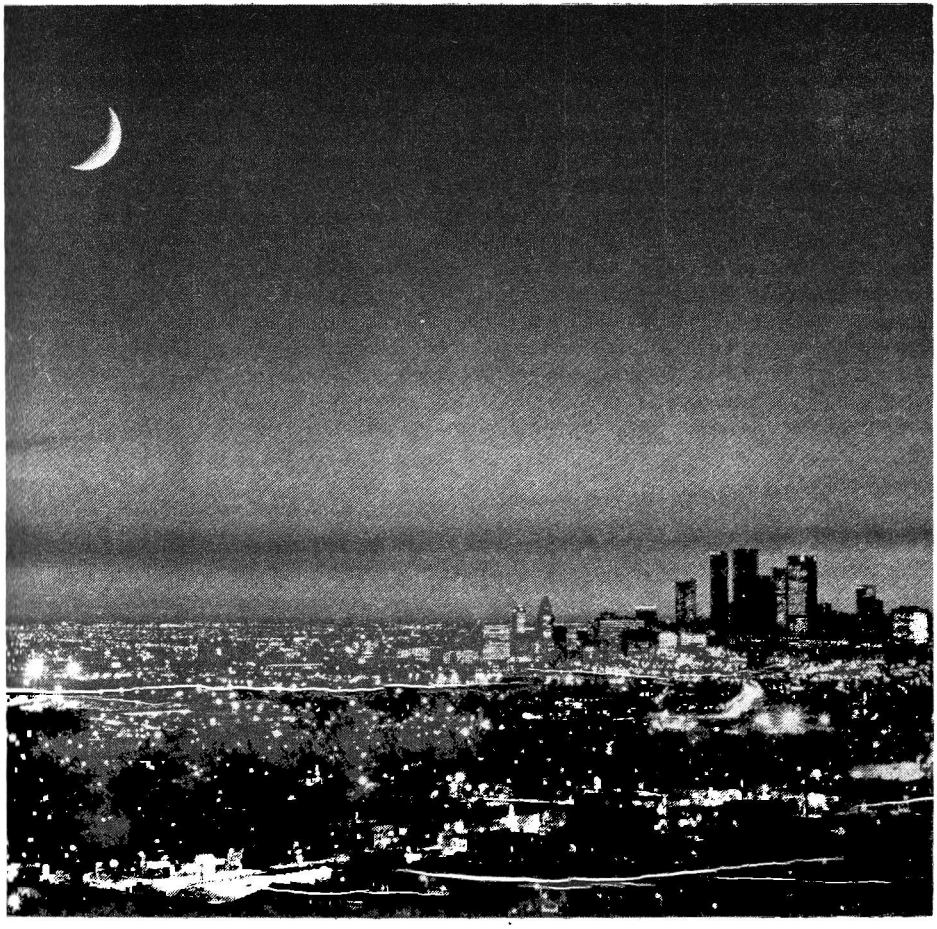
Look! About the controversy regarding Science Fiction vs. Fantasy: Whether it is widely realized or not, the modern realm of speculative fiction is the only literature of the imagination we have left. Its proper place and study is within the context of the history of religions, although it should not be properly considered a cult as such.

It represents the only cutting edge we possess with which to prune away the obsolete spiritual traditions of our heritage. The modern teller of these genuine myths and visions is instinctively reaching for a kind of regeneration, renewal of our culture, the integration of our personalities.

There is room within this art for both the classical, rational, extrapolative mode of knowing as well as the romantic, passionate, intuitive mode of Being articulated through fantasy. We need desperately these new images and concrete metaphors to fathom the totality of what we are, where we are coming from, and where we are headed! They are nothing less than the organs by which a new psychological model of reality is perceived.

I once thought that the healing and liberating message of historical Christianity could itself be rescued from the corruption of History, but in the face of Science Fiction I know there is no need; you can't keep the human spirit down; it will try, test, and struggle to animate any vessel into which it is poured; and with the vocabulary of SF concepts currently in vogue, it is hard for me to conceive of the religious movement which will follow.

There is a law of compensation here, O you reason mongers! The human



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spirit will be whole. Science fiction has become the only authentic religion of the future! Its advocates are nothing less than the ministers of new covenant, and not in the written word itself, which kills, but in the spirit which gives life. Would that I could give birth to these heuristic and didactic exercises as easily as I can expound their doctrine! And while I've got your attention, please pay as much attention as possible to the vertical connections between your alligator, your horse, and your monkey brain, each wrapping itself about the other like the layers of mucilage surrounding the particle of unrelenting irritation which is the heart of a pearl.

With unbridled enthusiasm,
John B. Cave
Keyser WV

You are certainly going too far. The one attempt by a science-fiction writer to turn the stuff of the field into a real-life religion can best be described as unfortunate. Remember: science-fiction writers, and readers, *are experts in making things up. Therefore they tend to recognize the made-up far more readily than the general population. This means they are less likely to be sucked in by von Däniken, Velikovsky, or UFO cultists. To actually turn science fiction into a religion, with a set of beliefs which preclude other beliefs, is certainly a perversion of the free, speculative tradition of the field.*

At the same time, there is no denying that science fiction has taken over some of the subject matter of traditional religion — questions of man's origin and place in the universe, the nature of the individual, life-after-death — and that much of the emotional and even the intellectual attraction of science fiction would have been, in former times, characteristic of religion. Childhood's End *is essentially about religious concerns; but the difference is that Clarke is saying, "Suppose this were so?" as opposed to, "This was revealed to me. It is true."*

— George H. Scithers

Dear George,

If I may, I would like to make a general comment on *Amazing®'s* policies. Judging from Robert Silverberg's "Opinion" editorials and from a lot of the other non-fiction articles you print, it appears that your magazine is deeply concerned with the welfare of the human race. But I can't arrive at that conclusion from reading most of your stories, which are meant to be light-hearted and entertaining, but convey little information beyond that.

I am under the impression that it has long been part of the SF tradition to apply itself to our deeper concerns. Is it part of *Amazing®'s* tradition as well? To that end I appreciate Mr. Silverberg's editorials. I am not one of those persons he talks about who eschews technological advancement, but I also don't think all of our problems can be cured by technology or scientific knowledge. Some problems have a psychological rather than technological origin.

One criticism I do have of his editorials: I think he sometimes falls prey to the same extremity of polemics as the people he's denouncing. Such things feed on themselves and end up in opposing camps with little hope of reconciliation. It might be more to the point for him to recognize that there may be some valid justification to the fears and beliefs he's fighting. Instead of tearing them down he could concentrate on providing solutions that would encompass all the problems. That is

much harder to do, granted, but it also brings better results.

And thank you for printing Ben Bova's "Space Weapons" article. I realize these are touchy subjects that you may want to avoid, but they won't go away by being ignored. I, personally, don't have an opinion on that business because I don't know enough about it; and lacking the knowledge I shouldn't form an opinion. The article was well-written and informative. I suspect Mr. Bova of being overly optimistic, but he did have the decency to present more than his side.

I wish I could say similar things about your fiction. I understand that attempting to deal with moral discussions, and so on, can lead to definite problems; but not dealing with them leads to worse problems. I know that you're basically interested in entertaining us readers, but how much fun is a cocktail party if the bombs are falling? What I'm saying is that I wish you would publish more stories that illuminate the darkness of human existence. In your last issue there were only two that, for me, had such qualities: Christopher Gilbert's "The Ultimate Diagnostic" and John Barnes's "Finalities Besides the Grave." There have been others in the past; I would like to see more.

Sincerely,
Kent Martens
Ferndale WA

We would like to see more too, and encourage writers to submit them. But we make a distinction between stories which have real substance, like "Finalities Besides the Grave" and J. A. Lawrence's "Some Are Born Great," and those which are merely trendy — science fiction stories about AIDS or Arab oil embargoes or whatever else is in the newspaper this week. These are important subjects too, but fiction, as we see it, should be a little more general and universal, rather than just an editorial with characters. This is why the earlier stories of H. G. Wells are still of interest, while his later, more didactic works are dust.

— George H. Scithers

Dear Mr. Scithers;

Allow me to begin by adding my humble praises upon those already collected by you. Your talent for selecting great stories and all those other tasks editing science-fiction magazines has, as far as I'm concerned, no equal!

I have just finished reading your July 1985 issue and you and the staff should be proud! I have seldom, if ever, had the pleasure; nay, joy, of such an issue. This notes that I have been reading science fiction since I was about 13 years old. That span is now some 23 years.

In an issue full of gems, one story stands out. I don't weep easily, have done so over a short story on only one other occasion in the last few years (again from a story you edited, Mr. Scithers). This time it was for the beauty of the composition by Mr. Grant. To Mr. Grant: may your muses sing many, many times more! "Lyric for the Darkmass" was a joy! The story "caught" me early on, and, like a fine classical prelude, held me transfixed, until that beautiful, enduring, last chord! BRAVO! BRAVO! ENCORE!!

Should that story be the only wonder, perhaps I would have procrastinated once more and not written. But wait! There is (was) more!

Mr. Creveling's story "Bet" is surely destined for many collections to come. Ms. Carr's "Catacombs," Mr. Iverson's "Unholy Trinity," and Mr. Schweitzer's "The Last of the Shadow

Titans" were all excellent!

I have not forgotten Ms. Girard's "Katzenjammer." It deserves special mention, being a delightful, whimsical lark!

I've run out of superlatives, but the rest was just as good. Keep it up! I'll keep reading!

Sincerely,
Charles M. Hostetler
Detroit MI

Dear Everybody There at the Office;

I am pleased that my letter in the March 1985 *Amazing®* prodded Robert Silverberg into clarifying his position on the "dumbing down" of current SF. I was simply complaining about the *implications* of his statements on female villains. I knew from the first that that was not what he meant when he said (wrote?) it.

I do read a great deal of what Silverberg refers to as "junk," i.e. *Planet Stories* and similar stuff. I buy a great deal of it . . . but most of it is already quite old (this part of Florida is loaded with used-paperback bookstores). I find this junk (or "a good, wild, roaring story" to quote Silverberg out of context) reads much better when it has time to age a few years or decades. I can read it and say to myself, "They don't write stuff like that anymore."

Still, I like science fiction that has a good idea, clear and well-written prose, characters with appeal . . . but, important though these are, I put plot above them all.

I enjoyed this September 1985 issue, particularly "The Amulet of the Firegod," "Rolls Rex, King of Cars," and "A Friendly Game of Crola," as well as Darrell Schweitzer's interview with David Gerrold. But Avram Davidson's latest tale of Dr. Eszterhazy simply went right over my head. I enjoyed the style, the historical and pseudo-historical references, and the characters . . . but the plot was simply beyond me. I estimate my average of understanding the Eszterhazy stories to be about sixty percent. Maybe on a re-reading it will all come clear. . . .

For the first time recently, I saw *Amazing®* on newsstands. First at a bookstore rack . . . then at a drugstore rack in the same mall. Unfortunately, they were in New York, where I went for a visit a couple of weeks ago, and not Florida where I currently live. Keep trying. . . .

Sincerely,
Robert Nowall
2730 SE 24th Place
Cape Coral FL 33904

If you can't find Amazing® *on the newsstand, ask for it, repeatedly if necessary. And if your newsdealer says he can't get it (which probably means the newsdealer is incompetent), find the local wholesaler, and ask* him.
— George H. Scithers

Dear Mr. Scithers:

Let me apologize before you read any further — I know I am supposed to send letters to Lake Geneva and submissions to you in Philadelphia, but I sort of goofed. Not reading the letter column (Shame on me!) meant that the only address I could find for the magazine was the main (permanent) one in Lake Geneva, so I sent a short story to that P.O. Box. To make up for it, it's only fair that I send this letter to the wrong address first as well. Sorry for the confusion.

My congratulations to Steven Gould for his short story ("Mental Blocks") in your July issue. It was highly entertaining, imaginative and thought-provoking. I wonder if there's a University somewhere we could try his experiment out and see what hap-

pened.

One thing I would like to know, since Mr. Gould is a student at Texas A&M, did his idea stem from more than imagination? Either way, it was a well-done story, with the best narrative hook since "One day, the Pope forgot to take her Pill."

Sincerely,
Bruce W. Gardner
Louisville KY

As far as we know, Mr. Gould was relying entirely on his imagination. But it wouldn't *be too surprising to learn that such an experiment had been conducted. Some people will believe almost anything if it is properly suggested. We call to mind the legendary newspaper ad which said, "Last chance to send in your dollar!" and listed an address. Nothing was promised in return, but people sent in their dollars. When this was investigated (so the story goes), the perpetrators couldn't be nailed for fraud, because they hadn't deceived anyone. Instead, they had let people deceive themselves.*

— George H. Scithers

Dear Mr. Scithers:

I am frequently "behind" in my reading and I confess (?) that I have just read the July *Amazing®*.

I was most interested by your editorial on the statement, history and interpretation of "Murphy's Law." (For one thing it helps me make sense of the wording of the rejection note I received on a story I submitted based on the Law. That is, however, not my purpose in writing.)

I was aware that Murphy was a real man, though I did not know he was still alive or that he was a graduate of West Point. I also knew that the original statement was about a technician who had installed some strain gauges backwards, though I did not know there were sixteen of them.

Your formulation of the meaning and use of Murphy's Law is one I greatly approve of and sincerely hope that reasonable people are making use of. A simple statement of your interpretation might be to "identify the things that could be done wrong and fix them so they cannot be so done." I can't believe you will find any reasonable person who will disagree.

I think, however, that you too easily (and futilely) dismiss the more cynical traditional formulation, "If anything can go wrong, it will." Once in a while someone — often without intending to do so — makes a statement that strikes a universal chord in human beings and thereby takes on a life of its own. I have heard reference to "the natural cussedness of inanimate objects." And I am almost sure I remember (pre-Murphy) references to "Finagle's Laws" which said many of the same things.

I suspect your "campaign" to reform the statement of Murphy's Laws will have about the same success as the use of "stf" or "Sci-Fi" for SF.

One aspect of your editorial did strike me in my professional capacity. That was the installation of sixteen strain gauges, all backwards. Now I don't know a strain gauge from a rain gauge but I assume they have two ends and that it is (was) possible to tell one end from the other.

If this assumption is valid, then the unnamed technician blasted by Mr. Murphy was, in part, unfairly treated. Perhaps he did not know the correct configuration, or did not know how to find out that configuration. But he was consistent; he had a fifty percent chance of being entirely right (or entirely wrong). Suppose he had put

eight in one way and eight the other way. He would have only been "half as wrong," but he would have known they were not put in correctly. Perhaps he was a gambler and just took a chance.

However, if it really was not possible to tell one end of the strain gauges from the other, then the feat of installing all sixteen of them backwards should be enshrined in the history of probability as one of the least likely events in history. The odds against doing so would be 2^{16}.

Maybe the fantasy Murphy has something after all.

Sincerely,
David L. Travis
Associate Professor of Mathematics
Glassboro NJ

Our understanding is that the strain gauges were marked, but the tech. rep. didn't bother to read the instructions. Murphy might be called the father of "Idiot-Proofing." If you have a plug marked red on one side and green on the other, then it is quite possible for someone not to read the instructions (which say to put the red side to the right) and have only a 50% chance of getting it correct. This was the case with the strain gauges. But Murphy would advocate the three-pronged plug, which you can't put in wrong!
— George H. Scithers

Dear George and eyesore manuscript readers,

I have received your latest threat of total annihilation if I send you any more manuscripts that have been typed with faded ribbons and I surrender! I must admit that I **knew better** but I thought that I could get away with it! You caught me. It wasn't the ribbons or the dirt, though; it was my cheap typewriter!! (My typewriter and I apologize; my new word processor/computer states it has nothing to apologize about.) I have retired the typewriter. (I really don't miss it at all, but don't ever let it know; I don't want the computer to get a swollen head.)

"Swollen Head? It sounds like the title of a story about a Writer."

Too late; I guess the stupid machine heard me.

"STUPID!??"

All right! All right, you're not stupid. You're great, you're wonderful, I can't live without you. Now will you let me get on with my letter??

"If you insist; but I really don't see what you're so upset about."

OUT! OUT! OUT!

"All right, I'm out already. Don't have a heart attack."

You see what you've saddled me with? You at *Amazing®*, not the computer. I retired the typewriter and bought a word processing computer so that I would never again get your form letter telling me to replace my typewriter ribbon. Sure, my writing life is easier now that I don't have to use White-out, Correct-type, and the editing pen; but now I have to put up with a smug computer.

"Watch it, I'll substitute your pleading letter to that sleaze-bomb in Hollywood for this one."

You see? No respect. It's not enough that I have to read the manual to learn how to use the stubborn thing. It's not enough that the documentation is confusing and that I, as a rank beginner to the (ranks?) of word processing know absolutely nothing about how to run the computer. I have to listen to its back talk too. Blah, Blah, Blah all day about how great it is, but does it offer a word of advice? Not at all?

"Try the F1 key."

F1?

"Yes F1. It's on the upper left side of your keyboard. If you really had read the manual you would know that F1 is the HELP key."

A>F1:

"Who? Wha?? Oh it's you. Sorry; I fell asleep while you were arguing with CPU."

Who's this?

"It's your Leading Edge word-processing software. Who did you think would answer when you call for HELP?"

Sorry; I guess I really should read the manual. Listen, can you get rid of CPU for me? I want to finish this letter to *Amazing®* and go to bed. What with correcting all the mistakes I make, learning as I go, and arguing with CPU, things are taking a lot longer than I thought they would. I thought a computer would speed things up a bit.

"It will, just be patient. CPU won't bother you any more, I've put him to bed for the night. Now . . . what about that Spell Check software you promised me?"

I already bought it. Now I have to figure out how to use it.

"Just press F1. I'll take care of everything."

Could I get on with my letter now?

"If you insist."

Thank God that's taken care of. Who would ever have thought a CPU could give a guy so much trouble? Every command has to be exactly right, or I get a message telling me that CPU can't find the file; or worse yet, nothing at all happens. I'll get the hang of it though, now that Leading Edge is on my side. He sounds like a real helpful guy.

"Guy!! I beg your pardon! This word processing software happens to be very female, and damned proud of it! Why do you think they call it **soft**ware anyway? But it's OK. Nearly everyone makes that mistake. No real offense taken."

LIKE I SAID, now that Leading Edge is on my side I'll soon master this beast and you people will never have to read another faded manuscript from my tired typewriter.

My eyes are beginning to glaze over now. Too much input for me in one night. I'll wake up the printer in the morning and see what I can get him (her?) to do.

Good Night,
Dave Olson
32 E Palm St.
Altadena CA 91001

"P.S. This is CPU. You haven't heard the last of me."

Readers, we want to hear from you. Active, lively letter columns have been a tradition in science-fiction magazines since the very beginning. Science-fiction fandom, now a mass phenomenon involving thousands of fanzines and conventions almost every weekend of the year, began here, *in the "Discussions" column in* Amazing®, *over fifty years ago. It's a tradition we want to continue.*

— George H. Scithers ✂

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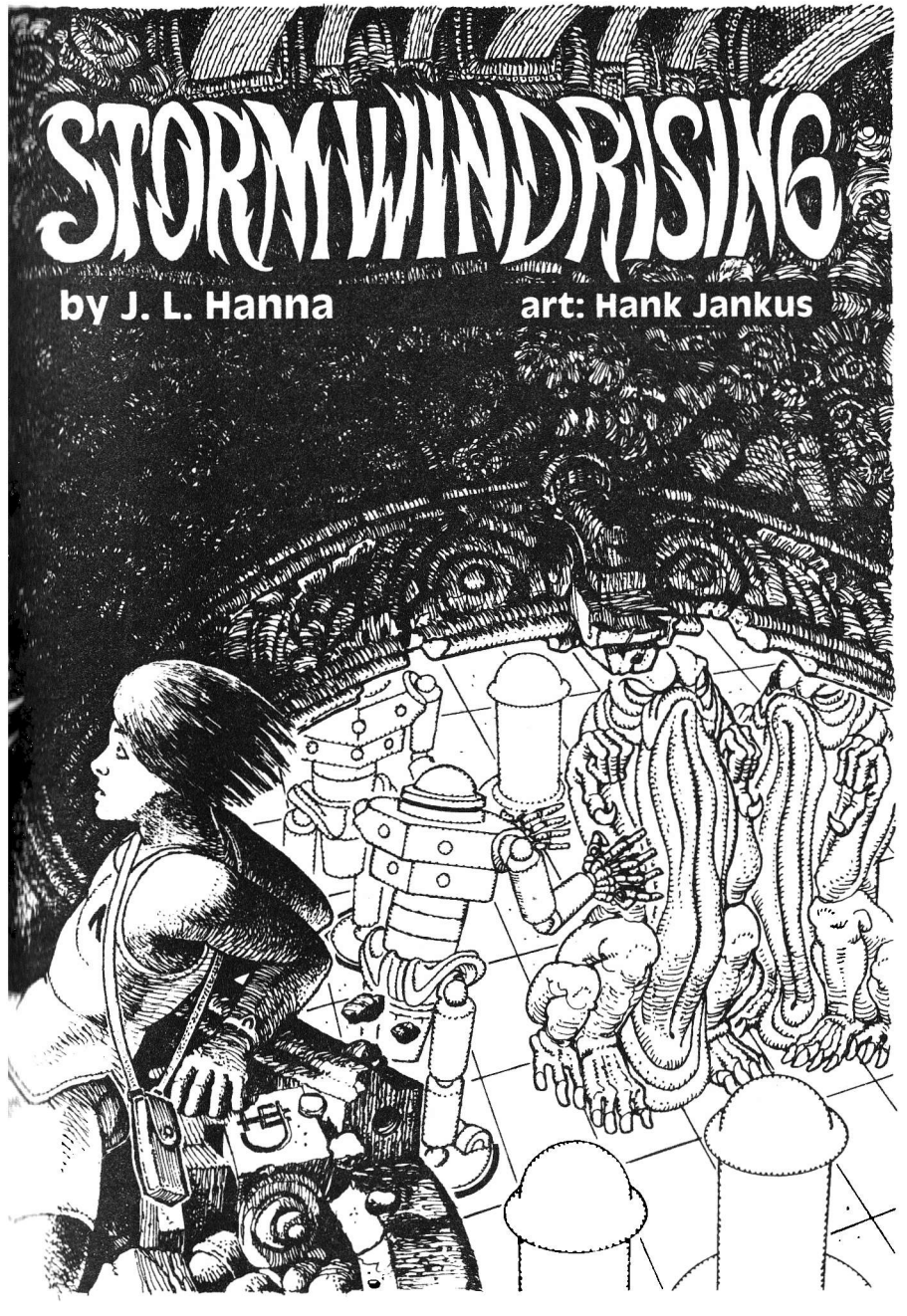

STORMWINDRISING
by J. L. Hanna
art: Hank Jankus

J. L. Hanna majored in anthropology and has worked in various places in Africa; and though present-day Russia is not hospitable to field work, he has studied the language and read more Dostoyevsky than he thinks is good for him.

This is his second professional sale.

This happened long ago, when men were rare among the Union worlds, lacking a purpose, a place, and a home world.

Vanya Anton-son Buslaev was brushing dried soil away from a fossil he had found embedded in a courtyard of a ruined town when the world began to grow dark. He looked up and to the fore-end; the great windows were already halfway closed, cutting out the light from Haains's star. The Ship was preparing for Drop.

The wooden handle of the brush clattered dully on a flagstone. The boy shook off the stab of fear and checked his timer: the second hand stood motionless by the sign for eighteen.

He put it next to his ear and shook it, hoping for a broken mainspring. Nothing so fortuitous. He had simply forgotten to set the alarm this morning. And this a Dropday! His father would kill him.

He got to his feet and ran from the courtyard, leaving his tools and his finds, past gaping windows and lightless doorways, down an empty street. The trend station lay beyond the town's limits, a quarter of a verst away. He ran so fast he left the fear behind.

If Ship had been well habited the warders would have rung the bells of the tower in Main and the loudspeaker system would have relayed their pealing throughout the vast cylinder, and someone would have grabbed him and hauled him off to the nearest Drop Chambers. Or he would have heard them himself. It wasn't his fault that most towns had been off the power mains since before the first human had come aboard. But his father would not consider that an excuse.

He ran up the ramp into the station and found the car that had brought him here still waiting on a siding. He pushed the door open and the lights came on. He breathed a sigh of relief: the trend system worked still. He found the communicator and punched out the digits for his father's store on the Human side of town. There was no answer.

The car began to move; the part of it that was alive chirruped at him and demanded food and water.

It shot out of the station and forwards toward Main. The car chirruped again. He stroked it gently, but there was nothing he could do. Like people, it could not eat before Drop. He should have fed it hours ago, but his mother had packed no lunch and he had worked straight through. Now it would have to go hungry until he woke up after Drop.

* * *

"It's deliberate. It has to be. I should have known the boy would do something like this to me."

Anton Khariton-son paced up and down the small garden walk. Overhead, the sea was growing dark as the great shutters rolled over the forward ports, cutting off the light of Haains's star, putting Main-town into growing twilight. The travelwombs' songs rose from the lake to spinward. Behind him the great double doors of the Drop Chambers gaped open.

By regulations they should have closed and sealed them before the forward crew had started their work.

Fareon Tenech looked up at the great tower clock. His human colleague came up to his chest, barely; where the human was red and pink, the Pilg was purple and brown. If seen from a distance in the dark, by a not very observant member of, say, a heptapodal species, they might have been mistaken for members of the same race. For a while.

"There is still time to telephone the Council and have them hold Drop." He seemed to be counting on his eight fingers. "This is not a busy system. The Haains have computers and can recalculate in less than a second. . . ."

The human did not seem to hear.

"He could be injured, of course. Always moping around those ruins." The man shook his head while speaking. "Something might have happened to him."

He turned to the Pilg: "He never wants to do anything useful. Give him a math problem written out and he'll whiz through it. Ask him what percentage of profit we make if we buy a thousand hi of rydon in Gesttel at 651 ob per hi and sell on Wilk at 9433 minus the transport costs and he can't even formulate the problem! And now this!"

The Pilg was sanguine. He had five thousand years more experience than the man. He stroked the back of one hand, saying:

"Such things happen. I can remember your growing years, and your father's. Such errors constantly occur with the young."

"But it's deliberate." Anton Khariton-son stopped pacing and looked up at his friend. "He hates me. He has always hated me. It's in his nature; my father didn't even have to turn him against me. Now he wants to cost me ob in fines, that's how much he hates me."

The Pilg shook his head. It was a human gesture the owners of the Ship had picked up from their crew and protégés; their own anatomy favored a different form of body language.

"We are different species, Anton Khariton-son. But I do have vague recollections of a childhood that have not quite vanished completely. There was much pain in it, not a little embarrassment, and there are still the shadows of memories which make me writhe; but I can bring back memories of my parents tinged with some fondness . . ."

"In humans, it's different." The man searched for something to say, and

spoke what he thought must be the truth.

"All humans want to see their fathers dead." After a moment: "All that humans want, is to see their fathers dead."

While he spoke the Pilg's eyes still searched the rolling sides of the world; the Pilg's home star burned redder and duller than men's, and his kind had better night vision, so it was not unexpected he could say, "Something glitters on the trend aft and to spinward," when his fellow portal guard saw nothing.

"How much time?" The man found himself caught between two dear loves, and was almost afraid to admit to himself he would sacrifice ob for his son. He seemed to shrink, as if all his tensions had drained from him. Fareon Tenech thought a moment, then spoke:

"He will make it, barely. Do you wish to go to the station and hurry him along?"

"No. Something better . . ."

The man went over to the wall of circuit-breakers: the two of them had unlocked the large boxes in the side of the Drop Chamber's concrete wall almost an hour ago.

"Tell me when he makes it to Station."

On either side of trend Ship's World rose gently upward toward the towns and fields on the other side, two hundred versts away, beyond the glassed-in ocean in the middle of the world. The lights in Night were gone now, replaced by interior phosphors. The great pinwheel waterfalls at either end were ghosts in the dark.

The car arrived at its terminus: Vanya directed it off the magnetic strip and discharged the accumulators. There was no one about. The machinery was all disconnected and standing ready for someone to come along and plug it in again after Drop. From the lake he could hear the call of the travelwombs, wondering where the Singers had gone. Then he ran for Chambers.

Behind him Station went black; the shadow which had run before him was lost altogether. Ahead lights still burned but, almost as he reached them, they went out, and he ran in half darkness.

Finally, the lights ahead of him had dwindled to a single point, the opened doors of the Drop Chambers.

His father was standing just inside the first doorway, a mountain of red-bearded bogatyr. It was only when Vanya crossed the threshold that his fears at last caught up with him.

"How dare you be late!" The words exploded from the man, more of a cry of indignation than a true question. One huge fist reached out and grabbed him by the front of his tunic. "Do you know what a fine we would have paid if you delayed Ship?" The boy was half lifted off his feet and carried through the airlock into the sleep area. The Pilg with his father slid the

door shut and made it airtight, then strode leisurely after them.

"You are certain you wish to keep this one, Anton Khariton-son?" The Pilg patted the boy on the shoulder. "You can always throw him back out and breed another."

"You mean *I* would breed another." Maria Petrovna interposed herself between her husband and her son, letting the boy find his way to the sleeping pad and the waiting syringe. "The number that I have is sufficient for me now; we shall simply have to insist that he do better." She calmed her husband down.

The needle stung the boy, and after a moment the familiar drug took hold, and he turned his face away from the adults before he saw the smile on the face of Fareon Tenech or heard his father's own gruff laughter.

While the adults went about their business making certain everyone was deeply under the tranquilizers and extinguishing all the powered equipment, the thought remained in his mind that sometimes the drugs of the last wakers did not take hold fast enough, that sometimes someone did not awaken from the Dropspace sleep.

If it happened this time, his torment would be over.

Please God, end the torment . . .

Ship had a name, although no one aboard referred to her by anything other than "Ship." She was the *Roving Worldlet of the Galactic Union I-Gu4776b Stormwindrising*, an unfashionable name for the civilization which flew her, but which fit her venue, the worlds of the Outer Circle of Galactic Civilization: planets of the Mortals such as Stefaire and Harg, Gjoaith and Haains that had come into space so recently within the last thousand years.

Sometimes she carried passengers, as when the Gjoai chose to settle some of their clans on a newly fruited world; more often the all-important luxury items were nestled in the protection of the habitable core, sometimes bulk cargoes of needed resources or raw materials were fused in pods to the exterior surface.

Her crew and owners were Pilg from their colony world of Eseln, Fourth Circle Folk striving for Third within the pecking order of prestige and lifespan. The humans had come aboard ten of their generations before; the Pilg needed crew, the humans a place. The human crew did the work that robots would have done. They could sleep through the Drops when robots fused and died. And they replaced themselves at their own expense. Each got what they wanted from the arrangement.

Anton Khariton-son oversaw a number of business dealings with both the passengers the ship carried and the inhabitants of a score of worlds along their customary route. He was training his sons and daughters for the business, although some intended to seek work with Ship Herself among the engines and biosystems. But the youngest boy had turned into a grave disap-

pointment who filled his head with the stuff of adventure novels and useless information.

One by one Klavdia ticked off the children's names from the class roster; she'd rounded them up from outside the old school building and now stood barring the door, waiting for the teacher. Today they were to get Grandfather; he was going to speak on Galactic History, or at least as much as the Everliving of the First Circle thought it wise for Mortals to know.

Vanya had made it into the building ahead of the others and was perched on a tall chair in one corner where he could see the blackboard and the teacher's podium above the heads of the others. Once upon a time, the desks in the school had been for Pilg children, although none of those now living had ever seen a Pilg child outside of recordings. This one remained.

An adult came, and waved Klavdia into her seat.

"There's a special meeting going on." Stefan Rodvion-son, an uncle-by-marriage, explained. He was too recently married to be properly wary of children. "So I guess classes are out. Stay out of trouble today and I'll see you get Olga's Revenge with all the bloody parts next time I have to teach." He half backed out the door. "There are more than enough books and games to keep you busy, and Anton Khariton-son bought a special teaching computer . . ." It was really a terminal that picked up broadcasts from the local NaviComp service, but no one corrected him. "Just don't destroy it too quick."

Then he was gone.

Talking broke out. Vanya's older brothers started a game of lapti. Klavdia turned on the big screen that picked up local broadcasts to keep the smaller children busy and started working with the imitation computer. It was as close as they would get to a real machine. None of them had ever spoken to a real Cybermind; those beings left the Dropships to the organics, and the organics left the starships to Mortals such as Pilg and men.

Vanya wandered out of the school into the common. A storm was brewing just under the ocean halfway around the world. No way as yet to tell when or where it would rain.

As the boy walked along the pathway he could feel the wear on the plascrete underfoot; he had calculated how long it would take for feet or treads or pads to wear away the artificial stone, and he knew it must be true that the original town predated the arrival of the Pilg on the galactic scene. The Pilg had bought their ship from yet some other race, which had done the same from a third. And so on, ad infinitum.

Once, in a dream, Vanya had a vision: a chain of living things going back through time, endlessly to the Explosion. He wanted to know all he could about that chain, to follow its links to the end.

All paths led to Councilhall, and the plaza in front of the squat tower was filled with humans and Pilg talking. He turned aside and walked past the observation telescopes along the low garden wall. Someone should have

been on duty, making notes of which areas had gotten rain and which would need watering. There was no one to call to him to say he should be in school studying, which was odd.

He went into the hall through a door not designed for man or Pilg, and then up a path no one used now, to a set of galleries made for something just his size which overlooked the Council's platform.

The session was crowded. Stefan Rodvion-son had pushed his way only as far as the back rows of the public gallery. Fareon Tenech was standing at the speaker's rostrum, answering questions:

". . . we cannot just say no. Our contracts are not considered an excuse. Someone else will have to take them over . . ."

"Like *Ilrithyn*?" Someone shouted the name of their Rokal competitor. The voice was his father's.

"Unless they get the same summons, they probably will, at that." Vanya's grandfather rose from his seat beside the other Council members. He was Posadnik of the human community; and if the *Ilrithyn* were to gain, much of that loss would be his to bear.

He rose to his full height, still small beside a Pilg, but dwarfing his only son. The other humans below could see behind him the Wall of Heroes, with Oleg's Bow and Axe prominently displayed. Vayna had heard Oleg's Tale many times; how Oleg Mikha-son Buslaev had rescued the Pilg from the soldiers of Ivan the Syphilitic of Moscow and so won a place for his fugitive people on their ships.

"As Fareon Tenech has said, who can stand against God and the Everliving?" He waited a moment for that to sink in. "But on the other hand, we stand to gain as well, perhaps far more than we shall lose." He turned to the screen behind him; the local NaviComp was broadcasting a flatscreen map of the galaxy seen from above the galactic pole. Some stars were circled in white, far fewer in red. One of the red-circled stars expanded and they read the numbers beside it, the characters they could all translate as **RESTRICTED (A)*****.

"Our destination is an *Inner Circle* star, the Core of Life Eternal itself. I've checked it out on the printed manuals. It is prohibited to us, normally; and no one here, neither Pilg nor man, has ever before been to a restricted star." The view cut back and showed the traced-out route from their present location, a two-hundred-parsec distance, a dozen Drops through other systems.

"Think of it! We have a commission from the Everliving themselves! Think of the contacts we might be able to make, the chance to learn something about their technology and society. Even if we cannot use a datum now, it will tell us what awaits our descendants in the far future, not to mention the chance we might be able to sell such information to others for not inconsiderable sums . . ."

Now he was in their element and could hold his people's attention; they

could argue like that for several hours, but the words of possible riches and fame were but a minor balm for the very real losses they would all have to bear.

As Vanya sat in his perch watching his father and grandfather shout at each other, the local system's NaviComp service called the ship. Fareon Tenech sat for a moment with the receiver near his hearing orifice and after a moment addressed the Assembly.

"We have been officially informed that all our goods have been unloaded and our passengers removed to the stations until transportation can be found for them. In two hours we will make Drop."

He shrugged again, rose to his full three meters height, and left the stage. The Assembly dispersed immediately, except for his father and grandfather, who continued their argument.

The star on the big receiving screen in the common room was tiny and white, and immensely far away. The voice of Agafia Feofanovna announced they had reached their destination.

"That hardly makes sense." Anton Khariton-son spoke to his wife in a low voice. "The star's too fierce, type O perhaps." She gave him an askance look and checked Klavdia's pulse.

He continued: "It should have no planets, and could not last long enough for life to evolve on any it captured."

He helped his wife ease their eldest daughter to her feet; Klavdia was still groggy, and sometimes she cried when the drugs began to wear off. This time she just shook her head to tell them she needed no help and staggered over to the exercise pads where the other children were slowly working the soreness out of their muscles.

That left only Vanya, the youngest, who seemed to be glaring up at him from the protective couch. He could never understand the boy, no matter how much he tried. *His* son never went around in tatters because the family never had a stable enough cash flow to buy whatever became needful. Vanya would never have to scrape together his own sisters' dowries or see them married off without proper bridal settlements! And if he would just *think* about the family business and learn the ropes, he'd never be in the position of having to take an allowance from his own child. *My son will never be ashamed of his father.*

"We have the planet in sight now." Khariton Kirill-son's voice broke over the intercom. The starfield on the screen shifted and brought into focus space constructions that almost hid the blue and white world beyond. "About half a million versts off."

By rights *he* should have been in the Councilhall; the Assembly had said so, when he hadn't even been on board to influence them. He had returned from the Gjoai colony world with the wombsingers the Everliving had requisitioned, and Fareon Tenech had met him in the shuttle port bay to say

that by custom and law, no changes in the Council were allowed while ship was under-way except for treason or insanity; and no one had ever said his father was insane, merely a dreamer like his grandson who muddled through for decades finding out useless bits of information about the Immortals while others grew rich about him.

Excitement tinged the eldest Buslaev's voice: "Those are Dropspace projectors around the world; they must be thousands of versts long, big enough to move a whole planet."

The scene shifted and showed the cylindrical bodies of other ships.

"So we aren't the only ones they snared." Anton left his wife to attend to the boy and went over to the intercom station.

They were at their destination. He was Posadnik of the human community now. He punched out the Astronomer's number.

"Agafia, can you identify those ships?"

"Not yet." She answered him, although there had been no transition ceremony as yet. "They're not transmitting, and I can't make out the markings. The design is the same as ours, though." That last datum anyone could make out.

"And Khariton Kirill-son," she remembered proper protocol, "Councillor-beings, the readings I have been getting from this star indicate, even if I've only had a few minutes to observe it and I don't have any of the really sophisticated equipment, that the star is unstable.

"Now, I am not saying that it will go nova in the next ten minutes, folks," she added because she had no idea who might be listening in, "only that we shouldn't stay around here any longer than we have to."

Anton Khariton-son could imagine the Pilg on the bridge beginning to squirm. The thought made him uneasy as well.

"If there are Everliving within a light year of this star, we shorttimers don't have any reason to be afraid." Khariton Kirill-son's voice came perhaps too loudly on the intercom.

An hour later Anton Khariton-son took the Posadnik's badge of office and duties.

Only robots responded from System Traffic Control. Loading, they told him, must take no longer than twenty days. In twenty-two days the planet would be at the spot in its orbit where it would be Dropped to their masters' new star. The Masters would follow on the ships which the shorttimers had been commanded to provide. Let nothing go wrong.

He worked out the loading schedules with Fareon Tenech using file cards and an ancient electromechanical calculator, and at the robots' command entered the data onto a terminal the machines provided. They would fill every travelcity on every working trendline to fore, then pack them almost to midships.

He never once saw or communicated with any of the Immortals.

The carriers began to arrive three hours after they entered the system;

robot ships disgorged enormous, bulky travelwombs; robot wombsingers trundled beside them and grudgingly gave their Masters over to the Gjoai. The robots would never survive Drop; once aboard, they trundled to the processing plants.

Up and down the curve of the world, lights began to appear everywhere.

Anton was in the unloading bay when the tenth carrier was drawn into the airlock and the inner bay filled with air. The airlock of the robot carrier slid open and out stepped a human-like figure in vacuum gear.

It took a moment for him to realize the figure was human. *Who?* By the Saints, was some madman trying to get them all killed, going down unbidden to an Immortal world? He was lucky to get back up. . . .

Then he realized that the first carriers to arrive had not yet had time to return to the planet.

The man moved quickly out of the way of the robots and travelwombs, looked around, and saw Anton.

Anton Khariton-son pulled the stranger out of the way of the robots and into an access port before any of the Pilg or other humans had time to see him. If the robots or travelwombs deigned to see their hitchhiker, they must think him just another inferior being standing around in their way.

The stranger held out a notepad with interstellar symbols written on it to indicate he had undergone decontamination before leaving his home environment. A standard procedure, more politeness than — considering modern medicine — a necessity. Anton Khariton-son took the pad and wrote the corresponding symbols to indicate they had on board *Stormwindrising* no known diseases he might inadvertently take home. The stranger smiled and undid his helmet ring.

"Huthen dak." The words were nonsense syllables. "Aig hays Oleg Gustafson fom *Quester*."

Anton shook his head. After a moment the stranger continued in passable Russian.

"Name's Oleg Gustaf-son from *Quester*; we're on the Djavin-Silerat-Pana#$ run. The other ship is *Sprite* out of the Danilan Cluster. We've been trying to contact you, but our equipment must be pretty different. My Captain is interested in seeing if we might engage in mutually profitable trade. . . ."

Anton laughed and slapped Oleg Gustaf-son on the back.

"Of course, we'd love to, so long as their Mightinesses won't blow us out of space. . . ."

He helped the other man remove the rest of his space suit, and they stowed it in one of the lockers. This trip might turn out profitable in the end after all, so long as the Pilg did not panic.

"They haven't objected so far." The new man explained. "Our ships have been sending visiting parties over to each other, testing each other's restaurants and spices and just touring . . ." Oleg Gustaf-son was being calculatedly garrulous, but his words had already given Anton ideas. Who needed

the bits of useless information they might steal from the Everliving, when humans from other trade-routes were around with things to sell they'd never seen before, eager to buy who knew what, and he with a father who was a born tourist just moping around the house feeling useless.

And there might also be a way he could channel Vanya's useless activities into something to benefit them all as well.

Thus it was a twelve of days before Departure that Vanya Anton-son found himself showing Volodimir Gustaf-son of *Quester* the fossils he had found in the walls of the old town at the base of the aft pinwheel-waterfall.

"I've never seen their like before." The older boy crossed himself, but with only one finger. He was as tall as Vanya's father, but so lanky he could never have gone down to one of the Gjoai worlds; the folk of *Quester* kept their spin slower than *Stormwindrising*'s, the Sheneth shipowners being a low-gravity folk.

"Our two ships are very much the same; the original builders were different, from what I've seen of the construction techniques, but we have a town like this, almost exactly. Not simply an identical town, but identical fossils. They must have been early ancestors of whoever lived here, before both the Sheneth and Pilg." He took out a camera the like of which Vanya had never seen before and drew close to the wall to take a picture. "Made by the Kroan," he explained. "Designed to take the Dropspace surges."

"Would it take pictures within Dropspace itself?" Vanya found himself asking.

Volodimir laughed: "Oh yes, if there were anything to see, or worth spending on film. I rigged a weight on a trap spring held down by a magnet; the magnetic force cut off when we Dropped but ship's spin did not, but all I got were pictures of our people sleeping in Chambers. The emergency lights turn our skins green.

"The big screen wasn't working, and of course Captain Helgain would not let me mount anything on the outside of Ship or unshield one of the ports!"

Volodimir traced out the fossil's form with one finger. "I've seen this one in a book; it's called a trivalve. They say it swam in seas on livable worlds — on one livable world — using a bladder of gas built up by electrolysis, or so the theory went. They were not filter-feeders: there are muscle attachments for the tentacles and you can even see the edge of one of the fangs. . . ." Before the day was over Vanya had gotten Volodimir Gustaf-son to promise to send him books dealing with fossils not in *Stormwindrising*'s library, and was not disappointed when, three days later, his uncle-by-marriage Ieremy Ion-son brought in a thick bundle of bound volumes in several languages that Vanya had studied, and some he could not understand.

His father was furious. They had just had the main meal and the entire family was assembled around the table.

"You mean to say you *asked* him . . . A son of mine *begged* someone else, like a pauper? You couldn't find something he wanted himself and *trade* decently for them like anyone else?"

Anton Khariton-son snapped one of the books up, made a quick pricing decision and said: "Worth at least fifty ob, wouldn't you say?" to the assembled family.

Grandfather shrugged: "Depends on where they were sold, who wanted them. Can't say the demand here is very high." Khariton Kirill-son's daughters and sons-in-law nodded in agreement.

Anton was not to be put off. "Real plastic binding, good quality synthetic paper. Fifty ob for the lot at the very least." He looked directly at Vanya: "What would this Volodimir Gustaf-son think was worth fifty ob?"

"I don't know. . . ."

"Come, come; you're the one who spent the whole day with him, showing him around Ship. You and he talked. He must have seen *something*, expressed an interest . . ." He put the book down with a look of exasperation on his face. "Great Saints, lad, we're from different parts of the Great Spiral Arm! What we have here is unique, just like these books from *Quester*!"

Vanya thought a moment before answering. Finally, he could say: "He liked the art on Five-Deck by the shuttle port that you bought from Korok Ilihn. There are no Perchell in their part of the Galaxy and he said he thought no one else saw the Universe in quite that way." The look of pain in his father's eyes brought a momentary feeling of triumph. Anton Khariton-son had turned down very profitable offers for some of those works of art in the past. Fifty ob was a trifle.

The triumph vanished when his father said:

"He's right. He has excellent taste. Well, my lad, I'll let you buy *X-Ray Perceptions* for the astonishingly low price of just fifty ob, since you're in the family, and you can have these books when you pay me back for the painting." One thick fist hefted the package and he carried it to a corner safe. "There are a number of chores that I have been thinking of assigning you anyway. At a quarter ob a day it shouldn't take you too long to work off that debt."

"Unfortunately, I have work for him as well." Grandfather spoke up from his plush chair by the reading lamp. He put down a volume that had managed to make its way out of the package and into his hands, reached into his purse, and took out two platinum coins.

Anton's face went quite red. All the other adults fell silent; one of Vanya's cousins snickered and was slapped by his mother.

Vanya thought his father would explode; he looked from the coins to his father's face and read in the eyes: *if you do this, you are no longer my son.*

Vanya put the coins in front of his father on the table and pushed them forward, then he got up and silently bowed.

"Very well, he's yours." Father spoke to Grandfather. "But don't come

complaining to me if you don't get your money's worth."

It was six days before Dropday when Vanya stood in his Grandfather's library with pictures he had taken of Ship's abandoned towns spread out over the tables and displayed on the screens. Out of one screen stared the face of Evgenii Zolushkin, Oleg and Volodimir Gustaf-sons' uncle, who had turned out to be Khariton Kirill-son's cousin to the twelfth degree, they now knew. Volodimir Gustaf-son's blond-bearded uncle recited:

"Sheneth today with Hanth and Seslt before them, Karnaiiith, Hayin, and Marleuret." He read out the list of races he was certain had once occupied his Ship *Quester* in the distant past. The screens and the broadcasting equipment had been "salvaged" from one of the Immortals' now-useless robots, and the beams kept tight to avoid discovery. "And we think we know what the Hayin looked like, too."

Vayna's grandfather nodded: "We also have the Hayin and Marleuret, and before them the Arak." He shook his white beard: "How many thousands of years ago that was, I have no idea."

"Arak isn't on our list at all, or on any of the other lists I've seen." Evgenii Zolushkin leaned forward into the screen: "And we have no idea which names correlate with which old towns and cities, except for the Tain, who had a very odd body shape and left doors only three feet high." He shrugged. "I've tried to interest our Sheneth in the problem — I afear the Captain and the others shy away from any systematic skulking. They think the idea is obscene."

"The Pilg are the same. The very mention of the Everliving gives them queasy stomachs. Three each. Still, the things we could learn from them . . .

"But the Pilg needn't learn everything that goes on aboard." It seemed to take a moment for the idea to develop in his grandfather's head.

The old man turned in Vanya's direction. "What we need is more information about the older cities. Evgenii Piotr-son knows which city belonged to the Tain because of the shape of the doors and the size. Well, not all the cities were remodeled for later use; some are no longer on the power lines. We need physical data, both the pretty fossils and the heights of the ceilings, shapes and sizes of doors and windows, if there are any, the width and height of the steps or the angles of the slopes of the ramps. The strength of the construction material can tell us something about Ship's spin when the town was built." He turned back to Evgenii Zolushkin: "And I know just the one who would enjoy investigating the topic for us here."

Vanya nodded eagerly. Departure Day found him in a city on the other side of Ship's World from Main, six hours before scheduled Droptime and four before he was supposed to report to Chambers for Dropsleep.

He had spent the morning with one of Volodimir Gustaf-son's Kroan-built cameras, photographing the uncomfortably high and narrow steps and rooms in a tower that had collapsed across the town's main square, shattering carved facades and crushing a statue whose pieces held tantalizing clues

to the sculptor's form and origin. Were those hands or feet sticking out of the ground? If a foot, the pads were very thick, but the terminal digits proportionally longer than the fingers of a man's hand.

There were fossils in evidence as well, and not too different from the trivalves he had shown Volodimir. Fossils from the Pilg home-world decorated the walls of Main's Councilhall; all races that went into space seemed to take part of their past with them, a reminder of their origins. Men alone were different.

He edged his way around a worn boulder of fallen wall and stopped. The mud puddle ahead was marked with fresh robot treads, and part of a wall had been pushed aside. Someone had been here recently and cleared a pathway through the ruins.

He pulled out his notepad and ran his eyes over the list of the towns the Everliving were supposed to occupy, then stopped. No robots should have been here. The collapse of this tower had killed the power and the trend. The town had never been reoccupied. He had walked several versts across open fields from the nearest working trend station and had seen no one. No Gjoai singers were here, none of the Everliving's walking wombs.

Why would a robot come here to die? They were not self-aware enough to know that Dropspace would destroy them. The Everliving never used fully sentient robots, it was said. They found it too difficult to deal with minds which might outlast even their own, or so his Grandfather had suggested to Evgenii Zolushkin.

Vanya followed the tracks through the ruins: an entranceway had been cleared of rubble and widened by removing a section of wall from either side and the high steps ground down to a ramp. He saw robots moving about inside, and part of one of the Everliving's enormous travelwombs. The wind carried the recorded "Sleep My Master" song; he recognized it, although the words were different. The machines were comforting the huge beasts.

The boy was about to approach the robots and ask them what they were doing here when he heard more coming down the path behind him. He turned in time to see the flamer gripped in a robot's side manipulator rising toward him; he jumped back to fall behind a wall just as a blast of heat rolled past where he had been standing. He dropped his notepad and scrambled away around the side of the building.

From the sounds of tread on stone, the robots were following.

He was still running when he managed to stifle the terror and force himself to think.

The robots would have to move around the rubble to follow him well; in flat, open ground, he could never outrun them. If he ran through the ruined city, he might be impossible to catch.

Vanya came to the fallen tower and clambered over it, keeping low to the complicated fretwork. When he dared to glance back, a wave of heat,

reflected from the stone behind him, struck his face. He saw the source, moved to shield himself with a balcony, and continued his climb. Then he was hurtling down the other side into tall grass and through what human children might have thought a playground. A short run brought him to a thicket of trees. He skirted them, ran down an alleyway, and found himself at the edge of the town.

Beyond lay verst after verst of tall grass and trees not much different from the Russian pines that surrounded Main. Vanya scanned the rising land, looking for shelter. In the distance, up the wall of the world, a ravine had eroded all the way down to hullmetal. He might actually reach it, and it was deep enough that he could hide from a robot that positioned itself on one of the town's buildings with a long-range flamer; but it led away from his destination, the trend station.

To aft there were gullies, more evidence of past neglect. By the standards of a natural planet they were minuscule, a few feet deep at most, but they and the high grass would have to protect him. They were all the cover there was.

The boy edged himself along the side of the building and then made a dash for the gullies. Nothing fired at him. After a few anxious moments he threw himself down the dirt slope and lay huddled against a boulder, looking past the grass at the town's buildings.

For the moment, because he was so close to the town, he was safe. By the time he got more than halfway to the trend station, he knew, he would be able to see the top of the building the robots had taken over, and anything on top of that building would be able to see him.

The erosion had cut jagged strips from the land; sometimes the gullies carried him as far from his destination as from the town with the robots. He looked at his timer. He could have walked the distance to the trend station across the grasslands in half an hour; he had had three hours remaining until Droptime. A third of that time was left when he pushed his head above the naked soil and found himself facing yet another open field.

The tower of the trend station was only a few hundred yards ahead; no robots were in sight. Vanya looked down the slope of the world toward the ancient town to spinward-fore. He saw the roof of the building where the robots had taken their masters' travelwombs. It was shaped like a double letter **M** and covered with balustrades on the side facing him.

There was nothing on the roof. But surely that was the easiest way to get rid of him, mount a guard on the roof with a long-range flamer. The enemy . . .

That stopped him a moment. *Who is the enemy?* What he had seen did not make sense.

Vanya crouched low and made a break for the trend station; he ran fifty feet, then zigzagged. Nothing happened. He ran behind a tree to catch his breath. The tree did not burst into flame. After another dash he stood in the trend station's main entrance, looking past the grill. The great hall was

empty except for the car that had brought him here, waiting for him on a siding.

Still not trusting his good fortune, he edged his way along one wall and then ran for the car. It opened for him. After another moment he was inside, and the car began to move off onto the main trend line. Then it sped out of the station at a respectable velocity and began to gain speed.

They passed a robot moving toward the station: it swung something in Vanya's direction and he hit the floor. A bright light passed through the car. The beast screamed a moment, then the light was cut off. When the boy got up again, the station and the robot were lost behind a line of trees that fringed the trendway.

He tried to use the caller but the machine was dead. Someone must have left it on during a Drop and the surge had burned out the insides. *That someone must be me.* All he could do was sit and wait until the car brought him to the station in Main.

The car shifted lines and moved onto a side route, shot up the curve of the world, then forwards again toward Main. It rolled into an empty Station. When he had left hours before, humans, Pilg, and Gjoai were still about; now they were all under Dropsleep, and his mother would be in a panic at Chambers waiting for him to come in late as usual again. Robots cluttered the station; they just stood waiting to be burned by the surges. The Gjoai were to refurbish them once they reached the new star.

He ran most of the way to Councilhall, down empty streets. No one was about. He found himself at the great doors to the Council building, pressing the lever to open the door. It was not locked yet; that, the Council would do after they had turned the keys that sent Ship into Drop. The door opened.

The visitors' gallery was empty. Ship's Council had gathered for the final invocation to the engines. A large section of a screen held the course parameters that had been fed into the system from NaviComp.

There were new beings present, of a kind he'd never seen before, even in books, let alone in life as passengers. He stopped up short, knowing what they were: long segmented beings, twisted accordions with manipulators and long, sinuous eyestalks. They were here to oversee the work of the shorttimer crew. His father stood with the Pilg, like them in Council robes, dwarfed by them and by others.

One of the Everliving turned its eyestalks in his direction as he entered. The other drummed each of its appendages sequentially, as though nervous.

He thought heresy. *Those* were not truly images of the Almighty.

Ship's Council had gone to their stations under the eyes of the Planetary Congress's representatives, and Anton Khariton-son wondered if his deodorant was working. He felt he must be sweating profusely. The two Everliving had actually asked him a question! They were dealing with him — a human being — as though he were a Pilg, or Haains, or a member of one

of the other shipowning races. *Possibly they have never encountered humans before, and have no idea how new we are to space.* He was certain he was going to do the wrong thing, say something stupid, fart, or fall flat on his face; and the Everliving would laugh at him, or the Pilg, or at humans in general, or do worse.

There was no limit to the things they could do, these races that moved their home worlds from star to star as their suns waned. The shorttimers all feared the Immortals, and feared what they knew they would themselves become in time.

And men who had come from Novgorod were the shortest-timed of all. Ten score years and then dust. Not even men's genes gave immortality.

Anton Khariton-son stood waiting for the command to be given; then he would take the key and unlock the lever connected to pulleys, which, in turn, would fire the rockets that would move the great bulk of the *Stormwindrising* through the nexus of Dropspace the System Traffic Control was forming ahead of them. Then they would all go to the niches in the wall where their drugs lay and the Everliving would enter the travelwombs who waited patiently for their masters under the balcony to the right, and in five minutes' time Ship would make Drop. . . .

Henerat Tergaf was motioning to him.

Anton's eyes followed the elderly Pilg's long fingers to the entrance and he nearly choked.

Lord Almighty! What was that boy doing now? Does he want to embarrass us all in front of the Immortals?

"Pardon me, Elders." Anton excused himself from the Council. "Ship's business. A minor detail." None of the Pilg contested his lie. Tergaf continued to listen to the chittering Everliving intently. He bowed and went over to his son.

"Get along to Chambers! You're late again — you have no place here now. What are you waiting for . . ."

A flood of words and fear from the boy washed over him and became a babble. He caught the words "Singerless Travelwombs" and felt his blood drain to his feet. His intellect sought an explanation.

"They must have been sleeping already." He assured his son. "The Gjoai here were all under by then, too. They'll wake up sooner after Drop that way."

"But the town *was* abandoned," the boy insisted. "And it is not on your list. And the station . . . there is no trend station!"

Anton sighed and looked back to Tergaf and the others. They were doing a good job of keeping the Everliving occupied for the minutes left before Drop. Let them continue.

"Come over here." He led Vanya to the work tables where he'd put the log with the list of occupation sites. "The grid coordinates? Well, you know them?"

He jotted down the numbers Vanya recited and ran one finger down the list, page after page. The writing was his and Fareon Tenech's, and between the two of them there would be no mistakes.

There was nothing occupied that far aft.

"Are you certain you have the right town?" The boy must have transposed one of the digits.

"I got the number from the big map in the library. And the town is directly opposite Lake Nairn," his son said. "The map shows one building still standing which in fact has fallen." Vanya seemed entirely sure of himself.

He motioned to the boy to stand back under one of the balconies and returned to the other Councillors and the Everliving. He caught Henerat Tergaf's attention and signaled a need to speak.

"Elders, I fear something has come up and we may need to interrupt Drop preparations to investigate. Would you notify System Control to recalculate our Dropspace course? It will take us no longer than one hour to check out the problem." That was well within the margin of safety for the drugged crew and passengers, and only because he intended to fly out to the town himself.

He never got the chance.

One of the Everliving twitched; its body closed into a spiral shape. It spoke:

"We must not remain in this dying system a moment longer than necessary. I protest this delay. We have made up our minds to leave; we have left our world for the flight and are ready for Drop. If you shorten our lives with your incompetence, remember that your lives are zeroes and ours infinity signs. Divide zero by infinity and that is your worth . . ."

"Calm down, Talenk." The other moved forward. "I am certain those shorttimers are doing their best to ensure the safety of us all. . . ." It turned to Anton Khariton-son: "You must understand that the time remaining to this star, although greater than your normal lifespan, is still less than one of us would normally allocate to comprehending a poem or enjoying a fine dream. What is your problem?"

Anton explained. The eyes of both Everliving turned in his son's direction.

"You believed *this*?" The first Immortal sounded derisive. "It's not even past larval stage; how can it tell truth from fancy?"

"I too find it difficult to believe," the second Everliving said, "and not worth a delay. Our robots would not make such a mistake. You yourself gave them complete layouts of this Ship and they have occupied it according to your programming. The wombsingers are in their places. Let us be off."

Anton felt his face go livid. "Ancient ones, my son does not lie."

The blue left the skin of the first Everliving's appendages. "You . . . diluted yourself . . . to this?" The tone of disgust was obvious. The Pilg

beside it looked uneasily about, and Anton saw Fareon Tenech's gesture for him to stop.

"Calm down, Talenk, they have to . . . it's their nature." The second Everliving had not blushed quite so strongly as the first.

Anton Khariton-son drew himself to a height slightly above the two Everliving, forcing their eyestalks to turn upwards. "If my son says there are unaccompanied travelwombs in that town, then there are."

It was irrational and he knew it. One did not — *could* not — behave in such a fashion to the Galaxy's elite.

"Wait!" Fareon Tenech put himself between the human Posadnik and the two Everliving officials, and gestured to Vayna to approach the Council.

"We cannot act on uncertainty. To do so would be unreasonable. Our responsibility toward your infinite lifespans requires that we consider your safety above all else. The Center would demand that we check out this new datum." He bent over the boy and spoke formally:

"Ivan, son of Anton, of the Buslaev lineage, species human, I require you to present to us all that you know in this matter."

Vanya described the town; when he mentioned the flamers in the robots' hands, the first Everliving began to convulse, but it held back words until the boy was finished.

"Is this *mad*? Our robots are never armed. You are all being unreasonable. My anger grows with this delay. You are like all breeding types. Emotions rule you. We shall demand a fine appropriate to the distress you are causing us with these lies!"

The Pilg flight officer looked at Anton and shrugged, an admission of helplessness among his race.

Fareon Tenech bent down over Vanya again and said: "I know your father believes you, but the story you told us cannot be true. The Everliving never arm their robots, or give them enough capacity to do what you have described. You know what a great responsibility this is: if you are merely trying to escape punishment for being late to Chambers, remember what greater problems will befall us all if you continue to anger the Everliving."

Vanya nodded. "I understand that."

"Then I must ask you formally: did you tell us the truth just now or not."

"I did."

The first Everliving went off into a corner by itself and muttered: "Breeders . . . breeders . . . irresponsible breeders!"

Henerat Tergaf turned to Anton: "We will begin invocations at once." He turned back to the Everliving: "Pardon us. This delay will not interfere with the transition."

All Anton could feel was a surge of overpowering anger which drove the blood back to his face.

Irresponsible? Yes. A daydreamer.

My son is not a liar!

Tergaf signaled him to get out of the Councilhall, now, before he angered the Everliving further. Anton bowed to the others and went outside. The artificial night was coming on again, but so slowly; so far only the aft waterfall was in shadow.

He walked briskly across the stone paving to the line of telescopes, found the controls of one, and moved the pointer to the coordinates his son had given him.

Vanya and Fareon Tenech were exiting the Council building. They would have just enough time to make it to Chambers and the needles there before Drop. He could hear the Pilg speaking to the boy: ". . . are lucky the rest of their government is already comatose. I don't think I could put up with a full clutch of them . . ."

Anton put his eye to the piece and focused. A blur of ocean filled the view, blocking off that portion of Ship completely.

He moved the control manually, and saw only shadows, a smear of darkening water. He drew back from it; almost, he felt betrayed.

That part of the ship would be watched by an observer at the Fore Transit Nexus. By now they had already taken their drugs.

Did the boy know that? He could figure it out. *Could he have made up the story as a way of getting back at me? At me?*

His own words, muttered under the glare of the Everliving, came back at him.

My son is not a liar.

He swung the telescope back into its holder and called out to Fareon Tenech: "I can't see the town from here; the Ocean blocks it, but there's a nasty grass fire all around the trend station. Is that good enough?"

The Pilg stopped. For a moment he looked like he was about to glance through an eyepiece himself, then he looked directly into Anton Kharitonson's eyes:

"Good," he said. "Then we must send someone over there for an inspection. Several someones. And armed. We cannot make Drop with an uncontrolled natural disaster raging in our own interior. That would endanger our passengers!"

Anton breathed a sigh of relief. He looked at his son. The boy's eyes seemed to say: *the trend station was off-sight too!* The boy had the good sense to keep quiet.

And Fareon Tenech must have known that nothing could be seen: he had lived on Ship for a thousand years.

They returned to the hall. Anton took the boy by the shoulder and pushed him behind one of the fat pillars with a motion to stay silent and wait. Tergaf was standing by the Invocation Point, his Captain's Key in one hand.

The first Everliving noticed them and said: "What is it now?"

Fareon Tenech stepped forward and answered: "There is a technical fault. There is no possibility of making Drop on time. We must ask you to

recalculate."

Henerat Tergaf's mouth dropped open, but before he could say anything the second Everlivling said: "Very well. I will compute the necessary adjustments."

It reached for what appeared to be a calculator; then a flamer appeared in one mandible and Fareon Tenech exploded.

Vanya's father pushed Vanya to the floor and dragged him behind one of the stone visitors' benches. They heard a long, continuous scream from the first Everliving, which was ended abruptly by another flamer shot.

His father commanded: "Don't move from here. No matter what happens." Then he crawled away and was gone.

"Come out, shorttimers. I will be merciful. Your deaths will be as fleeting as your lives."

The other Ship's Council members had found cover as well, but the Everliving could shoot down any who tried to get out the doors. They might call for help, but at this hour before Drop no one was around.

Vanya heard the Everliving walk forward toward the edge of the dais. It fired again in the direction of several Pilg who were shouting, perhaps to call for help, perhaps trying to reason with it.

Fareon Tenech's body had stopped burning; that of the first Everliving had gone up like fat on a kitchen stove. The smoke was thick and greasy. Vanya hoped it would blind the killer.

Ten minutes remained to Droptime. The second Everliving bent over Fareon Tenech's body and removed something long and silvery from the corpse's belt — a command key, one to replace the Captain's Key which Tergaf had carried with him into hiding. That would activate the mechanical chain that set the drives in motion and moved the ship through Dropspace.

"Come out of hiding. The pain of death by burning is far less than that of Drop. You will at least die sane."

Then Vanya saw movement on the far side of the Council chamber; his father's red coat, he thought. His father was over by the Wall of Heroes.

From the other side of the aisle he heard Tergaf's voice: "No, you mustn't . . ."

The Everliving turned in his father's direction — Vanya shouted and ran out from behind the protection of the bench — he hurled his pack at the Everliving and then around him his clothes and body began to burn, and his shouts became screams of pain.

When they brought Vanya out of the drugged sleep the light coming through the hospital's windows had a reddish tinge. His grandfather and Tergaf were standing over him. A third being filled most of the hospital room, one of the Everliving. Its eyestalks roved over the bed and examined the boy.

It spoke to Grandfather: "This one contains your genes?" It put the question as delicately as possible.

"Only a quarter of his genes come from me, on the average," Grandfather explained. "We have two sexes, and he is second generation . . ."

A wave of a mandible stopped the explanation as the Everliving became visibly ill. After a moment it said: "I understand; we used to . . ." It turned to Vanya: "Are you in pain?"

"No." But where were his parents, though?

"Your actions have saved the lives of many thousands of my conspecifics," it explained. "Your interest in . . ." It hesitated over the word, but finally had to speak it: ". . . evolution, yes, your interest in evolution has been explained to us." It hurriedly passed a package forward in its mandibles. Vanya's hands were too heavily bandaged for him to hold it. His grandfather received the gift.

The Everliving backed away, awkwardly, saying: "We will meet again at the ceremony." Then it was quickly out the hospital room door.

"They call themselves Ilit," Grandfather explained. "And that was the Planetary President. And I am only now beginning to realize what was involved in its gesture of giving you one of their paleontology texts machine-translated into Pilghai, let alone coming here to see you personally."

"Did you really think I was giving your father away when I called out to him?" was the first thing Tergaf said. "Pankroaver's eyestalks had already turned in his direction, and I had other fears. I admit I was terrified they would destroy Ship and all aboard her and then think themselves merciful for not exterminating every member of both our species in the Galaxy. . . . But instead, when they found out what Pankroaver was up to, they finished the job."

"Pankroaver was the Ilit your father killed," Grandfather interrupted the Council Head. The old man explained: while Vanya had screamed and burned, his father had taken the Bow of Oleg from the wall and planted first one, then a series of well-aimed arrows into assorted parts of its anatomy, until he he hit something vital.

Afterwards, not certain how to finish the job, he had taken Oleg's axe down from the wall and used it.

"It had an ingenious scheme, that Pankroaver," Tergaf said. "They told us it must have been working on it for some tens of thousands of years, since it had first gotten itself named a navigator for the Emigration Committee."

It had found the Ilit and their world a new star, and most of the species would have made a safe passage, all but one ship. The course data it had fed *Stormwindrising* had been false. Ship would have emerged five hundred parsecs from the nearest inhabited world, in an unused system, far from NaviComp facilities. A system without Dropspace projectors. Ship would have been trapped there.

"All our people were to die anyway, in Chambers. It had cyanine gas tubes ready for us. The other Ilit wouldn't have lasted much longer. It had a special song to play over the public address system. All the travelwombs would have digested their occupants without alerting the Gjoai, all but the travelwombs you found in that town where the PA system hasn't worked for ages. The President was on board Ship, and so was most of the planetary government. You saved them from becoming indigestion for the travelwombs.

"The travelwombs that the robots were guarding were hosting a dozen unborn Pankroaver clones, awaiting the imprint of the original's memories. Later, it would have used the other travelwombs to make more Pankroavers, and the Gjoai would have provided the slave labor to make its new world."

"Just Pankroavers?" Vanya asked.

"Of course. Wouldn't want to dilute itself — its own genes — through meiosis and mitosis, now, would it?" Henerat Tergaf made it sound the most natural thing in the world, although he himself was a shorttimer with parents and children, a part in the chain of life too — the chain of life the Everliving had cut short.

The tall Pilg laughed: "I used to think the ultimate crime for an Immortal would be murder, the killing of one's own kind. It isn't. They don't think that way at all. Each one is its own kind, one of a kind. The ultimate crime for their . . ." He searched for a word that fitted, but gave up. "I was about to say 'society,' but that doesn't really apply here.

"Self-cloning's the ultimate crime; it places the cloned in direct competition for space and resources with all the . . . ah, others." He shook his head. "They even made an example of the poor travelwombs Pankroaver co-opted."

A cold fear gripped Vanya's thoughts. "Grandfather . . ." A mishmash of numbers, an infinity divided by a zero. "Where is Papa?"

His grandfather and Tergaf looked at each other. The old human spoke slowly:

"We realized from the first, and your father knew it when he attacked Pankroaver, that the Everliving would never — could never — allow a shorttimer to kill one of their own kind and live. Even one who saved three hundred thousand of their immortal lives. . . ."

The box of tapes went clattering across the room. Vanya beat at the bandages on his body and arms to make pain to still the agony in his heart and soul and to burn away the flood of guilt: "I killed him. It's my fault . . ." The two old beings held him down to the bed, but he continued to struggle, wanting more pain.

"I prayed to God for it! I wanted it in my soul. . . ."

"Vanochka, stop this!" His grandfather held him close and finally forced his own words past the pounding in the boy's head. "Look at my eyes. See how dry they are. Stop it." He took a handkerchief and wiped away his

grandson's tears.

"Your father led the attack on the robots and captured Pankroaver's clones." Tergaf joined the human in forcing the boy to listen. "We knew what would happen then, and we planned for it. The Everliving have heard how he died in battle. They will seek no revenge on a dead champion or his family. And when you meet the other Everliving at the ceremony to honor your father today, you must understand this. The body is that of my kinsman Fareon Tenech, so I must ask you to be responsible in paying it proper honors.

"Your grandfather's 'other' son Rodvion Khariton-son will be there as well, comforting his widowed sister-in-law and orphaned nephews and nieces." One of Tergaf's eyes closed in a very human wink.

"Now, the doctors say you are well enough to stand and walk about, so get dressed and come with us to finish what must be done before we can depart this system at last." He rose to all three meters height and laughed.

"Well, what are you waiting for, child; get dressed. After all, none of *us* lives forever."

HOW BEAUTIFUL WITH SPRINGS

How beautiful with springs it lay,
And pirate galleons in the bay,
And footprints graven on the beach
. . . and nearly, nearly within reach.

Now I am old enough to buy
Tickets that let explorers fly,
And it recedes among the lost
Storm wrack that the years have tossed.

I fear no grave — it is such boats
That bear us where the island floats;
And funeral blooms for me shall be
Its palm heads lifting from the sea.

— Gene Wolfe

MARVIN KAYE & PARKE GODWIN: Collaborators in the Fantastic

INTERVIEW

by Darrell Schweitzer

Marvin Kaye and Parke ("Pete") Godwin were first associated in the eyes of the science-fiction/fantasy community when they collaborated on the splendid novel, *The Masters of Solitude* (1978), which depicts a strangely transformed future America complete with covens. But they have known each other far longer, having met through their mutual interest in theatre; and both of them, on their own, are writers of considerable stature. Kaye's fantasy includes *The Incredible Umbrella* and its sequel, *The Amorous Umbrella.* He has also written mystery novels, *Bullets for Macbeth, The Laurel and Hardy Murders, The Soap Opera Slaughters,* etc. Godwin's *Firelord* is one of the best historical fantasies of recent years. He won a World Fantasy Award for "The Fire When It Comes" in 1982. The two of them have collaborated on *Wintermind,* a sequel to *The Masters of Solitude,* and a horror novel, *A Cold Blue Light.*

Q: How did the two of you become writers?

Godwin: I came from a literary family. As a matter of fact, I'm about the fifth generation of writers in this country alone, in my family. I was writing from the age of eight, started selling stories when I was about twenty-three. I sold my first story to *Stag* magazine. In about my mid-twenties I began to get interested in other things — I guess my mind was just growing — like music, to the point where I was practicing piano two and three hours a day. After that I fell totally in love with theatre, just chucked up everything, my marriage and everything, and pointed myself toward learning how to act. Eventually I went to New York and had a short and not too lucrative career as a professional actor. I wouldn't trade the experience for anything, because it was probably the best training I had as a writer, other than just sitting down every day and writing. Everyone agrees that's the only way you do it. But how did I get to write? In 1971 my life was utterly cracked up. My second wife had left me and my current woman had walked out on me. And I couldn't get a job. As Marvin will tell you, it was completely zilch. So I was sitting there in a hotel room and I said to myself, "Well, you can either die of self-pity and fade into the woodwork, or you can Goddamn well do something." So I wrote a book. It sold, and while they were buying the first book they told me to write them another, and for once in my life I had the good sense to realize that this was what I was meant to do, and I just kept on doing it. A few years later Marvin came to me with the offer to collaborate, and that's how the blues got born, babe.

Kaye: I don't have, to the best of my knowledge, a literary tradition in my family, mainly because I don't know who my family members were past my father's generation. I grew up in Philadelphia in the '40s as the last of four

children, by far the youngest, too. My family was very '40s middle-class America, with a grave suspicion of anything that wasn't utilitarian. Art was not countenanced, but I was terribly interested from a very early age in being a performer of some sort. The first thing I wanted to do was become a magician. We're talking now about age eight. Later on, I decided I really wanted to be an actor. Most of my background derives from the cinema. I didn't realize it then, but that's where I was storing up the images. Also from radio, and to a lesser extent, comic books. But I never really considered myself a writer. I remember back at eight, twelve years old, in that period, putting stories together, not because I was trying to write them but because I wanted to perform them. My father was in the electronics field, in television and recording and such, and I recall cutting records he let me do just for the fun of making them for only myself to hear, and they were all horror/monster stories. I did them because I wanted to hear my own voice. Mercifully, these things are lost. When I got to high school, my decision was to be an actor and to a lesser extent a director and *maybe* a playwright. What I didn't realize was the extent to which the written word was influencing me all through this time. I was virtually a loner, and read and read constantly, mostly in the fantasy genre, not science fiction. Bradbury was about the only science-fiction writer I could stomach, and of course he was never a hard science-fiction writer. After I got out of college, I took a job on *Grit* newspaper, a national weekly, again not because I ever thought I wanted to be a writer. I had only one credit in journalism in college, and that's because I did a little work on the school paper and they made it into a credit course so people would actually do the work. But I took the job because my fiancée had another year to go, and *Grit* was only sixty miles away from Penn State and we were able to see each other every so often. Later, we moved to New York. I continued in journalism just to be able to earn rent, while I sought theatre jobs. Well, about 1970, the trade journalism area I worked in was so impossible that I quit, and it was about that time that I got interest from a publisher to do a mystery novel. I was amazed that they would take a chance on it. The only reason I wanted to do it was because I had this character rattling around in my mind for a long time. But, as soon as they paid me the princely sum of $1500 for my first, I sat down and started writing; and since that point I just never ran out of contracts. I was a writer because somebody said I was a writer because they gave me money for it. Then all those images I stored up subconsciously came into play. Even today I think of myself more as a theatre person, although now I'm much more interested in playwriting than acting or directing.

Q: How did you come to collaborate with each other?

Godwin: Marvin and I had known each other since early 1968 when we were doing a show in the Village, *The Merchant of Venice*. We had not only an interest in theatre, but we also had a common interest in the SF/fantasy field. Somehow fans seem to gravitate to each other. About that time he was doing his first mystery, *A Lively Game of Death*, and he had written a chapbook called *The Histrionic Holmes*. I submitted my first book to him just to say, "Honestly, Marvin, is this any good?" I really had nothing to judge by at that time. I hadn't written seri-

ously for, oh, fifteen years. He encouraged it, and of course the book was sold, and the next one. And in 1975 Marvin came to me with a three-page outline for a huge, *huge* thing, and he said, "How would you like to work on this?" It turned out to be *The Masters of Solitude*. I started work on it in the spring of 1975. At first I didn't think I could really do this, but I got interested in the witchcraft aspect, of making a society based on witchcraft work. That's how it came about.

Q: Marvin, why did you decide you wanted to collaborate on this one, rather than just write it yourself? Why did you go to Parke?

Kaye: There have been times when I've asked myself why I did it. [Laughs.] No, actually we get along very well, but there were times in the early part of the process when I asked myself, "What is this turning into?" The eventual result was far different from the original conception, but it was so much better that on the balance I'm very happy it happened. Why did I first go to Parke? Yeah, he's right. It was about 1975. Two of my mystery novels were published. I was on my fourth nonfiction book, and I had edited two fantasy anthologies, both of which came out in 1975. Though I was fairly well established at that time, it was hard to break out of what I had been doing. First I got into mystery novels. Nobody wanted to see anything but mystery novels. Then, when I sold my second nonfiction book to Sol Stein at Stein and Day, he discovered that I was a magician, that I had been taking an act out for a couple of summers and playing it. So I wrote three books about magic, and gained recognition in that field. But I wanted to write mainstream, philosophic work. If I had to write novels at all, and I wasn't sure I did, that was where I was aiming. I was very attracted by the idea of a Byronic hero, so dissatisfied with the shape of his world that he would do his best to manipulate and change it. Psychological manipulation has been a running theme throughout my work. But in the process of trying to shape this particular idea, the canvas grew bigger and bigger. I realized that either I was going to have to sit down and write the thing on spec, or I was going to have to share it. It was a truly practical decision to make it a collaboration. I couldn't break out of the mystery and nonfiction area into SF, because I hadn't had anything published in that field. There's this prejudice: "Sure, you can write mysteries, but you can't write science fiction. You can't write fantasy." Parke and I recently did an occult mainstream novel. It was very hard to prove to any editor that we could write that. It's ridiculous. If you're a writer you write *words*. So on that level, it was a practical thing to collaborate. I knew I would have to sit down and write some pages on spec. I have never been able to afford the time to do that. If they don't pay me, I don't do it. On another level, however, I began to realize subconsciously that this canvas — *The Masters of Solitude* — was so much broader in scope than my own personal input. Basically, I couldn't handle the covens. Had I written it, they would have been a very different people, and certainly not as well delineated. Now Parke's second novel is a book called *A Memory of Lions*, taking place shortly after the 1066 Norman Conquest. It is a five-finger exercise for the covens in *The Masters of Solitude*. At some level, I realized that Parke could do this part of the society much better than I. So I came to him with the outline, with the feeling that he had the essential input,

and I said, "There is an editor interested in this, Sharon Jarvis at Doubleday. She requires about 100 pages of spec writing. I have no problems doing a rewrite, but I can't take the time out to do the original material. And I don't have the psychological makeup for spec." Parke took it. He did not say "Yes" right away by any means. He read the outline and had a lot of doubts about it. But the next time we sat down and talked it over, we found that the ideas he wanted to bring to it made excellent good sense, and we saw that we had no ego problems about sharing and letting the thing expand. That's when we realized that the "marriage," so to speak, could work.

Godwin: The scariest and most crucial choice we had to make came at the very beginning of the book. We made it at once and it was settled for all time: the choice of *language*. I like Cabell, Dunsany; I respect them a great deal. But I feel that with their imitators the whole genre of heroic fantasy has become awfully heavy with pseudo-biblical, pseudo-Shakespeare, from people who really can't handle the language. A question I've always asked and never had satisfactorily answered: does high fantasy require high language? *Appropriate*, yes, but why does it have to be "high" or "Malory"? In any case, a future America would talk differently. Their language would be descended from ours. When I was up in New Haven [at the 1982 World Fantasy Convention], I looked through a post-holocaust novel that takes place in England about two thousand years in the future, and one of the lines was "He durst not draw his sword." [Laughs.] That's all, Charlie. So we made the choice of a basic kind of language, not phoney colloquial, not phoney corn-crackin' or anything like that, but just a basic countrified English, with no contractions at all, just the way the language *felt*, the fall of words. This was the main choice we had to make, and I've never regretted it. Outside of a very few novels, these choices have not been made in epic fantasy before.

Kaye: You said no contractions. That's not true in the City. City people use contractions to a pathological extent, for the reason that they want to save time so much. So their language sounds like a sophomore trying to learn the language and not having any real interest. They don't give a damn. They want to get it done and over with. Actually, there was no way to really translate City language as I saw it. City language would be so compacted, a combination of mnemonic devices and finger work. They could reference whole philosophies in a minute or less. Also, there is a middle class, which has a more colorful language in *Masters*. That was mined from the colloquialisms of our day.

Godwin: Writing both of these books, *Masters* and *Wintermind*, was like playing Bach or Beethoven. They demand technique, but they *build* technique as well. One of the great *demands* of doing a book with such choices is that we had to again and again say very complex things in very simple language. We had to reduce complex, cosmic thoughts into simple, straightforward language. Not bald. Never bald, but simple. It required tremendous discipline.

Q: Having gone through all this, can you still tell who contributed what to the book, or has it all blended together?

Kaye: Parke must recall, because he's got an incredible memory. He remembers what I called him fourteen years ago. A lot of passages blend together so well that it's hard to tell who did

what. In the broadest sense you can say that the Singer/City sections tend to be my work, whereas Arin and the covens tend to be Parke's. We sort of met in the middle class, the stories of Bowdeen and whoever. But that's a very broad generalization. Now you can take a step down from there and say that the first two of the seven internal books of *Masters* are pretty much Kaye and Godwin. The third and fourth books are pretty much Godwin. The fifth book is more Kaye, with a generous helping of Godwin in the middle. The battle scenes are almost entirely Parke, and the City sections are almost entirely me. But then we go down to another level, and we get to the actual day-by-day writing, paragraph by paragraph. No matter who did the first draft, it always went to the other's typewriter, and it got recast and rearranged. In our collaborations, I work on structure, putting scenes in their best sequence, perhaps. Parke is superb on character and has a gift for language. For example, in one scene where Webb has just found the Girdle of Solitude, which is part of the major quest of the book — I pretty much structured that scene and wrote a lot of it; and I had, as Parke said a moment ago, trouble in trying to take very complex philosophic thoughts that Webb (a very simple man) is being bombarded with at the moment, and boiling them down to a couple hundred words — Parke had to put it through the typewriter, too, because I don't know a heck of a lot about swamp living, of what these people would be like on a day-to-day basis, which feathers they would wear. He put that larding in. Our manuscripts finally reach the stage where they've gone through the typewriter twice. We then haggle like two Talmudic scholars over pilpul, over this word and that word, trying to cut and condense and not be fulsome. "Got one word out! Terrific! It's shorter!" One amusing little incident happened a while ago. I don't know if it was in *Masters* or *Wintermind* or *A Cold Blue Light*. We've done three collaborations. But at one point Parke called me up and he really read me the riot act for something that appeared on such-and-such a page, why the Hell did I write it that way, blah-blah-blah — I said, "Wait a minute. I'll get it." I looked it up, and I said, "Parke, you wrote that. I didn't change it a bit."

Q: [To Godwin] What were your impressions of collaboration?

Godwin: Pat LoBrutto [the science-fiction editor at Doubleday] told me just a few weeks ago when he was reading over *Wintermind*, "In *Masters of Solitude* I could pretty well tell what was Marvin's and what was yours, but in *Wintermind* I can't tell where one begins and the other leaves off." That was a very true story that Marvin just told you. When we were at the World Fantasy Convention, *Wintermind* had just been published, and Pat brought us a copy. Marvin was going through it. He wrote a ballad that was central to the story. In doing the galleys for *Wintermind* — we had to work separately; it just turned out that way — and when I was doing them late one night, I changed a word in the ballad. It seemed not only a better word, a word that they would use, but it also scanned better to me. Well, with his sixth sense Marvin found that word. He was flipping through the book and he said, "Why did you change this?" I said it was better. [Laughs.] He said, "No, I want to change it back in the next edition." So we haggle talmudically over small things, but I suppose we do this as an outlet because of our deep, basic agree-

ment on more important things.

Q: Don't you also see great differences between the ways the two of you write on your own? To cite two extremes, *Firelord* and *The Incredible Umbrella* are not even slightly similar.

Kaye: You'd be hard pressed to find a greater contrast than, I suppose, *Titus Andronicus, King Lear,* and *A Comedy of Errors.* I'm not trying to compare us in quality, but only stress the fact that one person can wear many hats and have many things to say. As Parke would agree, far too many people in the field are one-color writers, just as there are one-color actors. When I write the Umbrella books, to use a Godwin phrase, I write with my shoes off. I do it because I can't take being serious a moment longer and I want to please myself. When I did *The Incredible Umbrella,* I did show a certain amount of restraint and care for the readership. When I did *Amorous,* perhaps because Doubleday urged me into doing it sooner than I wanted to, I just threw all caution to the winds. I threw in every rotten pun, bad joke, and self-indulgence possible. *Masters* is more the kind of writing I'd like be remembered for. It delves deeper within my own psyche. I believe in Singer because I am so much like him. My mystery novels are very different. The nonfiction is an entirely different thing. Now I'm trying to work on plays, which were my first love. I feel it's just a matter of mood. The only problem is that you fragment your market, and it's very hard to bind it together. In the time of the Renaissance, or even when Aldous Huxley was doing his best work, it was possible to be a "Renaissance person," to do many things and be admired for it. Now it is innately suspicious to do that. I'm a frustrated composer. There is music to the ballad of *Wintermind.* There is music to the country-western song on *The Grand Ole Opry Murders.* What I always hear is, "Well, you spread yourself too thin." Nonsense — I have too much life to contain in one genre or one style. Parke, how do you feel about this?

Godwin: I would agree. To use a theatrical phrase again: choices. One actor can make many choices in . . . the colors he puts on his palette. There I am, mixing metaphors. It's the different colors that you use. I agree with you that I'm very much interested in a number of things outside my craft. I'm fascinated by archaeology. I have been active in it. I'm fascinated by the ongoing study of history, antiquity. And music. Without music I think the world would be very dull. But as to what I practice — I don't write poetry because I know I'm not that good at it. I can't paint. And I no longer play the piano. But I am interested, and I think that an artist has to be interested in a great many things to keep himself fresh, just to keep his fingers flexible.

Q: Do you think that the broad backgrounds the both of you had gave you an advantage, in that neither of you were solely specialists in science fiction and fantasy until you started writing it?

Kaye: I'm a specialist in it, as Parke is, only to the extent that I grew up collecting and reading it and being suffused with it. The broad background has been a virtue, I hope. But the key to your question is that when we were writing *The Masters of Solitude,* we did not perceive at first that we were writing science fiction. Broadly fantasy, yes, as Tolkien, Richard Adams, and such is fantasy in the broadest sense, although they're more than that. We felt that we were writing a pertinent philosophical

novel, a novel of action and character, epic tragedy, etc. etc. It's a book with tremendous relevance to the contemporary situation. Then, when we tried to sell it, we discovered that it was "science fiction." Which was frustrating in one respect because it fragmented the readership. It reached a smaller readership than if it were mainstream. On the other hand we were blessed because if it had gone mainstream, maybe ninety people would have read it, because novels that break out in that area are very hard to sell. Hermann Hesse is a Nobel prize winner, but how many people have actually read *The Glass Bead Game*? But to get back to the mention of music for a moment. You notice that in earlier answers by both Parke and myself music has been strongly alluded to. When Parke and I have our idea sessions, or rewrite sessions, we very rarely communicate in terms of literature. We often use theatrical terms, but more frequently we converse in terms of music. "Here we want lush strings." "At this point we want a rondo section."

Godwin: I've always read fantasy and SF since the time I was seven or eight years old and I was stealing my father's copies of *Weird Tales* or *Unknown*. Excluding *Masters*, which is an epic, I've used fantasy for totally whacked-out comedy in a few stories, like "Influencing the Hell Out of Time and Theresa Galowitz" or "The Last Rainbow," which appeard in *Fantastic* when Ted White had it, or something earlier, "The Lady of Finnegan's Hearth." Or else I've used fantasy to underscore reality. This, I think, is its more legitimate use, although I wouldn't want to be invidious there. You've read "The Fire When It Comes" obviously. Is this a ghost story? It's a story about being alive, from the viewpoint of a woman who happens to be dead. But it's basically a story about being alive, and the joy of being alive, the value, the meaning of it. When I wrote *Firelord* I had an awful lot of initial resistance to it. I mean, who the Hell needed another King Arthur story? And I really didn't know what I was going to do with that book, until I suddenly realized: here I am, forty-seven years old and just beginning to accept myself as a person. So if there is any value to Arthur's narrative, it is from the fact that this is a man who realizes what it is to be alive. Again, using fantasy to underscore reality. And the use that I made of Merlin in *Firelord*, if I have to put a label on it, Bergmanesque — the way Bergman used Death in *The Seventh Seal* is the way I used Merlin, as an alter-ego, as a facet of Arthur. But the story of *Firelord* is not another Round Table story. It's the arc of life as perceived by life itself. That is, I think, the main value of fantasy as I practice it myself: either understanding or laughing.

Q: What is the main *appeal* of fantasy to you?

Godwin: Those values I have already delineated. I cannot stand about 99% of sword & sorcery. I simply cannot stand it because my soul doth revolt against a confrontation of Good and Evil. It just doesn't happen that way, babe, and it's simplistic, a cop-out, to take all the Good and put it over here, and all the Bad and put over there. I've always been mainly interested in *character*. The thing that fantasy does for me is make reality larger than life. It comments on character. The fantasy that I really love is either funny, like Marvin writes in *The Amorous Umbrella*, which is full of literary allusions, or allegorical, like *Watership Down*.

Kaye: The fantasy that I like? Well, first of all, I agree totally with everything Parke said, with the exception of *Watership Down*, which I never could get into. But, to be fair, Parke can not tolerate Tolkien, which I adore. I'm especially fond of humorous fantasy, too. There's little enough of it, unfortunately. Fantasy writers tend to take themselves so seriously. I like some of Fritz Leiber's Fafhrd and Grey Mouser stories very much, the ones that are terribly tongue-in-cheek and kidding the genre. Two of the loveliest humorous fantasies I've ever read are the Mervyn Wall *Fursey* books. [*The Unfortunate Fursey*, Pilot Press, London, 1946, and *The Return of Fursey*, same publisher, 1948.] Unfortunately they're no longer in print and not easy to find anymore. They're wonderful things. *The Unfortunate Fursey* is about an early Irish priest who runs afoul of the Devil and miscellaneous banshees, vampires, and such. It uses a technique not very different from what I employ in my short stories, of finding a kind of language, or a profoundly modern way of looking at ancient problems so that the anachronism is humorous and also sheds light on current situations. I think the quintessential story I did that in was "Ms. Lipshutz and the Goblin," in which a goblin from antiquity walked into a New York unemployment office and had to endure processing by the slow, inhuman civil-service technique which is much worse than ever a goblin foisted on a mortal. Other fantasy? I grew up loving *Weird Tales* and the horror fantasy of Bram Stoker and Lovecraft and the early, early Bradbury, the *Dark Carnival* Bradbury. And one has to mention some of the children's fantasies that are better written than some of the adult fiction around. Naturally the Lewis Carroll books, Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*. I'm a real *Oz* buff. I've got all the *Oz* books, including the obscure ones. And I'm hoping I'll be able to have Fillmore of *The Amorous Umbrella* visit *Oz* someday.

Q: Sometimes I get a sinking feeling that commercial category pressure is causing the medieval-world fantasy to become as ritualized as the Regency romance. Do either of you see fantasy becoming restricted by the recent establishment of a fantasy *genre* in the publishing industry — in the sense that it now must be defined in certain obvious terms?

Godwin: I've written one medieval book, *A Memory of Lions*. *Firelord* is not medieval; it's late Roman. Yeah, I would tend to agree. To the point of stultification. Of course it's what the publishers can sell. It's also due to an abysmal lack of imagination that gives you copy upon copy upon Xerox® copy of the old stuff. I find it quite depressing. I really can't read it. In fact there are very few medievalists that I can read. Henry Treece was one. I can't think of many others. T.H. White, of course, *The Once and Future King*. That's a *magical* book.

Q: What I have in mind are those books that come out several times a month from several different publishers, and they all have the same covers, and pretty much the same plots. There is none of the religiosity of the Middle Ages in them, and none of the earthiness, and all that's left are a few paper-maché castles and some well-dry-cleaned costumes.

Kaye: It's unfortunate in that it gluts the market. There are too many titles. There have been for a while. There are publishers who do what you just said, and there are some who reprint books that don't deserve to be back in print. Sometimes they give them new

titles. You walk into the average paperback emporium and you see too many feet of science fiction and fantasy. There's at least one line I can think of that I do not buy because all the books look the same. I'm sure there are some good ones in that line, but I can't pick them out. There's such an overly broad spectrum of lookalike product that it just daunts me.

Godwin: As for your remark about the basic earthiness and religiosity, I suspect that a great deal of what people consider "medieval" comes from the reading of Malory and even *later* writers. If you go back to the prime sources of what they call the Dark Ages and the early Middle Ages and if you get a good translation of the stuff, you'll find — I did, and possibly you did too — that people were very *direct*. Their language reflected the simplicity of their lives. There was none of that high-flown Malory language, no need for it. Malory was writing about something that was already dead and possibly never existed — the courts of love, which was of course Eleanor of Aquitaine's favorite indulgence when she had nothing else to do on a rainy day — but the stuff was already *dead* when Malory wrote about it. He only used it as a chastening example for what he considered the dying chivalry of his day. You're right about the religiosity, too. The end of the world was coming next week. People went to mass two and three times a day. But they were direct. They were straightforward. They were close to the earth. You wouldn't want to live a week on what they ate. I have done it, believe me, and it's no fun. Everybody, from the peasants up to the nobles, lived pretty rigorously. No one was high-flown. This is what I've always striven for. The best way for me to get this was to use modern equivalents of language. In none of my books do you ever find a "prithee" or a "durst" or a "fain would I" or anything like that. It's as gutsy as the people were themselves, because no one ever told *them* they are Dark Age or medieval. That's what I try for.

Q: Many current fantasy writers seem to very much avoid this. Their settings seem more like Society for Creative Anachronism fêtes.

Godwin: I mentioned earlier a book which is supposed to be a post-holocaust novel in a fragmented England two thousand years in the future, and the first quote that strikes my eye is "He durst not draw his sword against me." *Two thousand years from now?* [Laughs.] They're talking like Englishmen in the 11th century? What is this bullshit? [Laughs.] I think most people have a very odd idea about what the Middle Ages were and how people lived. A very hazy idea. And I don't think it's going to improve, to tell you the truth.

Kaye: I suppose such fantasy is machined on that particular level, but on the other hand it's unfair to criticize that particular market for what's happening there. Every market goes through it. Mysteries — people who read mysteries tend to read them like people eat peanuts, absolutely indiscriminately. They cannot distinguish one writer from another. That's the one lovely thing, by the way, in the fantasy field. It doesn't take that long for your name to be known. I've written seven mystery novels now. Still most people I meet can't identify them until they get into, "Oh that book. I sort of remember it was that kind of plot." Sure, that kind of constriction happens everywhere. It's happening in westerns now. Remember the gothics? The true gothics that were all over the place? Harlequin Romance type things

are just doing that now. So we can complain about it, but still it has made the public very aware of our genre. We're to the point now where there is too much product. Publishers have for the last year really been pulling back. Now they're loosening up . . . a little.

Q: But you'll notice that there *aren't* any old-type gothics around anymore. What I'm afraid of is that fantasy will become so standardized that it is no longer perceived as the work of individual authors, just as product. Then the fashion passes, and the whole field collapses.

Kaye: Every field goes through constrictive periods. I don't think we're going to get back to the level we were in the '40s and '50s when there was almost nothing. I remember the very first science-fiction convention I went to, way, way back in the early '50s. At that time there was so little fantasy being published that the only activity was a small group of people called the National Fantasy Fan Federation holding one meeting at this convention, and being laughed at by the science-fiction people. Which really bothered me. Science-fiction people laughing at the very field they came out of. George O. Smith did a speech that year called "The Seven Stages of the Science-Fiction Writer." The last stage, before an SF writer supposedly fell into senility was, after hearing from nobody and getting no checks for a long time, receiving an invitation to join the N3F.

Q: Even today we have reactionary science-fiction writers writing articles like "Fantasy as Cancer," maintaining that fantasy is really lax and sloppy science fiction which fails to maintain the true disciplines and is corrupting the precious bodily fluids of the field.

Kaye: Science fiction is a sub-category of fantasy. It always was. It always will be. Fantasy has been around since Aesop and before. It is in the broadest sense what all novelists are doing.

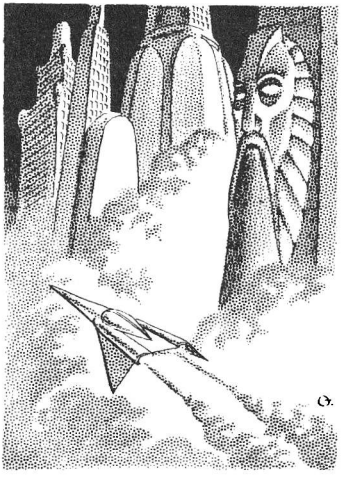
Godwin: Marvin mentioned at the beginning of the interview that he grew up in a very middle-class, '40s Philadelphia in which anything that was not utilitarian was looked on with suspicion. Sure, there's an awful lot of crap, recalling Sturgeon's Law; but there is an awful lot of good stuff too. Hopefully our trilogy will be remembered. I'm thinking of books like *False Dawn* by Chelsea Quinn Yarbro. Books like *Little, Big* or *Riddley Walker* that definitely cross the line. You can't say this is just genre. This is literature. Maybe, as we keep producing more of this stuff, the American consciousness is getting away from looking askance at a fantastic vision. Maybe more of them are coming to realize that what they regarded as foolish fantasy is simply another facet of looking at reality. In that I see our entire movement, the good and the bad, as being a definite flow forward.

Q: For the very-popular wrapup question: what are you working on now, and what do you have coming out in the immediate future?

Godwin: I'm working on the sequel to *Firelord, Beloved Exile*, which Bantam Books will publish in 1984. Marvin and I have an occult novel coming out from Berkley-Charter, and in a few months we will sit down and have the well-known idea sessions for the concluding volume of *The Masters of Solitude*. And I'm contracted to Bantam for another major fantasy book, *The Last Rainbow*, about the faerie as I developed them in *Firelord*. Beyond that, my plans are nebulous. Marvin has a play based on our occult book, *A Cold Blue Light*. I think he's better qualified to speak on that than I am.

Kaye: My latest Hilary Quayle mys-

tery came out recently, *The Soap Opera Slaughters*. It stems from the same research I did for *The Amorous Umbrella*, which has a whole section set in a soap-opera world. *Wintermind* was recently published. Then there's *A Cold Blue Light*, which is in a way a science-fiction approach to a haunted house novel. I'm working on a play based on it because I want to get into theatrical writing. Whether or not I do another Umbrella book depends on the market. At this stage the paperback market has been so constrictive that the Umbrella books have been hard to place. Parke and I are committed to the last volume of the *Masters* trilogy, in some ways our *magnum opus*, we hope. This volume will be called *Singer Among the Nightingales*. It will be essentially the re-viewpointing and conclusion of the Singer story that began in *The Masters of Solitude*, along with several other plotlines. There's one which will probably be a surprise to a number of readers, because they probably thought it came to a very definite end in *The Masters of Solitude*. We are setting a large portion of the final novel on two different islands. Which will give you an idea of what kind of a wonderful collaboration we have. One island is Sable Island, about a hundred miles off the coast of Newfoundland. It's a one-mile-wide by eight-mile-long sandbar, with wild ponies and sandstorms and shipwrecks all around the place, as bleak as can be, and Parke and I decided if we can only afford to go to one island apiece, he will go there. I get to go to Bermuda.



HAPPY ARE THE GODS OF BABYLON

by Alexander Jablokov
art: John Stewart

This story is a variation on one of the many ideas densely packed into "The Lottery of Babylon" by the great Argentine fantasist, Jorge Luis Borges. The Babylon Borges describes is not the city of ancient history, but the more universal, symbolic Babylon which has come down to us through the Old Testament. The lives of the inhabitants (and even their perception of the universe) are ordered by a fantastic, all-pervasive lottery, which may or may not actually be going on, although the people are taking bets.

In light of this, we cannot guarantee that Alex Jablokov was born in Chicago, did graduate work at Dartmouth, is an engineer, single, and fluent in Russian . . . but we can quote you odds.

The eleventh coin rang false. It always did, in the Market of Babylon, for that was the law. The Merchant of Cappadocia slid it across the polished wood counting-board into his money purse, ignoring the professional sneer of the Royal Bursar, who sat beneath his awning, cooling himself with a copper and horsehair fan.

"I wish the damn Lydians had never invented this stupid game of coinage," the Merchant muttered, as he turned away. "Now, barter, as in my grandfather's day. *There* was a system. If it was worthless, you chucked it back. Now, just because it has some king's head on it . . ."

"But Master," Hozar said. "It teaches you of value, of the true worth of fortune and human labor." A short man, with greasy, curly hair, he wore an amulet of lapis lazuli on his bare chest and tapped his fingers on it when he was nervous, which was always. The Merchant had distrusted him on sight, and so had hired him as a guide. In a foreign land it never paid to have a guide one trusted, for such trust was inevitably abused.

"All I know is that I have brought two score racing stallions from Cappadocia to the stables of your king's Master of the Horse and am repaid in coins of muddy brass! Coins you insist I am by law compelled to accept without demurral."

"And so you begin to understand the meaning of value, Master: that is, that it is illusory."

The Merchant tugged at his beard. "My grandfather taught me to check for bad teeth and cracked hooves and to leave questions of philosophy to those who do not work for a living."

He looked about himself, at the Market, packed with gesturing buyers and sellers. The air was filled with the shrill cries of the purveyors of honey mixed with mountain snow, the heavy, muscled smell of cured leather, and the eye-hurting sun of Babylon. The warehouses that hemmed in the Market were faced with blue tile and displayed the golden figures of those minor gods who concern themselves with such things as wool and dried fish. Beyond them rose the mass of the ziggurat of Marduk, shouldering the dusty blue sky. The chaos was welcome after the clashing silence of the crags of Anatolia and the lonely trails of the Mitanni grasslands.

"But your grandfather did not need to mollify the jealous gods of Babylon!"

"Am I to understand that if that eleventh coin were sound, your gods would be angry?"

Hozar sighed theatrically. "Such is the burden of Babylon. Look about you: civilization at its height! Our gods are oppressed by the perfection of our institutions, and seek to destroy us for our pride, which they fear is justified. Fortunately, we are protected by our Adjudicator. He sows confusion in our affairs, from which we reap a sense of our own worthlessness, a crop that pacifies the gods. They fornicate and slaughter each other, and leave us in peace."

"Happy are the gods of Babylon," the Merchant said. "But I still have business to attend to. I must purchase three dozen amphorae of date-palm wine for my King. So, we should proceed —" A sudden, horrible thought struck him. "Does your Adjudicator seek to reassure your gods by meddling with wine? Tell me what will happen." He braced himself visibly.

"It is not such a difficult matter, Master. You will take delivery of three dozen amphorae, duly inspected and sealed. Thirty-three of them will contain the fine date-palm wine for which Babylon is justly famous. Three, by the Adjudicator's most recent quota, will not. One may contain a krait, one olive oil, and one a human fetus, preserved in resin. One might contain a nest of hornets, one three gold tetradrachms, with the portrait of an unknown king, and one ordure from a public place of relief. One might contain date-palm wine which is deadly poison, one date-palm wine which has an aphrodisiac effect, and one absolutely nothing at all. The method, as you see, is quite elegant."

There was a moment of shocked silence.

"Do you mean that the Royal Vintner might open one of the amphorae I deliver to him to find that it is full of urine?"

"That is a possibility, Master. But just think: if he is an enemy of yours, he might find the krait!"

"It will be my head if the King finds a fetus bobbing in his wine cup."

"If he is old, and drinks the aphrodisiac, he will reward you for the new-found strength in his privy parts."

"And if he gets the poison?"

"Then you will be rewarded by his successor."

The Merchant groaned. "Why do you do this? I merely wish to buy three dozen amphorae of wine, as I could everywhere else, from Karnak to Hattushash."

"Master! No one can say with certainty what lies within a sealed container, not even those worthies that dwell in Hattushash. That is the preserve of the gods, which they jealously defend. The Adjudicator has saved you from a dangerous delusion of omniscience."

"I wish I could be more grateful." The Merchant reached into his robes and pulled out several small cubes of elephant's ivory, the sides marked with dots. He tossed them idly in his hand, then returned them to their hiding place. "There's to be no relaxation in dicing for me this trip, I see. So much for all grandfather's training in their use. A drowning man does not cry out for a drink of water. Let us go and reassure the gods."

The stall of Ashot the Armenian was deep and dark and as filled with containers of wine as a plover's nest is with eggs. They ranged in shape from stubby-legged bulbs to graceful flagons. Ashot himself was a thickset man with a hooked nose, and wore a turban.

He and the Merchant chaffered and dickered and called upon their ancestors to witness the harm they were doing themselves by their kindness to the

sly, rapacious devil with whom they were dealing and offered and counter-offered and swore mighty oaths and shrieked and pretended to faint, but their hearts weren't really in it, and after an hour they reached an agreement to exchange currency of dubious value for amphorae with unknown contents.

"Now. Contracts." Ashot leaned down and pulled two sheets of papyrus from beneath the counter. They were covered with minuscule writing and rustled in the hot noon breeze. He weighed them down with a chunk of carnelian carved into the shape of a sleeping gazelle.

"Damn Egyptian innovation," the Merchant grumbled. "Flimsy. No substance to it. Give me the old mud slabs, the way it was done in my grandfather's day. Now *those* were solid. They gave you the sense of important agreements."

"I suppose," Ashot said. "I gave up on them after my partner was crushed to death by six months' receipts he'd stacked incorrectly." He dipped an ibis feather into a thin paste of lampblack and scribbled on the bottom of each sheet. "Make your mark. Each contract contains two errors, as per law."

The Merchant froze with the stylus poised above the contract. "What sort of errors?"

"How would I know? They could be errors of punctuation, spelling, logic, mathematics, law, grammar, or epistemology."

The Merchant examined the contract. The writing was so dense he could barely distinguish separate words. The lines swam before his eyes. "Why?" he asked, in anguish.

"The idea of an accurate and holy covenant between two men is impious," Hozar said. "Sign this inaccurate and profane contract and cause the gods to smile."

Finally, growling in frustration, the Merchant did so. As he stared moodily off into space, Hozar gave Ashot loading directions to the river boat the Merchant had hired that morning. He tugged at his employer's robe, and they set off.

The boat was moored on the other side of the Euphrates, which was spanned by a great bridge. The river was yellow and muddy, and roared around the piers below. A many-oared barge, flashing gilded blades at every stroke, floated upstream of them as they crossed, its scarlet awning shading some personage the Merchant could not see.

The surface of the bridge consisted of a multitude of wooden squares, each about a yard on a side. Ahead of them, near the middle of the bridge, marched a tall man, his sandalled feet slapping down with vehemence. Suddenly, between one step and another, he was gone. The Merchant, his attention distracted by the barge, glanced around for him in puzzlement. He had certainly not jumped over the rail. The Merchant ran over and investigated the last spot the other had been. The panel: did it give, just a little?

"We must tell someone!" he said. "I suspect this panel is dangerous.

Someone else may fall through it."

Hozar laughed. "Oh, no. Not that panel. It will be a different one now, of course. Through a mechanism beneath this bridge, one of these panels at any one time will open beneath the weight of someone stepping on it, dropping him to his death in the rage of the river. Once that panel was swung open and shut, it locks and another is released, elsewhere on the bridge. Is it not miraculous? I doubt there's another like it anywhere."

"Why build this insane device?"

"The gods placed here this river, impassable to man. We Babylonians, in response, have thrown a mighty span across it, so that we may cross in perfect safety. The Adjudicator saw the danger in this. In order to quell the rage of the gods, no man should believe himself certain of reaching the other side unharmed. Once again, we have saved you from the temptation to spite the gods."

"I don't want to cross the bridge! Let's take a ferry."

"As you wish, Master. Remember, a certain number of them are required to sink, and have holes drilled in them for this purpose."

"Ai! I'm doomed."

"Halt!" someone shouted. The Merchant turned. Two men marched up, with the helmets and spears of soldiers. They stopped in front of him. "What was the color of your mother's eyes?" one of them barked.

"Brown."

The soldier consulted a scroll. "Do you prefer the odor of roses, or that of violets?"

"Er, violets."

"Your arm, please. We must gauge the length of your cubit." The other soldier grabbed his arm and measured off the distance from elbow to fingertips, counting carefully under his breath. He looked at the soldier with the scroll, nodded significantly, and tightened his grip.

"You must come with us to see the Adjudicator. You are under arrest."

"Why? What have I done?"

"As far as we know, you haven't done anything."

"Then why are you arresting me? Is this justice?"

Startled, the two exchanged a glance. "Justice? Of course it isn't justice! There is no justice here in the sublunary sphere save that dispensed by the gods."

"You see," Hozar said, "the Babylonian legal system is of such surpassing efficiency that we are forced to arrest innocent men at random, so as to reassure the gods that absolute justice is still their exclusive province."

"Should we take the other?" the soldier with the scroll said to his companion, who pulled out a coin, and flipped it.

"No, he is free to go."

Hozar skipped off gratefully, suddenly disappearing through a panel on the bridge with a despairing cry. The Merchant was too numb to respond

with either pleasure or sadness, or even to know which was appropriate.

The soldiers led him off the bridge and through a maze of streets and alleyways, following a sinuous path deeply entrenched in centuries of detritus as it made its way between the slumping mud brick houses. Birds twittered in the crowns of the date palms that grew from the ruins of houses too decayed to be habitable, and the spicy, oily smell of the midday meal lingered on the air. The arched stone entrance of the Adjudicator's palace was just managing to hold the houses piling against the palace wall at bay, though it looked like a losing battle. They went in past the guards, through a courtyard, and in through another door. As they entered, two other soldiers led a man out into the courtyard, terror plain on his face. The Merchant felt a churning in his stomach.

He was led into a tall, narrow room, floored in stone, where he was presented to the Adjudicator, an old man with sharp, dark eyes. He looked relieved. "The final correction of the day." He picked a pair of dice off the table and handed them to the Merchant. "Roll."

"What happens?"

The Adjudicator looked annoyed. "A foreigner, eh? Be grateful. Your fate here in Babylon may calm the gods of your land as well. Just roll the dice: they decide. Threes bring torture and death, eights humiliation. Sevens bring relief, redemption, reward. You will find what the rest bring, if they come up. So roll!"

The Merchant picked up the dice, then brought his hand up to his mouth and coughed, apparently on the dice, for luck. As he did so, the hand that actually held the dice smoothly exchanged them with two of the dozen or so dice he had in his robes, the two that would do the job. In dicing as in business, his grandfather had always said, a decent trader leaves nothing up to chance. It was nice to know that some of the old ways were still good.

He rolled. "Seven! Congratulations. You have been found conditionally innocent of your crimes."

The Merchant rolled.

"Seven again. Our presumption of your innocence grows ever stronger."

The Merchant continued to roll, and a total of seven dots continued to appear on the uppermost faces of the dice. His innocence was made secure. He was heaped with titles, gold, honors.

The final seven appeared. The Merchant scooped up the loaded dice and once again pulled the switch, handing the originals back to the Adjudicator. "I can no longer fill this office," that man said, with shaking voice. "The gods have indicated their pleasure. May I be the first to salute the new Adjudicator?"

"No! I will not remain in this madhouse. Give me my gold, let me get to my boat with my probable date-palm wine, and I will leave Babylon."

The old man shrugged, somehow unconcerned. "As you wish. The office will remain yours. You may someday wish to claim it."

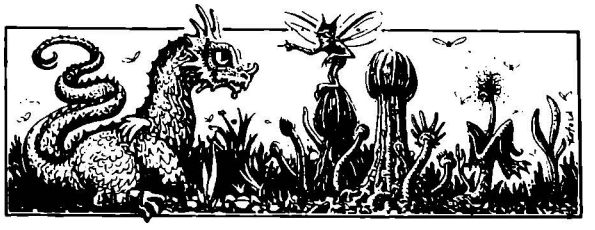
"Not a chance."

He accepted only as much gold as he could carry on his person, since loading porters would have incurred delay, and ran to the boat. The boat handlers he had hired sat patiently with the amphorae.

"Cast off!" the Merchant shouted, leaping in. They pushed the boat off shore, drifted into midstream, and set the sail. Slowly, the boat began to move, slowly, upstream towards home. It wasn't too many minutes later that the Merchant realized his feet were getting wet. . . .

There is a new Adjudicator in Babylon, who took that office wet and angry. He has increased the quota of errors. Five men a day die on the Euphrates bridge. Contracts no longer bear the slightest relationship to real agreements. It is a notable event when an amphora of wine actually contains wine. Most coinage in circulation is crude counterfeit.

It is widely believed that a Golden Age is at hand.



THE MUSHROOMS' SALON

The mushrooms are busy showing samples to the trees:
"Will it be russet, Ma'am, or one of these?"

The trees confer. The willows choose a lemon rinse.
The maples opt for Ultra-Orange. The grave oaks wince.

A plump and speckled mushroom minces to the oaks:
"Oh, Ma'am, that's not for you! These maples have their jokes,

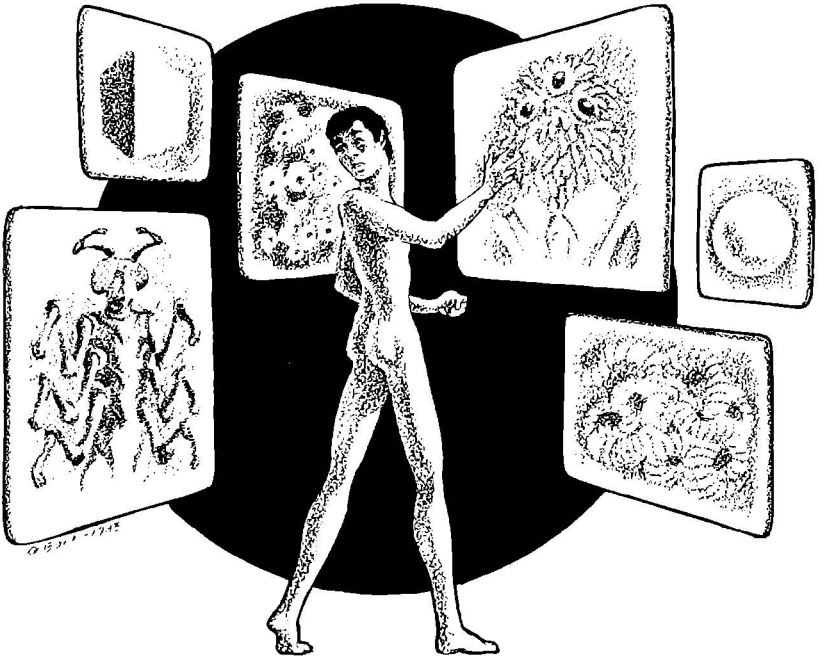
But you're more *serious.* Now here's a Tawny Brown
That will take you absolutely anywhere in town."

"Thank you, my dear mushroom. Yes, that's just the thing
To tide me over till I can come back in the spring."

— Tom Disch

THE 83RD CONFERENCE ON THE HUMAN QUESTION

by Warren Salomon
art: George Barr



Mr. Salomon is a left-handed, exclusively carnivorous male chauvinist who advocates disenfranchising welfare recipients and bureaucrats. His first SF sale was five years ago, to George Scithers at the Other Magazine. In real life Mr. Salomon is an attorney.

Your Excellency:

The following has been taken directly from the raw transcript of the Proceedings of the Eighty-Third Pan-Galactic Conference on the Human Question. All utterances have been translated into standard notation.

You will note the complete absence of delegates' personal names. This is because one of the conferees was from the newly-admitted (and easily offended) League of Unnamable Creatures. Instead, and in accordance with the most recently revised protocols, the transcript refers only to a delegate's government or to the star nearest his capital planet. Individual names appear in the confidential annex which has been supplied for your convenience.

The third-person commentary and all indelicate references to conferees by their species are the result of the transcriber's subjective impressions being overlaid onto the transcript itself. Obviously, substantial editing is required before an official version of the transcript can be released to the archives.

Due to the all-inclusive membership of the Conference, the peculiar nature of the subject matter, and the particularly acute sensory perceptions of the transcriber, it is highly recommended that a diplomatic filter be employed before proceeding further. . . .

"Why me?" asked the human.

"Why not you?" answered the Chairman. "It had to be someone. We couldn't have a Conference on your species without a representative sample present."

"Yes, but why me?"

"Mr. Chairman," said Altair, "the study of humans has been my life's work, as you know; and in my experience, humans all ask that question. If we discarded this individual and obtained another sample, the same inquiry would be made by the new one. All that his question means is that we have indeed chosen a typical example of his species. Because they all ask 'Why me?' the question itself may be ignored and the sound thereof accepted as a primitive cry of confusion."

"Who wouldn't be confused?" shouted the human. "You kidnap me, drag me to what you claim is some kind of broadcasting studio, sit me down in front of a hundred screens with all kinds of horrors staring at me —"

The Chairman flashed his strobe to regain command of the proceedings. "Esteemed delegates," he intoned, "let us not be distracted by trivial matters. We have much to do, and limited time has been allocated to us on the no-grid for holding this Conference. You, Altair, in deference to your expertise, may make the opening remarks."

"My fellow delegates," began Altair, "you are generally familiar with the work that has previously been done on this species, and with the many intriguing and unique, ah, attributes they possess. All prior Conferences

have been unable to classify this species, and indeed there has been a disturbing tendency for such Conferences to degenerate into, ah, most undiplomatic conduct. Indeed, one of the most important issues to be considered is the peculiar effect that humans have on Conferences such as this.

"There is no need to mention their sexual nature; their strange need for several kinds of sleep; their susceptibility to disease, both physical and mental; their tendencies toward forgetfulness, dreaming, and what they call fantasies. Whole libraries have been filled with the research done on these exotic characteristics. Indeed, the multi-level structure of their minds is so unusual a phenomenon as to be almost beyond our ability to comprehend it. No, we shall not dwell on these matters, nor shall we take up our limited time commenting on their much-studied behavioral oddities such as music, humor, war, religion . . ."

"I agree with Altair," said the multi-limbed Rigellian. "And since there is no need to discuss these matters, why do we waste time reminding ourselves of them? I am much more impressed by their surprisingly primitive physical structure. As can be readily observed, humans are a recently evolved species, and as yet they have made no progress in self-improvement. The example you see before you is exactly as the blind forces of nature made him, with no deliberate enhancements. I think the conclusions to be drawn from this —"

"Surely," interrupted a Sphere from the Geometric League, "we aren't going to listen to a harangue on the ancient simplicity-versus-complexity issue? I had thought that one was ended countless cycles ago. If it is your intention to incite ancient antagonisms . . ."

"I agree with my colleague," added a Cube. "No purpose will be served by criticizing the humans on their bodily structure. They are pleasingly symmetrical, externally, and they seem to fall midway between the ideal simplicity of the Geometric League, and the, shall we say, more . . . elaborate structures of . . ."

"I was merely trying to be helpful," said the Rigellian, with a long, complicated series of multi-limbed flourishes. He sniffed at a tankard of vapor, and then added: "It is well known that the more complex the structure, the more —"

"Silence!" commanded the Chairman, his strobe flashing brightly. "The subject of structure is not on our agenda."

The screen displaying the image from Betelgeuse pulsated, thus obtaining the meeting's attention, and its delegate said: "The nature of the humans is likely to be influenced by their unnatural environmental conditions. After all, their world is an extremely hot one, they drink liquid water, their lifespans are astonishingly brief, and like all ephemerals —"

"Enough!" The delegates' regard shifted to the conferee from Sirius B. "My government will not tolerate insults from a lethargic, half-frozen lump—"

The Chairman's strobe blazed angrily. "The subject of environment is not on the agenda," he reminded the meeting.

"May I be recognized?"

"The Chair recognizes the delegate from Capella."

"Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There is yet another remarkable feature to be pointed out, and it is related to the sexual characteristics of humans."

"Not another speech on the male-female phenomenon," groaned Altair.

"No, no. I'll not go over that material again. But consider this: human males are fertile their entire lifetimes, which is as it should be. Females, however, lose their fertility midway through their lifespans, yet they live on, often longer than their male counterparts, but with no biological purpose. This has never been given the attention it deserves, in my opinion."

"The issue of sexuality seems to fascinate your kind, Capella. We of Altair, however, have risen above such cumbersome measures, and they no longer interest us. Before you overwhelm this Conference with your private concerns, I suggest —"

"None of that!" ordered the Chairman, glaring directly at the image of Altair. "The issue of sexuality is not on the agenda."

"Perhaps we could focus the discussion somewhat," suggested Polaris. "Surely the topic of their sensory apparatus is open for discussion. I am most disturbed by certain anomalies in the data. For example, humans can shut off their eyesight, but none of their other senses. What is the meaning of such a limited facility? And another thing about their eyesight, consider how restricted it is. The creatures are practically blind to the whole spectrum."

"It suits them, given the nature of the light they get from their star," said Sirius B. "Its magnitude doesn't vary, as does yours, and stellar stability is believed to be an aid to orderly development. Of course, their having only a single-star system suggests certain obvious disadvantages . . ."

"There you go again," roared Polaris. "Always, it's the same. At every Conference, one message is hammered at, incessantly. The alleged superiority of beings from planets orbiting stable suns, or multiple suns! How much of this propaganda must my people endure? Polaris may be in the minority, but —"

Again the Chairman's strobe silenced the Conference. "That topic, also, is not on the agenda," he commented.

"I should like to point out one non-controversial feature that may be of interest," said Altair. "Have you noticed that fairly large protrusion the human calls its head? Observe, my colleagues, what a peculiar thing a head is."

"Just what's wrong with my head?" asked the human.

"See for yourselves," continued Altair. "The sensory organs are all jutting out from the central brain mass."

"Is that really unusual?" asked the Sphere.

"What I wanted to point out," said Altair, "is that aside from being a sensory node, this head structure serves other functions as well. The breathing — both in and out! — is done from there, and eating too. See that orifice the human has been speaking with? That's the very same place his food is taken into! Think of it."

"Simplicity and elegance are never objectionable characteristics," said the Sphere.

"But wait!" said Altair. "That same orifice is used for certain sexual functions as well. There are numerous reports —"

The human leaped to his feet. "This has gone far enough! No purple mushroom is going to get away with —"

"Silence!" ordered the Chairman.

The human stared at the Chairman's screen. "Who the hell are you, anyway? What's your name?"

The unnamable delegate began to shriek in protest: "No names! They are the ultimate in loathsomeness! The human is insufferably vile!"

The human glanced at the screen of the nameless one and remarked, "What's eating you, Worm-puss?"

The unnamable one's screeches increased in intensity, and were nevertheless all but drowned out by the anguished cries of the Anti-carnivorous Federation. Several conferees were seen shamelessly suppressing the output levels on their receivers. The Chairman's strobe blazed at full intensity, but in the pandemonium which had broken out, it was ignored.

Thus, Excellency, the Conference adjourned in confusion, as did all prior Conferences on the Human Question. Not even the vaguest communiqué could be issued. And this, needless to say, was in spite of the meticulous preparations of the conferees.

Many worlds have hopes of including the humans in their own spheres of influence, as soon as their nature can be agreed upon, but we are no closer to that end than we were before. Indeed, in view of the diplomatic disaster, it will be many cycles before normal relations can be once again established among the conferees. The delicate balance of power in the galaxy has been upset, and the various Leagues and Federations which had been coalescing are suddenly in tatters.

All governments now find themselves struggling with a rift in interstellar relations, one which may well develop into a full-scale protocol war. The Unnamable Creatures have blamed everything on everyone else, and each of the other participants is seeking someone else to blame. The once-powerful Geometric League are quarreling among themselves about the conduct of their several delegates. Even such traditional allies as Sirius B and Altair have broken off relations with one another. Polaris has retreated into total isolationism.

On every side of the Human Question — which, you doubtless noticed,

was never really discussed — there are grievously insulted worlds, and the diplomacy of generations has gone for naught. A full analysis of the situation is being prepared, and will be sent to you as soon as access to the no-grid permits.

The humans, having unwittingly been the cause of all this divisiveness, as they have been 82 times in the past, will once more be spared its consequences, their sector being classified as an Off-Limits Zone, which it will remain until this matter is resolved.

It is odd that this backward species, so offensive to all others in one repect or another, has played such a central role in Pan-Galactic affairs, yet that seems to be their destiny. Whenever our potential adversaries form alliances which could threaten us, their ambitions make them hunger for human space, and another Conference becomes necessary. But the Human Question is so divisive that no alliance of worlds can bear to confront it. How ironic, Excellency, that your position as the strongest monarch in the galaxy should depend on a far-away species as bizarre as the humans.

As for myself, because I chaired the Conference which has caused so much dissension, we must go forward with the appearance of total failure, and it must seem that my usefulness to you is at an end, as is my career in the Diplomatic Service. Accordingly, my resignation is tendered herewith, as we planned. I am looking forward to my retirement, secure in the knowledge that I have been of service in preserving your galactic hegemony.

In closing this report, I have a request to make, which I feel certain you will grant, under the circumstances. If you should ever feel the need to recall me to active service, I shall of course be eager to serve, but please, Excellency, let it be nothing to do with humans!

Respectfully submitted, etc. . . .

ON OTHER NAMES OF SCIENCE FICTION

Speculative fiction
is flawless diction.
SF, too,
is fine to do.
But if "Attack of the Carrots from Mars" makes you cry,
never use the term Sci-Fi.

— Christopher Brown Kelly

STORYKNIFE
by Mildred Downey Broxon
art: Janet Aulisio

Mildred Downey (Bubbles) Broxon has also written Aztec and Irish SF. She has repeatedly visited Greece, recently as an assistant tour leader. One of her current projects involves 18th Dynasty Egypt. When at home in the 20th century she lives with her cats, snakes, books, and numerous typewriters in the Ballard area of Seattle WA.

The knife she held was ordinary stainless flatware, in the Harvest Rose pattern. Nakarak had never seen a living rose. They didn't grow this far north. Blunt and clumsy, the knife should have been hand-carved ivory, but even a steel storyknife from a cereal box would do.

Nelson village stretched before her. Around the central *qasgiq* clustered half-buried homes of sod and wood. Aboveground stood planked summer houses. Fish dried on open racks, and sheds stored meat and berries against the winter. A few tethered dogs lolled in the summer heat, under platforms which held their now-useless sleds. Two men walked from the seashore. They'd killed a seal, Nakarak saw. She knew they had not bothered to set its *inua* free in reverence. To them it was only meat.

Nakarak had only recently learned of the old custom of storyknifing, and wanted to try it. A young woman bustled past with an armful of driftwood. Nakarak spoke: "Would you have a moment?" The woman shook her head and hurried on. The little girl stood discouraged. She shouldn't go into the *qasgiq*. In the middle of the day it belonged to the men. Another young woman walked past, with a basket of berries, probably meant for Eskimo ice cream. Nakarak stopped her. "Can I come along to help? You could work and I could draw you a story." The tradition of illustrating stories as they were told was old among Eskimo girls.

"No thanks, I have to do this myself, and I have to concentrate." She tossed blonde braids over her shoulders and hurried on. Nakarak stared after her. *What's a Swede doing here anyway, playing Eskimo? I saw the face she made when she ate seal meat. Ugh! Her people eat cheese.* She stuck the knife into her sealskin pouch and looked out past the village.

The tundra stretched in boggy hillocks to the horizon. Close by, the Bering Sea lapped a pebbled beach. She could go see if — no, she hadn't brought any equipment, and Deepdreamer didn't think in pictures. You probably couldn't storyknife with a whale. She shrugged and walked toward the farthest summer house.

The rough plank door was cracked and greyed by winter winds. It wobbled on leather hinges as she pushed it open. Fishpoles, nets, buckets, a broken paddle, and coils of line cluttered the dim entryway. She pulled off her boots, hung her parka on a peg, and went through the inner door.

After the sun, the fluorescent light blazed blue. An air-conditioned breeze dried her face. She checked the small shining kitchen: no sound but the tick of the defroster. She heard muted voices, and realized her parents were in their office.

Her father spoke: "I think Maguire is flunking out. She's been sneaking commercial food again. Bought it off the tour-bus driver."

"I scarcely blame her," her mother said. "She's already gained five kilos this summer. You can't expect modern young people to live on meat, berries, and fish."

"It's part of their training," said her father. "I managed, and so did you."

"I didn't have to *like* it. I still think total-immersion is ridiculous, at least for the undergraduates."

It was an old dispute. Her half-Russian father clung more to authenticity than did her mother, who was full-blooded Inuit. Both archaeology professors, they supervised the summer program at Nelson. Total immersion in traditional Bering Sea Eskimo life was supposed to lend greater understanding of the culture and its artifacts. Or so they said. Basically it was playacting. Nakarak wasn't sure what she thought of it.

It was rough on the students, but they learned a lot, and it had never killed any of them. The graduate students, of course, had to last an entire year, summer and winter; some lost the gamble. Well, nobody was forcing them. The old ways weren't that bad. Nakarak herself had learned all the necessary skills. It was hard to keep quiet, sometimes, as she watched students scrape holes in hides, weave lopsided baskets, or spoil good food. Well, she'd probably end up as an archaeologist herself, digging up her ancestors. The training, at least, would be easy.

She looked around the corner. Her mother was seated before a display screen. Chikuk was a short, dark woman. Like her husband, on her off-time she wore a cotton-blend suit: no caribou skins and grass socks in the house. Her parents were making out midterm grades. "What's doing?" her mother asked.

"Nothing much. Last night I read about storyknifing, and I wanted to try it out, but there's nobody —"

Her father did not look up. "Mmm. Keeping up with your anthro class. That's a good girl. Dinner's in an hour." He resumed his work. Nakarak went to her room.

It was tiny, as expected in prefabricated housing. She flung herself down on the synthetic polar-bear bedspread and stared at the wall. Over the shelf that held ivory spearpoints, a soapstone lamp given her by her many-great grandmother Anagan, a whale vertebra and an origami dragon, hung a photo of Anagan and assorted dignitaries on United North Independence Day. On the opposite wall were a spaceprobe shot of Saturn, a photo of an underwater volcano, and a picture of an emerald tree boa. Nakarak had never seen a live snake. Summers she spent at Nelson, winters in Nome near the University.

She stood up, went over to her desk, and punched out a code: what time was it in Japan? Maybe Tonoko would be home. Well, no luck. She sighed and tapped for her current recreational reading, a novel by Jules Verne.

After dinner (quiche and bean sprouts), Nakarak took her parka from the peg, pulled on her boots, and opened the outside door. This far north it was light all night in the summer, and she didn't have any silly bedtime rules. People slept when tired. It was the old way. Of course her parents had classes. . . .

Beyond the fence that enclosed the caribou run (there were only a few of the animals left), the last hoverbus of the day thrummed into the distance, bearing its load of tourists. A few dogs yapped, then all was still save for the washing of the waves and the screech of gulls. The students were indoors now, preparing food or resting, perhaps fumbling to learn the skills Nakarak had perfected by the time she was seven. She looked around, then headed for the old village.

Nelson itself was an artificial creation, but not far off was a real archaeological site. The students who lived in Nelson didn't work the dig: that came later, after they had survived the summer and spent a winter at Beringia U. learning to use sophisticated equipment. Nakarak forgot, if she'd ever known, what the old village was called. It had stood abandoned for years. She never hurt anything on her visits: the daughter of two archaeology profs knew better than to mess up a site.

Nobody lived there anymore, of course, except in the cemetery.

The familiar tingle told her when she crossed the bugfence. She was immediately enveloped in clouds of mosquitoes, black flies, and no-see-ums. She'd sprayed repellent on her hands and face, but even if the insects did not light, their zinging made her twitch. She could understand how the students, authenticity be damned, had struck for a bugfence. There was one at the dig, too, but it was only activated when work was on.

The old cemetery was a short walk from Nelson. She hadn't been there since last year. The village site, she saw, was still covered with sheets of black plastic. She could hear the pumps: the water table here was so high that any pit was soon flooded. Diggers had finished with the cemetery some time back, taking away the pottery lamps, weathered wooden bows, and stone knives that had been left for the dead, to label and study. She wondered how the dead liked that.

Not much remained of the boxes which once had stood on stilts. Most of the platforms had tumbled, the coffins decayed. Here and there lay a few bones that mice had not gnawed. Nakarak was used to human remains. She regarded one small fragment: the distal end of an ulna, possibly a child's. She measured it against her own wrist. Yes, quite possibly a child her age. She set it back in the same spot.

Somehow the cemetery looked more — more *there* — than she recalled. Maybe she'd forgotten that one tall platform, with the paddles and masks. How had those been overlooked? The museum must have had all the paddles and masks it needed, and left these for their rightful owner. She should have remembered that grave from last year, though. But last year she'd been a little kid of eight.

Ravens cawed and fluttered to rest on the upright platform. Nakarak felt momentary awe. Her ancestors had said that Raven created all things: here, now, she could not shrug it off as folklore. She stood watching the black

birds jostle for position. Her fingers closed around her pouch: she took out the metal storyknife.

The wooden paddles, she saw, had scarcely weathered, however many years they'd stood outdoors. Their red-and-black designs glowed bright. Atop the pilings, the grave-box looked as if the burial had been yesterday. The ravens stared. A cool sea wind carried off the mosquitoes, and all was silent, even the birds.

Nakarak crouched. A flat spot of mud was a good storyknife place. Someone, she felt, was ready to listen; someone else had been too long alone. She sketched a small figure and began: "A young girl was picking berries one day when Raven appeared before her. He pulled back his hood and spoke in a human voice. 'Look at me, girl,' he said. But the girl was afraid."

She was afraid because she did not know what to expect. The voice was a harsh croak.

Nakarak jumped and dropped her knife. She looked around. There was no one but the ravens and the closed grave-box. She picked up her knife again. How clumsy and graceless the Harvest Rose pattern was! She drew another sketch: a bird, now, with a man's face, stood before the girl. "She did not know what to expect, so she waited politely for Raven to speak."

One of the birds hopped down and, with his beak, scratched a walking figure. *Come with me,* said Raven, and strode off. *I will take you to meet someone.*

It was not the bird who spoke. Nakarak was sure of that now. She sketched the girl again, farther on. "So the girl followed Raven, as she was bid. They walked until they reached the place he wanted."

And Raven said, *You are to meet one who can no longer travel. You will speak with him. He would hear stories, and tell tales. He is a great angakuk.*

The voice surely came from the box. *Angakuk.* So this was a shaman's grave. Perhaps that explained why time and weather passed it by. The raven waited. Nakarak wiped the ground clear and drew a standing figure, palms outstretched. " 'Greetings, angakuk,' the girl said. 'This unworthy young person is honored.' "

The raven sketched a male figure standing before the girl. *And so the angakuk showed himself before the girl and told her a story.*

The birds cawed and flew away. Nothing remained but the grey wood of the pilings, the grave-box, and the upright paddle. Wind ruffled the sparse grass, and Nakarak's storyknife was cold. The voice continued:

Once there lived a mighty shaman, long ago, so long ago there is no counting.

The wind sighed. Nakarak drew a wavy line that felt like *long ago.*

He could travel under the ice, to find the sea-mammals, and bring them close for the hunters to kill. They took them with reverence and care, and their spirits went free, to return next year; so there was always food. This shaman also talked to the whales.

Nakarak drew a man and a whale. Then she sketched a little girl. "A young person also talks to whales." A few more lines, and the girl held a box. "Their speech is hard for humans to make."

Silence followed. Had she done something wrong? Perhaps she had interrupted. Shamed, she began to apologize.

The young person speaks to the inua of the whale? The face behind the mask?

What could he mean? "Deepdreamer is a bowhead whale. His friends are —"

Do you speak to the spirit-within, which returns to the sea so that next year it comes willingly to a wise hunter?

She didn't want to talk about hunting whales. It had happened, she knew, but to imagine Deepdreamer speared, gutted, and flensed — she shuddered and resolved not to interrupt again.

In this way I spoke to the animals, long ago. But one year they did not come, and though I went under the ice, I did not see them there. Nothing would do but that I go to the moon, to ask the great chief who lives there to send more whale and seal.

Men had gone to the moon before Nakarak's mother was born, and now there was a city. Despite her resolution, Nakarak drew a spidery three-legged figure and asked, "Did you land in something like this?"

A long silence. Then: *I flew through the air. The world in the sky is upside-down; when the wind blows, snow drops from the grass there to cover the earth. All the spirits of the animals live in that place, with the great chief. Only a strong shaman can go to the moon.*

It didn't sound like anything Nakarak had read. She'd never heard that astronauts were shamans.

The voice was sad. *Even though I asked the great chief in the moon to send animals, when I returned to my people the game did not come, and many starved. They decided to send me back to the moon, to ask again. They tied a thong around my neck and dragged me to and fro in the qasgiq until I left my body and could not return. Then they buried me with my masks and were afraid. Later that winter they all died. I lay here and could do nothing.*

As the voice spoke, Nakarak *saw* them: the gaunt faces, the bodies huddled for warmth, the calm that comes before certain death — they clustered round her yet, those folk of old. They'd sent their shaman to the moon for help, and no help came. She gripped the ivory hilt of her storyknife, the storyknife her father carved for her, from the tusk of a walrus he'd slain with reverence, so long ago —.

She drew a flat line, peaked mountains, and a cratered plain. "It was not your fault," she said. "When men went to the moon they found no animals. There is not even air."

No answer.

"We don't hunt whales anymore. They can talk, and they don't want to

die any more than people do —" For a moment, again, she saw the hunger-sharp faces, felt cold burning in her stomach, hungered for whale blubber. She choked.

Nothing but wind, keening through wooden uprights, and far, far away an old voice: *Once I could talk with the animals, once I could fly to the moon, now I am dead and children tell me lies.*

Tears smarted Nakarak's eyes. "No," she said, "no, I was not mocking you, please —" but the voice had faded into the whittering wind.

The paddles were grey and weathered, now. Little paint remained. One plank of the box was rotted away, and inside she saw a jumble of furs and bones. Her storyknife was ugly, lifeless steel. "I'm sorry," she whispered She rose and gently laid the knife on the platform. Its bright gleam was alien to that place.

She walked home across the tundra, boots squelching in the boggy ground, flies and mosquitoes buzzing unnoticed. From a distance Nelson looked artificial, sterile, and planned. Which was real — the village, or the talk with the dead shaman? Even though the past was dead, it was not too dead to hurt. But *she* — what did she know of pain, of hunger, of life? *Live soft and pretend to understand your ancestors, the real people.*

She winced as she stepped across the bugfence. Fake, all of it. She shoved open the wooden outer door of her home, threw her parka at the peg, and kicked out of her boots. She went straight to her room.

The green message light was glowing: a call must have come in while she was out. Tonoko, maybe? She looked at the counter: there were two calls. She keyed playback.

The first message was from school. Figures and graphs filled the screen. It appeared that in a new test she'd scored in the ninety-ninth centile on linguistics and communication.

So? She was declared eligible for training in some new academy. They were recruiting their first class. She frowned. It was as vague as school reports usually were. She wondered if the notice they'd sent her parents was any clearer; probably not. Well, she could find out tomorrow. They were asleep.

She keyed the second message. An old, lined face smiled. It was her many-great grandmother Anagan. Few other folk now looked that old, but Anagan had been ancient before the anti-aging drugs were developed. She'd been born in the early twentieth century.

"Nakarak, child, I'm sending this message to you alone. You can wipe it when you're finished. I know the school sent you and your parents a report —" *How did she know that? Well, Anagan had her ways* — "You probably don't understand what it implies. I was pleased when your name came up during my search."

Her search? The old lady had retired years ago, from being Presidential Advisor, whatever that was.

"This is a special project of mine." The old face was still a moment, remembering. "After all my years of manipulations we're getting ready to go into space. Deep space. Other solar systems." A smile, and a look of youthful wonder. "We need to train the personnel. That's what the search was for. You qualify for the Explorers' Academy. Training will take place on the moon."

On the *moon*? Nakarak was stunned.

"It was a fight, mind you: any multinational effort is. But we have all that lovely oil." The old brown eyes twinkled. "It's your choice, girl. If you want, you can go. Think about it." The screen went blank.

Nakarak rose and wandered about her room. The soapstone lamp on the shelf was heavy and black with age. She rubbed its cool solidity and stared at the Saturn photo. It had been taken looking up through the rings.

She was bursting to tell someone. Deepdreamer might like to know — but his small dim eyes had never seen the stars, and he could not understand. May she could tell Tonoko. After all, a writer of ideograms would probably like the idea of storyknifing. Of course Tonoko was in Japan. . . .

Nakarak set up a background image on her screen, an irregular pattern of mud and pebbles. No, that was wrong. She changed the surface to fine grey powder.

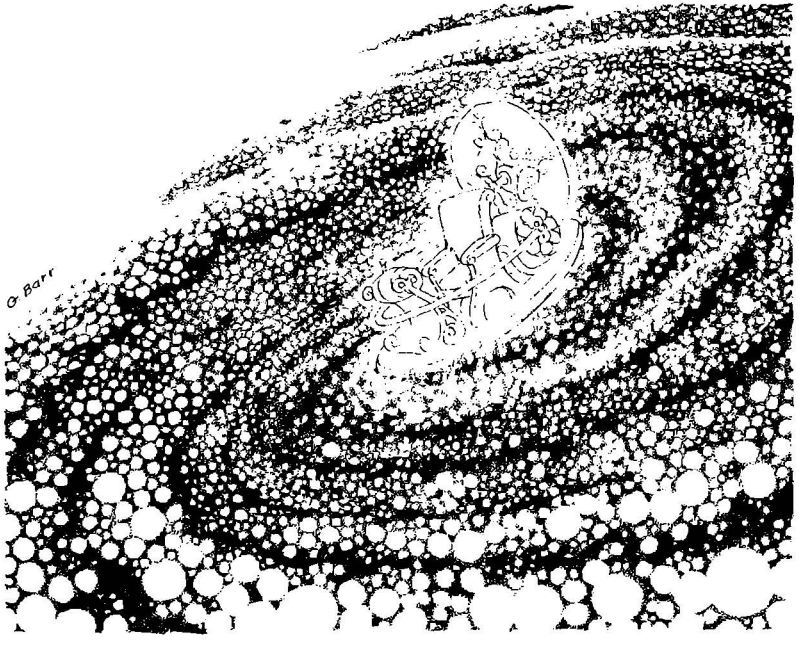
She sketched in a small figure and began: "Once a young girl was picking berries, and a raven came to her. It pulled back its hood, showing the face of an old woman, and said, 'Would you like to go to the Moon?' 'Very much,' said the girl. 'How can I get there?' "

Swift and sharp, the new storyknife traced its pictures across moondust.

ONE EVENING IN H. G.'S DRAWING ROOM

by Bruce Bethke

art: George Barr



"Cyberpunk" in our November 1983 issue was Bruce Bethke's first story sale; here is his second. His work with a company specializing in computer music software and hardware, much as he likes it, has tended to limit his output of fiction.

"This is a working model," explained the Time Traveller as he placed the tiny machine on the octagonal table before the hearth. "Upon the saddle of the full-sized machine, which is very near completion, I intend to penetrate the manifest secrets of time!"

"Your father collected ormolu clocks, did he not?" ventured the Psychologist.

Our host steadfastly continued. "As I cannot take all six of you with me —" (here the Provincial Mayor heaved a great sigh of relief), "I have built this model to demonstrate the principle.

"Watch closely! When this white lever," he pointed to a tiny piece of bric-a-brac on the model, "is pressed forward, it will travel into time and we shall never see it again!

"Now," he turned to us smiling, "who of you would like the honor of launching this machine on its eternal voyage?" The Provincial Mayor excused himself to refill his pipe, so the Time Traveller fastened his pale grey eyes on Filby. Filby in turn looked at the Medical Man, who was looking at the Psychologist, who nodded to me. As one, we turned to look upon the Young Man.

"I'd be delighted to!" the Young Man said effusively. He was Very young.

"Splendid," said the Time Traveller. He directed the Young Man's finger onto the lever, then stood well back. We all saw the lever turn.

There was a breath of wind, the candles flickered, and the little machine suddenly swung round, became indistinct, was seen as a ghost for a second perhaps, as an eddy of faintly glittering brass and ivory; and it was gone — vanished! "Ow!" exclaimed the Young Man, and he put his finger in his mouth.

"I'll be damned," Filby said softly. Scarcely had the words escaped his lips when a tremendous clattering and groaning commenced, as if all the dead were rising from their crypts to take him up on his offer. Then, to complete our already profound amazement, a large oblong crate, resembling nothing so much as a bobby's blue call box, manifested itself in the midst of our little gathering, exactly where the octagonal table holding the model Time Machine had stood.

"A most remarkable illusion," said the ashen-faced Medical Man.

The moment the box had taken firm substance, a door in its side opened and two creatures — one a tall and wild-eyed man, the other, God help me, a small white dog wearing a polka dot bow tie and horn-rimmed glasses — spilled out, arguing heatedly.

"Professor Peabody," the man bellowed, "are you absolutely *certain* this is the point of origin?"

"Beyond a shadow of doubt, Doctor," the dog replied testily.

Behind them, a greasy-looking, disturbingly well-armed thug slipped quietly out of the box. "Are we there yet?" he asked.

"Of course!" replied the Doctor and the Professor in unison.

The thug leveled a large black pistol at the Time Traveller. "Should I kill him now or do you want to interrogate him first?"

"Put that thing away, Ratty," the Doctor suggested. He turned to our host. "You must forgive the Stainless Steel Rat; he's so impulsive sometimes."

Much to our relief, Ratty smashed down the door to the outer hall and took his leave. At that point we noticed that a half dozen dwarves in Napoleonic uniforms had clambered out of the box and begun stuffing the candlesticks and silverware into a large sack.

Our host leapt to his feet, livid with anger. The Doctor, however, turned his back and called to two very befuddled looking gentlemen who'd hesitantly followed the dwarves out of the box, "You there! Martin Padway, Billy Pilgrim! Get back inside, you're safe there!"

The dog called Peabody caught our host by the sleeve. "Are you in charge here?"

"Yes!" he snapped, finding his voice at last. "And I —"

"Then you must be the imbecile responsible for *this*," Peabody said, as he lightly tossed the model Time Machine onto the settee.

"I demand to know what you're doing in my drawing room!"

"*You* demand?" roared the Doctor, as he spun around. "I should bloody well think *I* get to do some demanding! Thanks to you I've got two hundred Wimps in here" — he slapped the side of the blue crate — "looking for an airplane to crash in. What am I supposed to do with *them*?"

"Now now, Doctor, calm yourself," suggested Professor Peabody. "And as for you," he added, to our host, "be grateful the nexus was too small for the *Nimitz* to fit through."

"Eh?" said our host (under the circumstances a rather astute observation, I thought).

"Never mind," said Peabody, "the point is this: Your little toy has caused a temporal backwash fifty centuries long and at least a dozen continua wide. All manner of time travellers were sucked into the disturbance. You, sir, are single-handedly responsible for the worst case of time pollution I have *ever* seen."

Five men, carrying large rifles and outfitted for a safari, stepped out of the box and looked around. "Don't look like tyrannosaur country to *me*," one at the rear of the group grumbled.

"Shut up, Eckels," said the frontmost one, with some authority.

"How was *I* to know about side effects?!" our host demanded. "I've only recently begun experimenting with time travel!"

"Oh Lord," Professor Peabody sighed, "a damned *amateur*." He removed his glasses, thoughtfully chewed an earpiece for a moment, then tapped our host on the chest. "Look, Mister whatever-your-name-is, time is in bad enough shape without every fool gentleman-scientist dicking around with it."

"I —!" our host sputtered.

"Do us *all* a favor," the Doctor snarled. "Leave time travel to the professionals, okay?" Without waiting for an answer, the Doctor turned to the assembled mob, which by now had grown quite large. "All right," he bawled, "everyone back inside, we're getting out of here! Jherek Carnelian, that means you, too!"

Unnoticed, Ratty had slipped back into the room and was sidling up to the Traveller. "I'll give you a piece of friendly advice," he said softly, as he sliced off our host's cravat with a razor-tipped fingernail. "If I were you, I'd scrap that machine in the back room before the Spiders and Snakes find out about it and drop a battalion of Change Warriors in your garden." Then he smiled, shot the model Time Machine to pieces, and stepped into the box. The door closed, the groaning recommenced, and in a few moments the box had vanished.

Everyone was silent for perhaps a minute, and then the Psychologist spoke up. "Well," he huffed, "*they* certainly were a rude lot." Our host sank deep in his plush velvet chair; silent, bemused, and seriously nursing his brandy.

"I say," the Young Man exclaimed brightly, "this time travel business *does* sound frightfully exciting." He failed to notice the glares that focused upon him.

There came an insistent rapping at the front door, and our host at last roused himself. "Filby," he said wearily, "I gave the servants the evening off. Be a good fellow and answer the door, will you?" Filby got up and left the room.

"Is it true," the Young Man blithely continued, "what that Rat fellow said? About you having another Time Machine?"

"Look, I really don't want to talk about it," our host said peevishly. "I want to talk about something else."

"Tell us about your mother," suggested the Psychologist.

"Martians!" exclaimed the Young Man. ("*Spare us*," muttered the Medical Man.) "You tell such smashing good stories about Martians," the Young Man insisted.

"Oh, very well then," our host acquiesced. "Uh . . . Martians: bug-eyed, tentacled," — his enthusiasm perked up as he warmed to the topic — "hideous blood-sucking monstrosities! Little did we suspect that in the waning years of the nineteenth century, the Earth was being observed by —"

A magnificent brown-skinned creature, dressed in billowing cobalt-blue silk robes and a silver mask, strode urgently into the room. Angrily, it tore the mask away with a six-fingered hand and fixed its gleaming golden eyes on our host. "One more word out of *you*," it hissed, "and we sue for libel!"

Our host leapt headfirst through the French windows and fled, screaming, into the night.

THE LANDS OF MARGINALIA

In the envelope
of a small black hole
I met the cartoon men
living their lives in an orbit of light
Where the Schwarzschild perimeter bends.
Waftarom oozed from a doorway
Toward which a creature ran by on blurgits.
Plewds blew from his brow;
Behind him his briffit was hitched on with hites
like a chariot throwing up dust.
Behind this a ROWR-beast made staggerations
(his lucaflect nose to the scent),
Chasing the blurgit-speed creature to the doorway
which lay in a zZAT-cat's domain.
Nittles, grawlix, quimps and jarns
sprang in a round maladicta balloon
Out of the zZAT-cat's own lips.

Solrads were wiggling from a solar symbolia
in the black hole's idea balloon.
Against a wall a victim of mugging
wore oculama eyes,
While squeans and spurls swirled up
from his wounded 2-D head.
What was next, I wondered as
agitrons made the border quiver.
The victim rose and grabbed the blurgit;
ROWR-beast pounced upon the zZAT-cat;
A hand rose from the doorway and snapped
the door as tight as a trap.
And here and there with broad echolalia
swalloops of thumping and barking
And biting snickered like crackling digitons.
Meteor-swift were the shadows that etched
Dites, vites, and hites in cross-hatching,

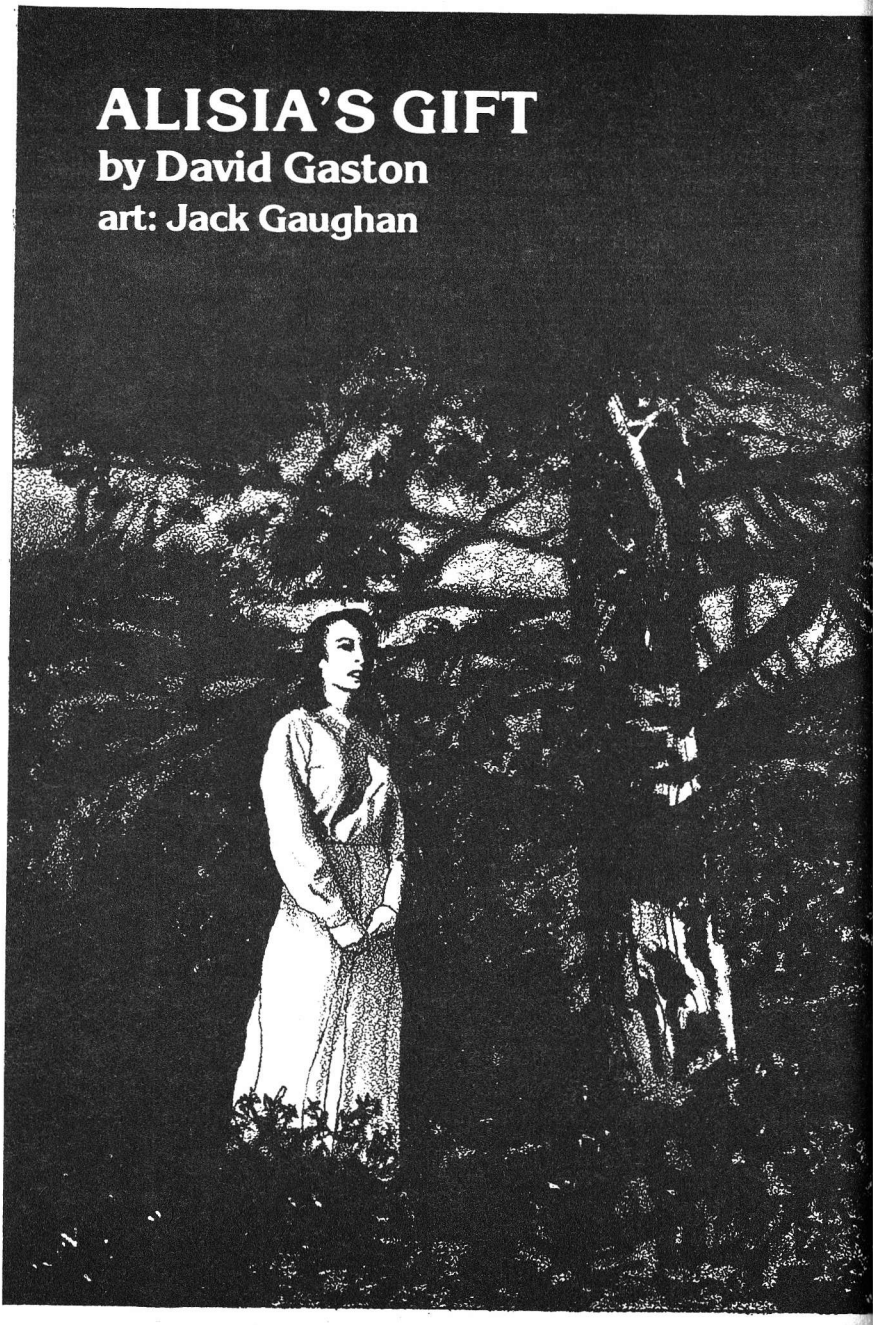
Till I, in the borderlands, encountered a time
foreign and faded and gravity-dense
Where everyone turned to spaghetti and lived
one D without any other.

— John Devin

ALISIA'S GIFT

by David Gaston

art: Jack Gaughan



Mrs. Karanov blew into the parlor of her house like a schooner before a gale. "Eilina! Stephanie! We've barely got a quarter-hour left and I doubt if we're a whit more than half ready. Eilina!"

The cook and the maid ran in from the kitchen and the hallway and curtsied. "The tea is almost finished, ma'am," said Eilina, the older of the two, "and the biscuits are baking." "And all the downstairs rooms are swept and dusted," said Stephanie, a little out of breath, "but the library still needs fresh doilies and the brass in here could use a touch of polish —"

"We won't have time for everything," said Mrs. Karanov. She gave the parlor a quick military glance. "Leave the library alone; he's not likely to see it anyway, and we can steer him away if he starts wandering about. Stephanie, clean the brass in here and run a cloth over the silver if it needs it, but for heaven's sake don't make a mess. Eilina, check the cushions and tie the curtains back, and don't bother with the tea: I can listen for the boil."

Mr. Karanov lumbered into the parlor fumbling with his cuff. He was wearing a coat with slit hanging sleeves over a new pleated tunic. The tunic sleeves bloomed out extravagantly at the shoulder and then narrowed to a long cuff that buttoned tight almost the full length of his forearm. His farmer's face was drawn with frustration as he felt a button slip for the third time.

"Prisca," he muttered, but before he could continue Mrs. Karanov took his arm and quickly knit the cuff together. As he watched her fingers flicker with their magic he said, "I still don't see why a man has to get dressed up like a dandy just to talk business —"

"Now, now," his wife soothed, "we just need to make sure His Honor thinks the best of us. You know nothing's too good for our Andrei." She kissed him on the cheek and sent him off, then looked over the parlor again. Her eye stopped on the tea table. "Eilina! Where are the flowers?"

The cook looked uncomfortable. "Well, now, ma'am, you asked your youngest to find a few blooms in the garden —"

"I know that. I sent her an hour ago. You mean she isn't back yet?" Her jaw was set and the color was rising in her face.

"Now, ma'am, you know that the young lady likes to make sure everything is just right, especially seeing as it's for Andrei and all. . . ."

Alisia walked through the kitchen door with a fresh bouquet in her hands. She didn't notice anyone else in the room: she was intent on the flowers, arranging them in a fever of concentration. Her hair was awry and there was dirt on the hem of her dress. Eilina looked at her and bit her lip while Mrs. Karanov folded her arms below the heat of her glare.

"Alisia!"

The girl jumped and almost dropped her bouquet. She looked up wide-eyed at her mother and the cook. "I . . . I got the flowers you

wanted, mother. . . ."

Mrs. Karanov grabbed them from Alisia's hand and shook them in her face. "Did I tell you to pick them one by one? Did I tell you to take an hour at it and leave yourself ten minutes to get dressed?"

The girl looked at the grandfather's clock and blanched. "I did-didn't . . . I was j-just trying —"

"*Get in your room*, girl, before I decide to give you what you deserve!"

Alisia ran from the room with her face hot and stinging as though she'd been slapped.

In the hallway she turned and ran up the stairs past the framed mirror on the landing. She glanced into the glass even though she really didn't want to, didn't want to see the narrow face with the stringy hair and the eyes the color of mud, didn't want to be reminded about the nose that was too long and the chin that was too soft. But she glanced anyway as she always did, hoping, perhaps, that one day she might find something worth looking at; but the face never changed. It stared back at her with that stupid vacant gaze that made Alisia wonder why she didn't sit in the sun and play with cotton balls like a village idiot.

The room she shared with her three sisters opened off the hall a few steps from the top of the stairs. She burst in, tugging and jerking her work dress over her head and grabbing for the clothes her mother had laid out. The other girls were sitting on their beds already dressed, brushing out their hair with ivory combs. One of them looked up at Alisia but none of them moved to help.

". . . and Petar was no use at all," Magda, the eldest, was saying. "I don't know what Celine's going to do now, but God knows there's plenty more where he came from."

"I don't know that she'd go that far," said Marta.

"You haven't talked to her," said Kirte, smiling. "The way she feels right now, even if —"

"Marta," Alisia interrupted, "have you seen my hairpins?"

Her sister gave an exaggerated sigh. "The last place you put them was in the top dresser drawer on the right."

Alisia jerked on the drawer, nearly pulling it off the runs, and began to fumble around inside with loud scraping noises. Magda rolled her eyes at the other girls and Kirte giggled.

Marta laid down her comb. "I think I've found the answer to Celine's problem. Alisia can help."

"No. Seriously?" said Magda.

"Yes. It's Petar Celine's worried about, right? What he needs is another girlfriend. Someone to take his mind off her. Alisia would be perfect for him."

"Sure," said Kirte. "We just need a time when they can be alone. She could wear a dress that shows off her shoulders. . . ."

Kirte was giggling too hard to continue. Marta and Magda looked at each other, then turned away sputtering with suppressed laughter. Alisia pressed her lips together and concentrated on picking out a hairpin, and then another, and another.

"Alisia might like the idea," said Magda, looking at her sister's back, "but do you really think Petar would agree? I have a feeling he'd rather find someone a little more . . . mature."

"Oh, of course, I'd forgotten," said Marta. "She wouldn't know where to begin. She hasn't even been kissed yet." Marta raised her voice. "Isn't that right, Lisi? Fifteen next summer and you've never kissed a boy?"

"Maybe the real problem," said Magda, "is finding someone to give our little sister a little practice."

"Finding a boy like *that* —"

"I know! I know!" said Kirte. "The baker's son over on Gate Street, the . . . the youngest one —"

"Bertrund?"

"Bertrund. He's just the one we want. They say that when no one's around he goes out to the barn and kisses the cows —"

Kirte and her two sisters broke into shrieks of laughter. Alisia whirled on them, limbs stiff and quivering, fists tightened like knots.

"Stop it! Stop it!" she screamed. "You stop it right now!"

"Girls!" came their mother's shout from down the stairs. "The Magistrate is coming at any moment! Get down here at once!"

"Yes, momma," Magda called, and the three of them swept out with their long perfect hair blowing behind them and their eyes and faces aglow with the laughter. Alisia looked trembling after them and finished her buttoning and lacing in a flurry. She turned to the mirror and yanked a comb through her hair. It snagged in the knots and tangles, breaking off several pieces but doing little to improve the mess. With a sob of disgust she threw the comb on her bed and stared at it with eyes that grew blurry and hot.

"*Alisia!*" her mother bellowed.

"Coming, momma," she called, and grabbing a piece of yarn she pulled her hair back from her face and tied it behind her head. It made her look like a mouse but it was the best she could do. And, certainly, better a mouse than a cow.

Wiping her eyes as she ran down the stairs, she turned at the landing to see her mother braced at the bottom. Alisia looked away from her glare and passed around her into the hall, but not before Mrs. Karanov put her hands on her hips and said, "Honestly, girl, the day you get a thimble's worth of sense into your head it'll shock me into my grave. Why I don't take a lash to your hide here and now is beyond me —" Alisia mumbled something in response and tried to walk away into the parlor. Her sisters were waiting there, sitting in starched positions to keep their clothing in

shape. Her brother Andrei stood to one side, scrub-faced and uncomfortable in his new tunic and coat. Alisia wanted to say something to cheer him, but before she could speak Stephanie turned from the window with eyes like porcelain saucers.

"He's almost here! He's coming!" she said.

"Girls! In your line!" said Mrs. Karanov as she entered. "Thank you, Stephanie, you may go to your room. Join your father, Andrei. Straighten up, girls, no slouching, he's not looking to marry off his boy quite yet but we may as well start early."

Kirte giggled as the girls arranged themselves and Marta nudged her with an elbow. They stood shoulder to shoulder a little to one side of the opening to the vestibule. None of them could see past the portal, and they waited with very little breathing to hear the knock on the door.

It came at last, and after a decent pause the door opened and then men greeted each other with the loud boisterous tone men use when they're not being sincere. Alisia heard her father introduce Andrei to the Magistrate, and the three of them walked into the parlor.

The Magistrate was a glory of purple and gold. He had a broad face with a full red beard parted in the middle and swept up at the sides. His coat was of purple velvet trimmed with ochre braiding on the immense puffed sleeves and with ermine on the wide yoke. Under the open coat a purple belt held his tunic tight against the many layers of underclothing. The tunic fell in heavy brocades to about mid-thigh, and below it his legs were clothed in purple hose. As a final touch he wore a cap on his head, a velvet beret with a long yellow plume that swept back behind him.

Mr. Karanov began the introductions. "Alexan, I'm sure you've met my wife Prisca. . . ."

"Of course," said the Magistrate, taking her hand and kissing it lightly on the first knuckle. "But I dare say the first meeting ought to have come a few years earlier than it did. Like the fool who comes late to the harvest, I saw the prize only after it had been gathered in."

Mrs. Karanov was suddenly all smiles and flutters. "Ah, your Honor, how you talk! You've turned many a girl's head in your time, I've no doubt of that."

Mr. Karanov introduced his daughters and the girls curtsied as they were named. When Alisia straightened she found the Magistrate smiling into her eyes.

"Alisia," he repeated. "A lovely name. You're the youngest, aren't you?"

"Yes, Your Honor," she managed to blurt.

"Last born is best loved, so they say. I'm afraid that's true with our daughter. We dote on her much more than we ought. Not that she minds, of course, but so it is." He gave her a brilliant smile that set her cheeks burning with blood.

"All right, girls, let's leave the men to their talk," said Mrs. Karanov, cooing and preening. "Into the kitchen with you. Do have a seat, Your Honor, the tea won't be a moment."

Alisia was dizzy with a flush that felt as though it colored her from her thighs to the top of her head. He *talked* to me. He *likes* me. Dreams reeled like drunks through her mind. I knew I wasn't as ugly as they all think I am. I knew it. They don't know anything. Maybe he even thinks I'm the prettiest. Maybe he'll want his son to meet me. I'm not too young. What could I wear? I'd have to make something really nice, something older. . . .

The moment the kitchen door closed behind them, Mrs. Karanov was all business again. "Very good, girls, very good. It's not time to let up yet. Kirte, Alisia, get the tea ready. Magda, Marta, see if the biscuits are done. For heaven's sake, no one spill anything."

Alisia and her sister gathered up the parts of the tea service and waited by the door until their mother gave them a nod. When they entered the parlor Andrei and his father were laughing rather loudly at something the Magistrate had just said.

"— but the worst of it was," he continued, "the girl was even shorter than her mother!" The other two men laughed again with even less sincerity, and in the pause the girls set the trays on the low table in front of the Magistrate's chair.

"I'll tell you, Sergei," he said, "I'm hard pressed to say which is the most beautiful: your silver or your daughters." As her father thanked him Alisia felt her heart trilling: she knew perfectly well who the Magistrate was speaking of. She finished the pouring with a flourish and looked up at him with her sweetest smile.

"Would you like some cream, Your Honor?" she asked. "We skimmed it fresh this morning."

Out of the corner of her eye she saw her father's arm stiffen: he knew as well as she did that she was out of the script. But Andrei and the Magistrate both looked pleased and Alisia was too full of the moment to think of stopping.

"Why yes, girl, thank you, just enough to take the heat off it," he said.

As she poured a few drops she asked, "Sugar?"

"Please. Just a touch; I don't have quite the sweet tooth I had at your age." Alisia giggled and picked up the sugar scuttle but she wasn't quite sure how much to measure out. She settled on a level teaspoon and began to sift it into the tea. Before she was half finished the Magistrate said "Whoa!" and flicked out a hand; the sudden movement caught her by surprise; her arm jerked, scattering the grains over the table.

Alisia felt the color vanish from her face. Her father murmured, "Alisia . . ." but the Magistrate was still all smiles. "Now, now, Sergei, there's no problem. We'll have this cleaned up in a second," and he reached for his

pocket handkerchief.

"No! It's all right!" said Alisia as she grabbed a napkin and reached across the table; but she was too hasty. Her hand struck the teacup and knocked it over the edge, and the steaming tea spilled all the way down the purple hose on the Magistrate's left leg.

Alisia pulled back in horror. Her father stood up with a face like curdled milk. The Magistrate half rose, cursing in a tone he hadn't used before. "You clumsy oaf," he sputtered at her, his eyes wide, "these were pure silk!" Alisia opened her mouth to speak but she couldn't breathe. Her father strode at her and his voice shook like thunder.

"Out!" he shouted, pointing. "Get out! Now!"

Alisia turned and burst back through the kitchen, scarcely noticing if anyone was in her way. In a moment she was through the pantry and out into the yard, running past the stables and down the rows of the garden. By the time she reached the back gate her breath returned to her, and before she had it open she was sobbing.

Behind the back fence of the yard was the commons, the large pasture shared by all the families in the square city block around it. In the late light Alisia could see the backs of the houses running shoulder-to-shoulder around her like a far battlement. She ran weeping across the cropped grass to the northwest corner where a narrow passage between two houses led to the main street. Most of the shops there were closed, and only a few strollers saw her as she sped down the cobbles and out through the gatehouse in the city wall.

Out of the shadow of the gate the road turned to rutted dirt. Alisia ran in the grass along the shoulder and continued along the turns until trees hid her from sight of the town. On her right a hillside sloped up into the fringes of the forest. It was already dark under the branches but that didn't matter: she had spent so much time as a child in this part of the woods that she still thought of it as her own. She turned up the hillside and the trees closed around her.

There was no need to run any longer, but Alisia's pace didn't slacken until fatigue wore the edge off her pain. She slowed to a walk and continued up the slope breathing heavily. She was fairly certain she would not be followed: even as a child she had known that most people accepted that the forest was haunted in some way. Whether or not that was true, the solitude of the trees had always drawn her, and now it was one of the few places where she felt safe. After a time the ground leveled out, and she walked on under the stars that began to show through the branches.

Her crying had stopped some time ago, but the anger at what had happened still seethed inside her. "How could I have been so *stupid?*" she wailed, and somewhere a bird stopped its twittering. She came to a smooth-trunked tree she knew and began to pound on it with her fist.

"Nothing I ever do is good enough," she said, speaking in time with her beat. "I always manage to foul it up." She walked on a little further, then stopped and lifted her stiff arms to the trees as though beseeching them for help.

"It was supposed to be for Andrei!" she said with anguish. "It was supposed to help him go to the university! And I had to ruin everything like an idiot. Like a stupid idiot." A few yards away on her right was a tree with a divided trunk. She sat in the gap and wrapped her arms around the bole on one side while she cried again. She rocked herself there for a time while the passion of the pain slowly bled away.

"I'm no good and I should just believe it," she muttered. "I'm ugly and stupid and I'm not going to change." She got up and walked deeper into the forest, feeling her way from tree to tree. She was through the fringes now, out of the region she knew well. Enough odd things had happened to her when she played here that she didn't entirely disbelieve the stories people told, but for some reason it seemed to her that she had to either go home or go on.

Alisia walked until she was certain she would sleep if she stopped to rest. All around her the forest murmured to itself in the sounds of the animals and trees. She thought once or twice of turning back but realized she still couldn't bear it. Her clothes would be warm enough if she tried to spend the night, but she had no idea what else she might have to deal with. "As if it mattered," she whispered.

She found a tree facing what looked to be a small glade fringed with brush. She cleared a spot beneath it and sat down, crossing her legs and tucking the heavy skirt under her. As she leaned back against the bark she happened to think of Eilina and all the dire warnings the maid used to give her about going off alone, and as she closed her eyes Alisia almost smiled.

Weary or not, sleep was a long time in coming. When she finally drifted off, her dreams were restless and troubled, fantasy-memories of times of shame and guilt that would not leave her. She saw herself in the kitchen hiding the shards of a broken pot with frantic hands before her mother could come through the door. She saw herself running along narrow impossible streets, and it was already dark and she'd forgotten it was her turn to help with supper, and it was late, already too late to do anything but run home while the fear knotted her stomach like a leather-worker's braid. More than once Alisia forced herself awake and blinked in the darkness until she was certain it hadn't really been happening again.

Mercifully the dreams did not last. Sometime in the dark of the night they faded all at once into a peaceful warmth that wrapped itself around her, supporting and protective. The change was drastic enough that she almost wakened in surprise, but she wasn't strong enough to question it. With an inward sigh she slipped deep into sleep and dreamed of riding and flying faster than the wind and the clouds, faster than the voices that

called to her from somewhere dim and distant.

Much later she stirred a little and blinked. There was pale dawn light in the glade, and though her eyes were blurred, she could see morning mists between the trees. Close by on her left she made out something large and white that she took for a rock. She rubbed her eyes to clear them as she arched her stiff back against the tree. Her legs felt cramped and she tried to uncross them.

They wouldn't move. She tried again, and in her half-sleep she realized there was a weight on them. Without thinking she laid an absent hand on it to push it aside.

But it was too heavy and too large. She felt sleek hair under her hand, and skin and muscle over bone. And then the thing moved.

Kicking out with a broken cry she squirmed out to the side and stumbled tripping in her tangled skirt until she turned over to see it, her eyes hazy with the blood that hammered through her head. White and heaving it rose from the ground in a terrible thrust of strength, up on its feet, its four cloven hooves stamping while it snorted and shook a long head and a mane. A horse, she thought, a white horse. . . .

But no. Not a horse. Not with — not with that —

It was a unicorn.

Alisia's breath shuddered through her and fogged out into the air. The creature was magnificent. Nearly as tall in the shoulder as the girl he stood, white pelt rippling as he shook the sleep out of his muscles. The early light breaking through the mists caught in the gold of his mane and in the long fall of his tail. He turned his head from side to side, looking, it seemed, for whatever had frightened the girl; and the slender helixed horn pointed the way with a flash of indigo. When he found nothing to be concerned about he stopped his searching and looked at Alisia.

The girl backed away until she bumped into a tree. The unicorn walked forward with calm steps, never moving his eyes from her face. She wanted to run but found she could only wait and tremble until the creature stood so close she could smell the clover on his breath. He looked her in the eye with a gentle glance, then reached out his head and sniffed along her hair and clothing and under her arms until he ended by nuzzling her at the side of her throat.

Alisia found that she could relax a little. "It's all right, it's all right," she murmured, half to the unicorn, "it's going to be all right." She reached up a hand and stroked his muzzle, then laid both hands on his head and moved it away from her neck. The unicorn looked at her with eyes that almost seemed amused, and she returned the stare for a long moment before she found she could swallow.

"Can you understand me?" she asked. She studied his face for a response. "I have to go now. I want you to stay here. You stay." Good Lord, she thought, I'm talking to it like it's a dog. The unicorn continued

to watch her but there was no flicker of comprehension in his eyes. Alisia lifted her hand higher and touched the root of the horn where it arose from his forehead. She looked at him again and laid both hands on his muzzle.

"I'm going now," she said. "Thank you for taking care of me last night. Goodbye." She turned and walked away stiff-legged as she forced herself not to run. Ten paces, twenty paces and there was still no sound, but at thirty she heard the soft pawing of the turf as the unicorn began to follow.

She whirled around and said "No! I'm serious! You can't come with me. You just can't." The unicorn paused and blinked at her. "I'm leaving and you're not coming with me. You go back wherever you came from. Go on. Shoo! Get away!" She turned her back on him again, but she had hardly begun to walk when she heard him following. She walked faster and he kept pace with her, and when she started to run he broke into a trot.

Alisia stopped short and turned on him again. "No!" she shouted. "Stop it! It won't work. It just won't work." She was almost crying now. "I don't know how this happened but it's got to be some kind of mistake. Look at me! I'm ugly and stupid and you're so beautiful I can hardly look at you. You're trying to make me think I'm special again and I know it's not true and I won't let you do it. You'll just hurt me like everyone else does. Just go away and leave me alone. I mean it. I mean it!"

She couldn't get any more words through her tears. She stood and cried while the unicorn walked up to her without hesitation and gently began to lick the wetness from her cheeks. "Don't do that," she said weakly. "Cut it out." He nibbled her hair with his lips, and Alisia stroked the sleekness of his muzzle while she brought the other hand up to run along his neck.

"Would it be all right if I just . . . if I just sort of —" she said as she stepped forward and slipped her hands up around his neck until they tangled in his mane. She leaned against his side, breathing the scents of hair and sweat and earth, and the new sun was light on her face and on the flanks of the unicorn that Alisia hugged there in the forest.

"Look," she whispered, "if you're ever going to go away, do it now, please. I couldn't take it, not later. Not if you make me believe." The unicorn flicked his tail and brushed her hair with his cheek.

Later in the morning Alisia sat at the edge of a clearing where the unicorn was cropping some grass. Her eyes were brilliant with the sight of him and she rocked herself a little as she watched him moving through the pieces of sunlight. After a while she shook herself and put her chin on her knees. "You know, I'm still not saying this is going to work," she said.

The unicorn looked up and twitched his ears, then went back to his eating.

Alisia stretched out her legs and sighed. "I mean, I don't understand

how you picked me. I don't see why you weren't looking for someone as special as you are." He didn't seem to be paying attention. "I know you don't believe me but I really am the dumbest girl in the whole town. My brother Andrei is the only one who says anything nice to me. My father is a good weaver but he's not very important in the town. He was even afraid he wouldn't be able to get Andrei into the university unless he had a good reference —"

She shuddered at the stab of memory and stood up to get it out of her mind. She walked over to the unicorn and began stroking his neck and flanks. "But I guess I'll try it if you want to. I'm just not promising anything. All right?"

The unicorn lifted his head and stroked her shoulder with his muzzle. She patted him and said, "By the way, can I call you Karis? It seems right somehow."

He flicked his ears and she said, "Good enough." She caught his eye and smiled. "Do you know how to play tag?" He snorted at her, cocking his head. "Good. You're it. But watch the horn!"

They played in the meadows of the forest while the sun climbed the sky and the dew dried on the grasses. When Alisia later remembered the game she couldn't recall a beginning or middle or end: it was as though the moment for her had been timeless. She did remember her amazement and delight at the unicorn, who seemed to enjoy himself even more than she did. When at last she fell laughing into a bed of daisies and decided she was too tired to go on, Karis was still waiting a few yards away for the game to begin again.

Alisia lay on her back and looked at the sky while the unicorn trotted over. "The morning's getting pretty late, you know," she said. "They're going to be wondering where I am." She lifted herself on her elbows. "Do you really want to come with me?" He pranced a little and shook his mane. "We may as well go then." She stood and hugged him again as she said, "I still don't think I believe this, but it sure will be easier having you with me today."

She took her direction from the sun and the two of them set off. Karis seemed perfectly content to let her lead the way: he walked beside her when he could and stayed a few steps behind when the trees were dense. Alisia noticed quite a few more animals than she was accustomed to seeing when she came alone, and she wondered if the unicorn's presence might have reassured them.

After a little confusion Alisia found her way back to the part of the forest she knew. When she and Karis came to the top of the slope above the road, the sun was high and butterflies were dancing in the meadows. They walked and slid down the slope until they came near the end of the trees. Alisia could see the road from there, and she held up a hand for the unicorn to stop.

Below them two merchants on mules were riding away from the city. Several other mules packed with cloth and heavy weavings followed them in a train. The two men were sharing a wineskin and singing a song of the road with a great deal of ribald laughter. Alisia stood close to the unicorn and stroked his neck while the voices faded. "Oh, Karis," she said quietly, "I'm not sure I'm ready for this." She led him out of the trees and down the last of the slope.

The sunlight shone bright on the road, sweeping away from them towards the gates of the town. The path was empty at the moment, and Alisia walked quickly while the unicorn trotted to keep pace. As they drew near the gatehouse, Alisia noticed a few men she knew standing beneath the teeth of the inner portcullis. They were gossiping but they looked very serious about it, puffing on their pipes and shaking their heads or frowning a little. One of them was gazing out of the gate but he didn't seem to see Alisia and her companion until they were very close to the walls. All at once Alisia saw his eyes widen and his pipestem freeze a few inches from his mouth. One by one the other men noticed his silence and followed his gaze until they were all motionless and staring as Alisia and Karis walked under the shadow of the gate.

"Good morning Mr. Petrovich, Mr. Oreschenko," Alisia said sweetly. Mr. Petrovich gulped, forgetting the smoke in his mouth, and began coughing with a loud rasp. The rest of the men ignored him, following the unicorn with slack faces as he and Alisia passed by them into the town.

There were a number of people in the streets that morning, haggling in the shop windows or carting their produce to the market on the south side. Alisia was a little concerned about causing a scene, but the shortest way home still took her down two blocks of the main avenue. She walked quickly and sprightfully and Karis followed with a pleased air, looking over his surroundings with genuine curiosity. Out of the corners of her eyes Alisia noticed people stopping their work to stare in befuddlement or utter a quick exclamation. A few men glanced over Karis and looked away as though there was nothing unusual about seeing a unicorn at that time of day. Others had a stronger reaction: one woman approaching them on the street shrieked and nearly lost her armful of squash. The only ones who seemed pleased were the children who smiled at Karis with delight until their mothers pulled them out of the way. Alisia greeted the people she knew and waved to others politely and found she wasn't entirely displeased with all the attention. Only a few minutes actually passed before she and Karis came to the narrow alley leading to the commons behind her home; but the time had been more than sufficient, and Alisia could almost hear the word spreading from house to house.

The two of them crossed the commons and Karis waited while Alisia unlatched the gate of her yard. She led him down the path through the garden and noticed that he stepped daintily, taking care not to tread on

the plants. Once out of the rows, they turned a little to the left and came to the end of the small stable.

Andrei was working inside. He was dressed in his old breeches and tunic and looked much more comfortable than when Alisia had seen him last, but he had frozen with his shovel in his hands and she could see the white around his irises. She and Karis stopped inside the doorway and Andrei managed to say, "What . . . what . . ."

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Alisia. "Andrei, this is Karis. He's a unicorn. Karis, this is my older brother Andrei."

Karis shook his head and the twists of his horn caught a beam of sunlight from a gap in the roof. Andrei glanced back and forth between the unicorn and Alisia. "How did — how did you —"

"Well," she said, "when I ran off last night I fell asleep under a tree in the old forest. When I woke up he was lying with his head in my lap. I must have charmed him."

After staring a little longer Andrei remembered himself. "Uh . . . I just finished cleaning a stall here. . . ."

Karis walked up and Andrei gave him plenty of room. He stepped into the stall, looking it over and sniffing the fresh hay, then turned around satisfied. Andrei watched him, not quite over his shock. "What does he eat?" he asked Alisia as she came closer.

"Normal things, I think. Do you have some oats?"

He ran and filled a bucket and set it in front of the unicorn. Karis sniffed it once, then fell to eating with a pleased snort.

As Alisia listened to him munching she said, "Oh, Andrei, I'm so sorry about last night. I tried to act cute and I ended up ruining everything for you. . . ."

Andrei shrugged, never taking his eyes from Karis. "It's all right. After you left the Magistrate apologized for getting upset and he looked happy when Magda cleaned off his leg. I think he'll still give me a reference."

"That's wonderful," said Alisia as relief washed through her, and she hugged him. "I'm so happy for you. I'm so happy I didn't spoil it."

"You didn't." He smiled. "He was sort of pompous anyway. It was fun seeing him jump." They both laughed and Andrei watched Karis again. "Does he talk?" he asked.

"I don't think so."

He nodded. "I thought they were supposed to talk."

"I think he *thinks*. I'm sure of it. But other than that . . ."

Andrei walked to the side to see the unicorn a little better. "I still can't believe you did this."

"I'm not so sure I can either." Alisia turned to Karis and spoke to him. "Is everything all right? I have to go inside and change my clothes. Will you be all right?"

Karis lifted his head and twitched his ears, then returned to his oats.

"Will he let me touch him?" Andrei asked as Alisia left.

"Oh, yes," she called, "he's very gentle. You'll like him."

She wiped off her feet near the back porch and entered the door. She turned right and then left into the main hallway and ran down to the parlor where she saw her parents. Her mother rose and put her fists on her hips but before she could speak Alisia ran up to her and gave her a hug.

"Hello, mother, hello, father," she said, "I'm sorry I made a mess of things last night and I hope you weren't too worried about me, but I'm glad the Magistrate wasn't upset. I spent the night in the forest and I found a unicorn and he came home with me. He's out in the stable with Andrei if you want to see him. I have to go change my clothes." As she ran up the stairs she called out, "His name is Karis!"

By the time Alisia's changing was done the parlor was empty. She left through the back door and went to the stable where Andrei was happily brushing out the unicorn's coat. Mr. Karanov had found enough courage to stand nearby and pat Karis on the neck. When Alisia came up to them her mother was standing against the opposite wall with crossed arms and tight lips.

Her father smiled at her. "He's a beauty, girl, that's for sure. You told Andrei he was just lying there when you woke up?"

"Yes. I still don't understand it. I even tried to make him go away but he wouldn't do it. I thought it had to be a mistake." Her father stepped back to see Karis a little better and the unicorn snorted. "Father, I'm awfully sorry about last night," she continued. "I was acting like such a fool."

Mr. Karanov shook his head. "It's all over with now, and nobody's hurt by it. Just don't get so fancy next time. I shouldn't have yelled at you like I did," he added. "It wasn't polite."

"If she'd driven the Magistrate off," said Mrs. Karanov, "that would have been the least she'd have to worry about."

"But she didn't, Prisca, so there's no point in worrying it to death. Besides, this fellow sort of makes it all worthwhile."

Karis lowered his head to eat some more oats, and Alisia's father patted him on the side. Mrs. Karanov watched them without moving. "Feed isn't cheap anymore," she said.

"Oh, Prisca," said her husband, "I'm sure he'll graze all right, if it comes to that. We can always afford one more mouth."

Mrs. Karanov pressed her lips a little tighter. "I don't know what the neighbors are going to think."

Andrei winked at Alisia. "If you want to find out, Lisi," he said, "I think there's a few of them waiting for you out on the commons."

Alisia walked out the other end of the stable and saw that more than thirty people had gathered behind the back fence. As she came nearer, Mr. Petrovich called out, "Alisia! What about this new pet of yours? Is he

still here?"

"Yes, he's here," she said, then turned and called, "Karis! Karis!"

The unicorn trotted out white and golden into the sun and Alisia felt her heart tighten as she saw him for the first time all over again. Behind her she heard people gasp in surprise or awe or fear. Alisia unlatched the gate to let Karis pass into the crowd that opened wide to receive him; then she followed him out and pulled the gate behind her.

Before she could latch it she heard a stifled shriek. She looked back to the stable in time to see Kirte turning away and running back towards the house. Marta was still standing there on the edge of the shadow watching Alisia and her unicorn with a face like ash, and before Alisia could speak Marta turned and stalked after her sister.

As the people on the commons gathered carefully around Karis, Alisia wondered whether or not the unicorn would appreciate all the attention, but he didn't appear at all anxious or upset. If anything, he seemed to take as much interest in the people as they did in him. He was particularly gentle with the children who ignored their elders and ran between his legs or tried to catch his tail. For an hour or more he and Alisia waited near the gate or walked a little on the commons while the people came and went. Near the end of the time Alisia saw many men and women she had never met before and learned that word had already spread to the far boroughs of the town. After she repeated her story for the twenty-fifth time and saw the last of the old men straggle off, Alisia had to admit she was more than happy to see them go.

She and Karis were some distance from her gate by that time, and as they angled across a quarter of the commons, Alisia saw Magda waiting inside the fence. She had half a thought of turning and going the other way, but there wasn't much point in putting it off. She had no idea what to say, however, and slowed her pace until Magda solved the problem by opening the gate and walking up to her with a smile of happiness.

"Oh, Lisi, he's beautiful." she said. "Can I touch him?"

Alisia was a little flustered. "Yes, he'll . . . he'll let you."

Her elder sister stroked his neck and combed his mane with her fingers. Alisia stood back a little bit, but she couldn't help noticing the way the light from the unicorn brightened Magda's eyes. Magda patted Karis on the side and said, "You've got Marta and Kirte frothing, you know."

"Really?"

"Yes. They were just screaming at Mother a while back. 'What right does that little stick have to get a unicorn,' blah-blah-blah. *That* was a moment to treasure. If the best that comes out of this is the sight of those two alley cats getting their tails stepped on it'll all be worth it."

Alisia didn't know what to say. As they walked back to the gate Magda came closer and put her arm around her. The older girl bit her lip. "Alisia, I'm sorry about yesterday."

"It's all right."

"It's not all right. I haven't been much of a big sister lately and that's not good. I never should have played along with Marta to begin with. You need a lot more help than I've been giving you and I'm going to do better, I promise you. I mean it. And it has nothing to do with your friend here."

Alisia's throat was too tight for her to speak. Magda stopped and hugged her and said, "Oh, Lisi, I'm absolutely green with envy, but I'm totally thrilled for you at the same time. I hope that's enough."

Alisia hugged her back and tried not to cry. "It is, Magda," she said, "it's perfect. You're perfect."

They laughed as they took Karis back to the stable and went to the house. In the kitchen Eilina had saved some food from supper, and Alisia realized at once how hungry she was. Magda left her with her meal while Alisia talked to the cook between mouthfuls of chicken.

"Did you see him, Eilina, did you see him?" she said.

"That I did, mistress, and he's quite an eyeful, you can be sure of that."

"And he's so gentle, too. He looks like he could do anything he wants, but he acts like a kitten with me."

"He follows you just like a lamb."

"But the best thing is," Alisia said through her milk, "the best thing is he really likes me. He knows me and he still *likes* me."

"Now mistress, there's lots of people who think the whole world of you," said the cook as she hung up some pots, "so you shouldn't go thinking that's anything special."

"It *is* special. You've always been good to me, Eilina, but you're almost the only one besides Andrei. And you like everybody." She finished off a hard roll. "But now it's like everyone likes me because Karis does. I can even make them happy instead of waiting for them to do it to me." She was practically bubbling. "That feels so *good.*"

"Of course it does. I've always told you time and again that you ask more of yourself than a young girl should."

She gave Eilina her plate and headed for her room, but she stopped on the stairs when she heard Andrei call her from the yard. He was standing below the steps when she came out onto the porch, his face caught between a smile and a grimace.

"Is something wrong?" she asked.

He jerked his head towards the stable. "I don't think so. But you've got some more visitors."

Alisia crossed the yard with him, shooing the chickens away from her feet. When she looked into the stable her stride almost caught, but she kept herself walking normally.

The Magistrate was standing near Karis's stall. His clothing was not as elaborate as it had been the day before, but it was more than expensive enough to make Alisia feel underdressed. Two other men were with him,

looking at the unicorn and speaking quietly. From the way they stood, they seemed to be trying to keep the stable mud off their polished boots as much as possible, but they hadn't been very successful so far. Alisia's father waited off to one side, smiling and pulling on his sleeve the way he did when he was uncomfortable.

The Magistrate saw her approaching and said, "Here's the young lady now. Good afternoon, Alisia."

"Good afternoon, Your Honor," she said, remembering to curtsy only at the last moment.

"Gentlemen, may I present Alisia Karanov. Alisia, these are Mr. Antonov and Mr. Velisky, two of my aides."

The two men nodded, and she curtsied again. "Your Honor, I wanted to tell you how sorry I am about yesterday. I never should have been acting like that in the first place and I hope your leg wasn't hurt too badly —"

The Magistrate waved her off. "Don't give it a thought, girl. It was hardly the first pair of hose I've ever lost at a tea."

Velisky took out a small pair of spectacles and clamped them on the end of his nose. "We've just been admiring this discovery of yours, Alisia."

"Oh, yes, isn't he beautiful? Isn't he just perfect? Half the town must have been out to see him already."

Antonov spoke to the Magistrate. "From the mess they made of the commons back there she's probably right."

The Magistrate nodded. "There's bound to be some temporary excitement, of course. You shouldn't let it concern you."

"It'll concern you if the Council brings it up."

"We'll see." The two of them watched Karis for a while without speaking. Finally Velisky said, "They say the horn gives you three wishes," and Antonov nodded a little.

Andrei stepped in to break the silence. "I've been thinking about what this is going to do for our town," he said with enthusiasm. "This is the kind of thing that could really make a name for us. Right now we're just another little village in this end of the county, but if word about Karis gets around people might sit up and take notice."

Velisky eyed him with a sharp deflating glance. "Now *that* would be unfortunate."

"A few years back," said Anotnov, watching the unicorn, "word got about that the village of Vensk in the southeast had captured a small griffin. It was kept chained in the square and fed horsemeat until it grew large enough to break its fetters and fly off. Now I haven't the slightest idea whether or not the story was true. The point is that very few people outside of Vensk took it seriously. I don't think the town has lived it down even yet. 'Crazy as a Venskman:' I heard that said the other day. No, that's hardly the way to make a reputation."

"I think we're on a much firmer track with the kind of work Mr. Karanov is doing," said Velisky. "Wouldn't you say so, Antonov?"

"Yes. Definitely. Textiles. The quality is certainly there. We're already known as a regional center. If we can crack a few of the northern markets next autumn we'll start earning the right sort of name."

"And may I say," said the Magistrate, "that it would not be a moment too soon to reward the years of fine work weavers like Mr. Karanov have given us."

Alisia's father was beaming by this time, and Andrei looked thoroughly abashed. Alisia twisted her hands together and rose up a little higher on her toes: she had a terrible feeling that something was slipping away from her. "That's all for the best, I'm sure," she said. "I never thought we should make a lot of fuss over Karis; it wouldn't be good for him. I'm sure he'd rather have things peaceful and quiet."

"Oh, beyond a doubt," said the Magistrate.

"Creatures are always more comfortable when their habitat is calm," said Antonov. "It's only nature. As quiet as our little town is, it's probably terribly hectic for this fellow. No doubt the sooner he gets back to his own meadow the happier he'll be."

Alisia felt something catch in her throat. "I . . . I was planning to let him stay here if he wants to. . . ."

Antonov shook his head. "That won't do. Dangerous animals may not be kept in the city limits. The ordinances are very specific about it. We won't even let circuses stay the night, and I'm sure we've saved some lives that way. I suppose we can all look the other way the rest of the day, though, wouldn't you say so, Alexan?"

The Magistrate nodded. "Oh, yes, there'll be no problem this afternoon. This really is something remarkable, after all, and we can't expect the girl to know how to handle it perfectly. In fact, Sergei, as long as he's gone by nightfall I shouldn't worry about your liability. Even when there's a question of damages, people are always rather forgiving of young girls; it's one reason why daughters are less of a problem than sons. I can recall just last year there was a dispute in the northern borough —"

Alisia made an effort to keep her anxiety from coloring her voice. "Your Honor, sir, if I could say something to you . . ." The Magistrate nodded and she tried to sound reasonable. "I know I've made things difficult for everyone but I think you should know that I didn't really bring Karis here, he came because he wanted to. So I think it's different than if I had just brought some wild animal home. I mean, if Karis wants to leave he will, but I really couldn't take him somewhere and make him do something he didn't want to do. It's not like I could just set him loose again. Also you can see just by looking at him that he couldn't ever be dangerous to anyone, he's kinder and tamer than most of the pigs and goats people have running loose —"

She stopped because the men were turning to each other and chuckling. Velisky adjusted his glasses on his nose and said, "My dear girl, if you have as little control over him as you say, how can you ask us to believe that he's *tame*?"

Alisia opened her mouth and then closed it when she realized she was caught. Andrei was looking at the floor with crossed arms and a flushed face. Alisia turned to her father, her whole body begging him to say something. He twisted his toe on the ground and glanced sideways at the men. "Well, you know, Lisi . . . even if we tried to keep him I don't know what we'd do with him. I mean, we couldn't ask him to plow and I doubt if he'll let you ride. . . ."

Alisia stared at him while she felt the last of her strength crumbling, and her father tried to look anywhere but at her face. She folded her hands and looked at the Magistrate's feet. "I'll . . . I'll do what I can," she said quietly.

"Good girl," said Velisky. "You're being very understanding." And then the men went on to other things.

Alisia turned away without excusing herself and walked back to the house. Kirte was standing near the porch steps in a place where she could have seen and heard everything going on in the stable. She was trying not to smile, but her eyes were shining with a fierce delight. Her mother was waiting nearby with her hands on her hips, glaring at Alisia as she came to the steps. "Well, what did you expect? Did you think this would change anything? Did you think it would make you any less clumsy and stupid? You've had your head in the clouds so long you think you can make your problems disappear by waving your hand. The sooner you learn otherwise, the better off you're going to be."

Alisia walked inside without speaking and went up to her room where she changed her shoes and tied on her heavy cloak. When she left the house again, there was no one near the back door. Karis had left the stables and was waiting in the garden with Andrei. When Alisia strode up stiff and silent, her brother stepped up and put his arms around her. "I'm sorry, Lisi, I'm sorry," he said.

"It's all right," she whispered, "It's all right." She went to the gate without him, and Karis followed. A few children were still on the commons, and they ran along beside them across the grass. Alisia took no notice of them, and when she and Karis passed between the houses and out into the main street, she scarcely saw the people who waved or spoke to her.

They left the town through the empty gatehouse and set out down the road. Karis walked easily, tossing his head, but Alisia moved with arms and legs like taut bowstrings. As soon as they were around the first copse of trees, Alisia stepped off the road and sat down as though she'd been dropped.

"Didn't I tell you?" she wailed at the unicorn when he trotted up. "Didn't I try to tell you? We made one big mess out of everything." She hugged her knees and stuck her chin on them, staring out over the fields, then jumped up and began shouting at Karis. "Why didn't you listen to me? Why did you make me go through all that? Now everything's the same as it was before and I just look sillier for wanting to keep you. And the worst thing is you made me think things were going to be different. They *aren't* different! You hurt me just like everyone else does, and now I'm never going to see you again! I never should have listened to you to begin with. I should have left you in the forest and gone home and everything would have been just fine." She stalked off across the road and faced the fields with her arms crossed and her back stiff. Karis watched her without moving for the long moment it took her to soften. When at last she turned and ran back to him, he shied a little at her charge, but she threw her arms around his neck and held him tightly until he was still.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean that, you know I didn't." She wiped her eyes on his pelt and held him a little longer. The sun was low enough in the west that the hairs of his mane were touched with orange where they brushed the edges of the light. Alisia took a burr from his side and turned to look at the sunset, leaning her head against him and stroking his cheek.

"Oh, Karis, I don't know how to make you understand," she said quietly. "You can't . . . there's just some people who can't take what you want to give them. My mother's right. I don't like that but it's true. People have reasons why they are the way they are, and they don't change just because you want to drop yourself into their life. Things just don't work that way. This would be so much easier if you'd believe that."

She turned to face him and took his head in her hands. His eyes had that look of gentle amusement she'd seen in them that morning. She tried to ignore it and said, "You've always done what I wanted you to. Well, now I want you to go. I'm telling you to do it and I'm not fooling this time." Karis stepped back a little and looked at her. "I'm not going to change my mind. Don't wait around and make me angry." Karis glanced at the hillside, then watched Alisia for a long moment as she forced the trembling out of her legs. She was about to speak again when he turned from her and began walking towards the forest.

I will not cry, Alisia told herself over and over. Karis trotted a few yards up the slope before he seemed to hesitate; he stopped and looked back and forth from the forest to Alisia as though uncertain. She knew she couldn't hold out much longer.

"Go on, what are you waiting for?" Her fists were tight at her sides. "Don't waste any more of my time. What's the matter, are you afraid?"

"Oh, no, it isn't that," he said. "It's just that I wonder if you might have missed something."

Alisia gaped at him. "What?"

"I'm sorry, did I startle you?"

"No, no. That's all right." The shock only lasted for a moment: now that he had spoken Alisia realized she had always known he could. He was so calm and plain about it that she almost felt foolish for acting so stunned. She put a hand on her chest and caught her breath as she said, "It's only that . . . I was — I wasn't really sure. . . ."

Karis nodded. "Yes, it's a fault of mine. I keep to myself much more than I should. But I thought I should say goodbye, at least."

"Wait," she said. "Wait a minute. Not yet. What was that you were saying, just now?"

"Oh that. Well, I wouldn't presume to argue with you —"

"No. Go ahead. Please."

"All right. It's just this." He trotted back to her as he spoke. "I was thinking of gifts. You've always been talking as though they have to be deserved. You seem to think they have to tell you something important about the one who receives them."

"Is that wrong?"

"Oh, I wouldn't know. But it did occur to me that you might be missing the point. Perhaps a gift doesn't have to be earned at all. Perhaps what it really tells you about more than anything else is the love of the giver."

Alisia puzzled for a little bit before she began to understand. "Oh, I see. You mean . . . oh, that's wonderful. That might be true. I hope it's true." She put a hand on her hip. "But why didn't you tell me sooner?"

Karis cocked his head. "Would you have listened?"

Alisia smiled. "Not really."

"Well, then."

"But I'm not sure I'm any better now."

"I'm not sure you need to be." He lifted his nostrils and sniffed the wind. "Listen. I know you can't stay away for very long, but where I come from there are people who know a lot more about this sort of thing than I do."

Alisia remembered a dream of a ride so swift and free it was nearly like having wings. Her eyes widened and her mouth opened, softly. "I'd love to meet them. More than anything."

"Well, climb on then, and hold tight," said the unicorn, shaking his mane. "I feel a good gallop coming on."

David Gaston was born in Santa Monica in 1955, and presently lives in Reseda, California, with his wife Carrie and his children, Lara (age 6) and Shawn (5). He makes his living managing a manufacturing company in North Hollywood, but he is also a semi-professional calligrapher and an amateur playwright and director.

WASH AND WERE

by J. B. Allen

art: Hank Jankus

The author tells us: "I am a systems analyst living in Southern California, with two cats named Charles Babbage and Ada Lovelace. This is my first story sale, as I anxiously hang on the precipice of literary stardom. One of my life-long ambitions is the revival of the shaggy dog story."

"Hey mister," said the stranger conversationally, "you have any pups?"

I shrugged. I like dogs well enough, but Paula would throttle me if I brought one home.

"My wife is allergic to animals," I said. He looked genuinely hurt.

"Humans are animals. You know that, don't you?"

"My boss acts like one most of the time," I admitted. "Can I buy you a drink?"

"Water," he said sullenly. His nose twitched in a really curious way. I shrugged and flagged down Aquinas, who grabbed one of those metal hoses that dispenses every liquid known to man and expertly filled a small glass. At least I was getting off cheap.

"Didn't I see you in here once before?" I prodded. "About a month ago."

"Twenty-eight days," he said firmly. "I never would have found this place again if it wasn't for that nutty name. What does it mean, anyway?"

Aquinas gave me a sly smile and worked his way down the hardwood bar, whistling and rubbing the glossy surface with a small cloth.

"A McGuffin is something, usually an object, that a story centers around. On Thursdays, the regulars come in and swap stories. Of course, it helps to have some memento from the events in question, which gets hung on the wall.

"Like over there," I said, aiming my forefinger over Aquinas's head. "There next to the solid glass frisbee. That's the melted jack handle from the Man-eating Ferrari. And there, above it, that's a chain-mail brassiere, a real handful that was." I chuckled to myself.

He scanned the wall intently for a moment, then stuck his mouth down the glass. His tongue slid up and down until the level dropped to where he couldn't reach it. He raised his head and panted, licking his lips with a broad, pink tongue.

I glanced around the room to see how many apologetic smiles I had to come up with. All the time I was thinking how smart I'd always been never to buy drinks for strangers. This looked like a Hell of a lapse. The stranger rubbed his head with the side of his hand.

"I'm sorry," he said self-consciously. "I keep forgetting."

"Forgetting?"

"That it's a full moon." His head sagged. He looked up at me with soulful puppydog eyes. Silently I calculated the sprinting time to the front door.

"Happens every month," he said piteously.

"You turn into a wolf."

"Not on your life!" Every head in the place turned. I hushed him.

"Okay, what, then?"

"Well, it's like this. A few months ago I was living peacefully in the woods with my mate." He got a faraway look in his eye. "Now there's a bitch."

I started to say I knew exactly how he felt, but he cut me off.

"One night a small band of hunters were drinking and got lost deep in the

forest. They wandered for hours until they came across us, rousting us and chasing everyone terrified into the night. I stayed behind to defend our territory. In one horrible moment I realized that they meant to kill me. Before I could escape to join the others, one of the hunters cornered me. In a panic I attacked him.

"In the fray that followed, the lunatic bit me. At the time I thought nothing of it, but as the days progressed, I felt more ill. My skin felt looser somehow and I lost quite a bit of hair. My joints ached and I slept most of the time.

"Then, one night, the full moon rose. I collapsed in a heap, writhing in agony. In a matter of moments, a strange transformation came over me. Before I could make sense of what was happening, I was lying there in a three-piece suit, a leather briefcase by my side."

He shuddered. "My throat burned like fire, and I felt a mad craving for Perrier with a twist. Super Bowl scores began rattling around my head, along with flashes of Bo Derek in a wet kimono. I was obsessed with owning a Porsche and a beachside condo with a Jacuzzi. I felt compelled to stand in line for a Steven Spielberg movie.

"How I kept from going mad, I'll never know. It was a horrible, hellish experience. The next morning, I reverted to my normal self, but when the moon rose again, well . . ." His voice trailed off.

I scratched behind my ear, wondering what it would feel like to do it with my hind leg. I decided to humor him for the moment. "How about a nice piece of jerky?"

A narrow line of drool formed at the corner of his mouth as he nodded. I flagged down Aquinas and asked for jerky and a pickled egg.

"It's really not so bad," I said. "You get to see what life is like on the other side."

He shook his head. "Have you ever been caught chasing a car? Or licking your private parts on a bus?"

I admitted he had me there. "But just think of all the nice things you could do for your fellows. You're the only one that can get the nice big bags of crunchy dry food."

"I don't know," he said despondently.

"You could make reservations in cushy kennels. Buy flea collars." His ears perked up at that one; I was on a roll. "Rent a car and take your friends for a ride with their noses out the window."

He nodded thoughtfully. "I never thought of that."

"Sure. And what about taking your friends to the vet when they get sick?"

"Yeah," he said. "By George, you're right." He was literally beaming. "I want to thank you." He shook my hand like a pump handle.

He left whistling something that might have been 'How Much Is That Doggie in the Window?' He'd left something on the table before he'd gone.

"Aquinas," I said triumphantly, picking up the small object. "Is there a spot up there big enough for a Milk Bone?"

Screen Reviews

by Baird Searles

Thunderclone

The thing that knocked us out about the first two Mad Max films was their originality. *Mad Max* was pretty incoherently original and suffered from underproduction, to put it kindly. But the second, *The Road Warrior*, took all sorts of stock elements and, in ways too arcane to go into here, fed them through some sort of grinder and came up with a whole new thing. Maybe it was as simple as the bright Australian light, which might have been what California's light was like when the movie industry moved out there, before Hollywood became polluted in its myriad ways. And there was the fact that the second didn't imitate the first (in ways it didn't even *connect* with the first, but better that than outright copying).

Last summer the theaters seemed to be showing one movie with five or six different titles, which had someone under the age of consent (that's about 14 these days) getting involved with some sort of home-made pseudo-scientific device resulting in various comic (?) predicaments. The third Mad Max movie at least offered an alternative to this omnipresent flick; what it didn't really offer was an alternative to the *second* Mad Max movie.

How often it's pointed out that the commercial formula for *anything* is — if it makes money, make another one and change as little as possible. So, when something original *does* pop up that brings in the loot, do it again.

So Max again is up against the punk baddies. Here they're running the community rather than trying to take it: it's a place called Bartertown, and the lady in charge claims it's a step back toward civilization. As she's Tina Turner, one takes her claims with a grain of salt. Her minions are so befeathered and beroached and beMohawked that they look like embarrassed extras gone astray from a production of *The Last of the Mohicans*.

B'town, however, is dependent for its power on methane produced by underground pig sties (if ye dinna ken the connection between pigs and methane, do some research or see the movie — it goes into it in gross detail); and Max gets involved in the intramural squabbling. Sent into the desert to die, he is rescued by a colony of adolescents and children who have been waiting for a sort of Messiah to save them. This expected Messiah is the barely remembered captain of a wrecked jumbo jet; and when Max turns out not to be he, some of the colony set out for Bartertown in disillusionment.

This pastoral interlude is the best part of the movie, maybe because it's photographed out of doors in that light. (Bartertown is mostly underground pig warrens.) Needless to say, Max has to rescue the innocents from the Mohicans; and we have, again, the chase down the world's longest straightway. This one happens to be on rails in an odd sort of steam vehicle (Australia has the world's longest

stretch of absolutely straight railroad track; did you know that?), but it's still the same chase.

And throughout, Mel Gibson's stillness and quiescence, so dangerous in the earlier films, has now become a sort of bored lethargy; it's so trite to attribute this to international stardom, but it's the most immediate explanation.

In short, Mad Max III (*Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome*, officially) is a replay, ready-made with repeat or standard ingredients. *The Road Warrior* took some secondhand goods — the car chase, the punk-look future that's as much a cliché now as the streamlined future was in the '40s — and did new things with them. The new one makes secondhand goods out of them again.

Tripods

It's disconcerting to compare that one movie with six titles from last summer with an Anglo-Australian series which more or less opened the TV season. *Tripods* (based on John Christopher's *WHITE MOUNTAINS* trilogy) also has an adolescent protagonist, but that's about the only point of comparison.

The Brits have proved that they have an uncanny knack for transferring literature to the TV screen. Part of the secret is the limited series format — take all the time you need (as opposed to only a couple of hours for a movie), and then stick as close to the book as possible. Add superb actors and directors, and *voilá!* — you have a triumphant realization of the printed word.

Many of the British series have been set in various periods of the past, which have been recreated superbly. From there it's only a step to science fiction, which means creating a milieu of the future.

Christopher's trilogy is an ideal one for such treatment. It takes place in A.D. 2089, on an Earth which has returned to a pre-industrial past: there is nothing more complicated than a mill wheel there. The reason for this is that Earth is a conquered world; the conquerors are known only as the Tripods, great three-legged machines which stride the countryside and have reduced mankind to a form of passive slavery. This is accomplished by the process of "capping": each human child is taken into a tripod after a certain age and is returned with a metal insert in his head, which effectively reduces aggression and curiosity. The process has been made into a coming-of-age ceremony which is celebrated happily by the populace.

Will Parker is a year from being capped, and is unhappy and afraid at the prospect. He is contacted by a "vagrant," one of a wandering population of humans who live outside society and are presumed to be the few who are driven mad by the capping process.

The vagrant who accosts Will, however, is far from mad; he is a recruiter for the mysterious White Mountains, where are to be found those humans who have not been enslaved by the Tripods. He persuades Will to run away, to find the White Mountains; and the story is that of Will's adventures in a land dominated by the great metal machines, the discovery of their mysteries, and the attempt to free mankind from their yoke.

As I write, the series has not yet reached an end, so I don't know how far it will chronicle Will's adventures. It is beautifully produced. Will's home village is perfect, looking like something from the 17th century, but with a subtle difference; and the jarring

presence of the anachronistic alien machines, striding through the pastoral landscape and taken for granted by the people, is exactly the quality of the books. Christopher is an intelligent, but rather bloodless writer; somehow the dramatization adds what he lacks, the living presence of actors seeming to flesh out the characters and the action. This could well be one of the rare instances where the TV version is even better than the original.

Who Cares?

A few months back my kindly editor printed a letter from a young lady who accused me of not liking Dr. Who. Now I don't mind being taken to task when I say something dumb, which has been known to happen; but I do mind being misinterpreted: it's amazing how many steamy letters I've had over the years from people who have just not bothered to read accurately what was written. The lady in question was more polite than most, but let me set the record straight. I said the only good *new* thing on last year's second season was a series of commercials; since Dr. Who has been around for any number of years, even in this benighted country, it obviously does not qualify as a ***new*** thing.

To prove my point, let me note the recent opportunity in my area to see the very first Dr. Who program (the programs are syndicated, so one can never tell which will turn up where). It was a fascinating glimpse into the past, this program over twenty years old that spawned the two decades' worth of Whoey.

The original doctor, William Hartnell, was obviously chosen as the classic image of the eccentric scholar-scientist, with his flowing black bowtie and his flowing white locks. (Interestingly, the men of the Stone Age tribe among whom he finds himself in this first adventure all had to wear wigs, since this was before the time when the civilized male wore his hair long; Hartnell's mane, however, is obviously his own.)

The dear old Tardis was a bit more primitive in those days; its dials resemble oil gauges on a Studebaker. But the circular plot structure of this episode pre-echoes the form almost all further programs were to take: back-and-forthing the actors from the Tardis to the three available sets which were obviously all the budget allowed.

VIDEOWARES

The Last Battle (Le Dernier Combat) (RCA) was the surprise find of 1984, though it opened and closed in New York in about a week, and probably didn't appear much of anywhere else. I.e., it was not exactly a superhit. So thank God for video cassettes, which enable these small obscure masterworks to be available to those who will appreciate them.

Who will appreciate *The Last Battle*? It's French, black and white, made on a budget of $2.98, sometimes infuriatingly ambiguous, and has no dialogue whatsoever. But this story of a strange post-holocaust world where no one speaks and one man has a series of odd and lethal encounters is sometimes beautiful and constantly compelling and evocative. If you're an admirer of styled and demanding SF such as that written by Ballard and Delany, *you* will appreciate *The Last Battle*.

Quintet (Key) is an oddity by Robert Altman, made in 1970 and starring Paul Newman, which has been all but forgotten. The setting is a dying city of the future; a new ice age has set in. Life is maintained by looted wood and the hunting of seals far to the South; the seals are disappearing.

Newman, a hunter, returns from the South with the daughter of his hunting companion, who has been killed. She is pregnant, a cause for rejoicing since pregnancy is now become a rarity. Newman leaves the girl with his brother to go and buy wood; while he is gone, everyone in the room in which his brother's family lives (one room, for warmth) is killed.

It's sort of a murder mystery — but, more completely, a study of a future society, and the details are intriguing. A constant visual theme is that of dogs eating the human dead. The city's inhabitants, confined to small areas of warmth, are mad for a game called "quintet." The power and the city's computer work erratically; a light bulb is turned on, and the ice on it slowly drips away. Throughout, on the sound track, there is the distant sound of advancing glaciers, like a far-off artillery barrage.

The costumes are wonderful; everyone is wrapped in great swathes of homespun cloth; they look like Old Testament patriarchs with towering headgear. Even more wonderful is the location; Altman had the inspired idea of filming in the remains of Montreal's futuristic Expo '67 (12 years after it closed) in the Canadian winter. You don't often get sets of that magnitude.

Being Altman, the film is sometimes obscure, sometimes pretentious. But also being Altman, *Quintet* is certainly one of the more interesting science-fictional experiments in film, and deserves more of a rep than it has. Take a chance on it.

It Came From Hollywood (Paramount) could make for a laugh-filled evening, or maybe a giggle-filled evening, or maybe an evening of dead silence, depending on your reaction to old movies and current (more or less) comedians. It's a compilation of clips from vintage SF and horror films, most of them very short, and they are divided into categories, each introduced by Gilda Radner, Dan Aykroyd, John Candy, or Cheech & Chong. The little sketches by which this is done are a good deal less funny than most of the movie episodes, which were done seriously, or as seriously as anyone did SF and horror in the "good old days."

Many of these are hilarious, and the sections on monsters, gorillas, and the animal kingdom run amok are particularly successful, with absurdity piled on absurdity. The high point is a "giant" bird, of a craftsmanship so crude that it wouldn't be allowed in a cereal box, which crunches up toy airplanes (this is from, if memory serves, 1957's *The Giant Claw*).

Some of the clips are overfamiliar, but a surprising amount will come as a surprise to all but the most omnivorous vintage-film buff. There is one glaring error in taste that should be noted: *The Incredible Shrinking Man* is almost universally acknowledged as one of the few early SF films of high quality. Including a lengthy sequence from it (the cat and the doll house), and therefore implying it to be on a par with the crude efforts shown around it, throws some doubt on the knowledge of the producers.

Damnation Alley (Key) takes us from the riblime to the subdiculous: it is arguably the worst science-fiction movie ever made; and though it's from a novel by Roger Zelazny, Mr. Z should not blamed for what the producers did to a reasonably taut and exciting story.

Two military-type survivors of a nuclear holocaust make their way from the Southwest to Albany (*Albany?* Well, that's where the radio signals are coming from) through a world tilted off its axis, which results in the sky

becoming a singularly unattractive shade of polarized green. They run into various perils, including a nubile young lady, a dear little boy, giant scorpions, and the insect life of Salt Lake City, which results in one of the great lines of science-fiction film: "The city is infested with killer cockroaches!"

When they get to Detroit, the world decides to tilt back to its original axis and they are swept away by a tidal wave, and where do they resurface? Golly, gosh — 17 miles from Albany, which obviously has not been one whit affected by all the global goings-on — not even one killer cockroach.

Come to think of it, this one is probably more of a laugh-filled evening than *It Came From Hollywood.* ✂

ALL HALLOWS EVE

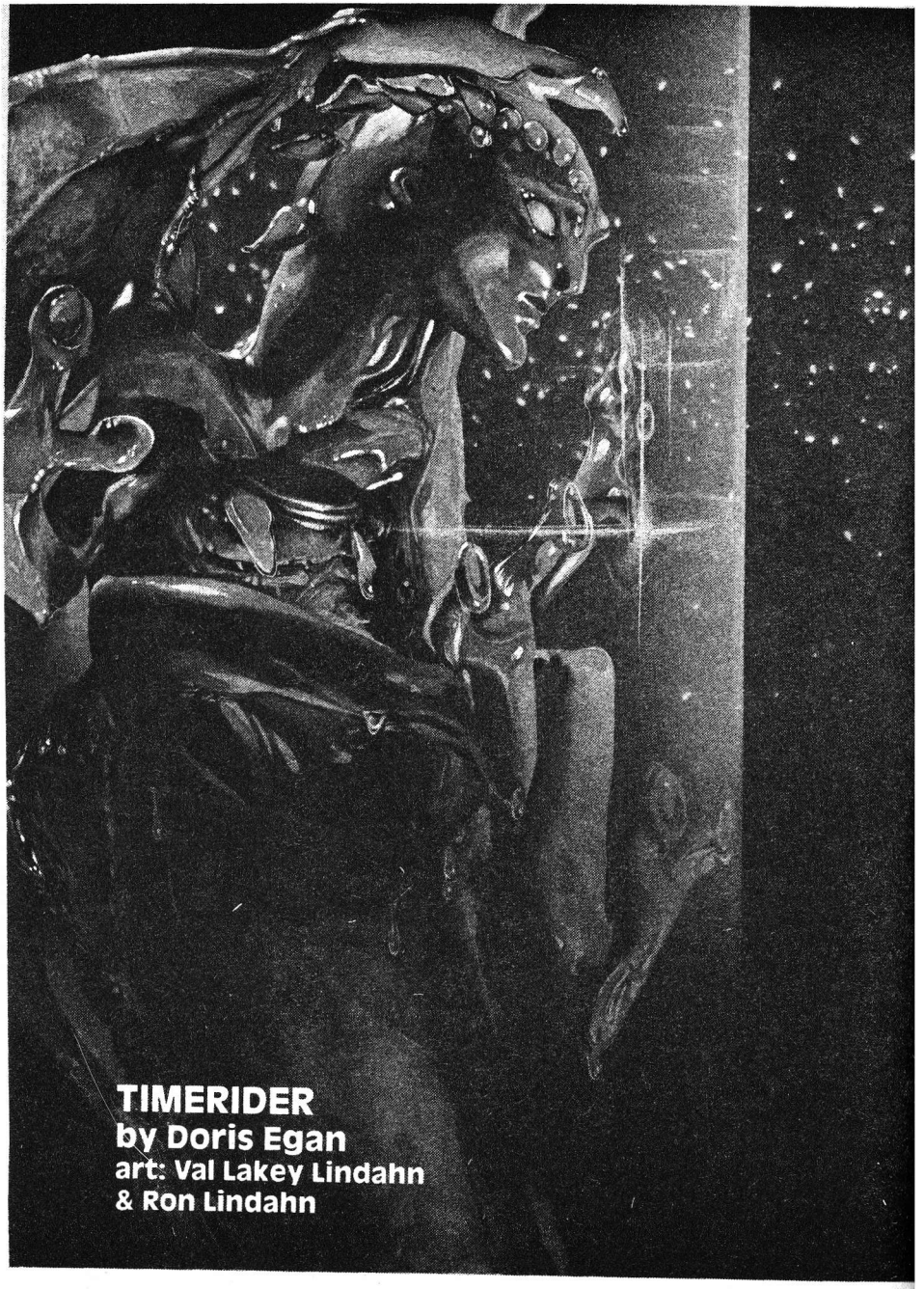
Now anthropoid and leprous shadows lope
Down black colossal corridors of Night
And through the cypress roots blind fingers grope
In stagnant pools where burns a witches' light.

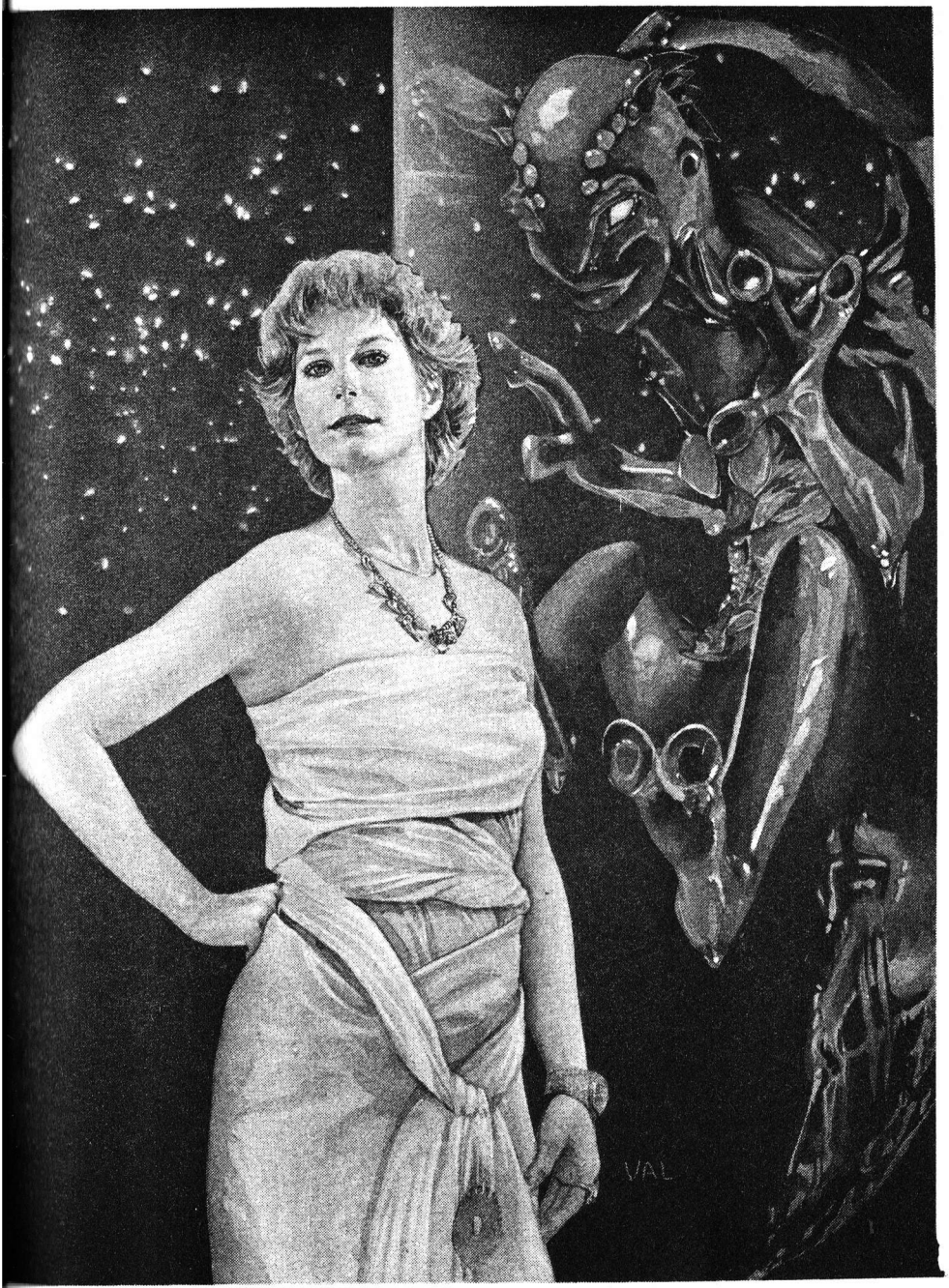
Gaunt, scaly horrors of an Elder World
Squat on a lone bare hill in grisly ring,
Howling blasphemies to a red hag-moon;
And where a serpent round an oak has curled,
And midnight shudders to a hell-born tune,
A nameless, godless shape sits slavering.

Gibbering madness slinks among the trees;
Deep in black woods a monstrous idol nods,
And rising from the nameless Outer Seas
Come spectres of the age-forgotten gods,

Who in blind, black infancy of earth
Gripped howling men in their misshapen paws,
And ground, with ghastly glee and obscene mirth,
Nude, writhing shapes between their brutish jaws.

— Robert E. Howard


TIMERIDER
by Doris Egan
art: Val Lakey Lindahn
& Ron Lindahn


VAL

The author writes us:

"I am currently working as the word processing/computer systems supervisor for a conservative New York financial firm. This job has proven highly educational — giving me access to expensive word processing equipment, teaching me how to dress, and providing me with insight into the way totalitarian organizations work. I am presently living in Jersey City, which I don't really mind. I rather like watching the sun set in awesome majesty over mysterious, alien-looking factories. This is my very first sale, and I feel better already."

Mark had me on a manic-depressive cycle because of what happened in Byzantium. It was everything you might think, humiliating, frightening, self-disgusting; but the worst thing about it was the energy drain. As I climbed up the hill to manic it poured out of me, rushed out of me in torrents, while I ran down corridors half-dressed, calling out to my colleagues in filthy language. I danced, I screamed, I hung over railings and yelled at the passersby. No one, of course, stopped me.

Four or five days of this; then, when my body could stand no more, the downward slide. A few days of rest, time to breathe, even the ability to think clearly. Then the tumble into the depression pit.

That phase I will not talk about. But it was in the days between, the almost-peace, that I decided to keep the journal I write this from. I would write as long as I could, until I lost interest as I climbed the peak, or realized there was no point in writing at all, as I slipped into the gray fog of defeat. The amazing thing was that the cycle cost me no status among my friends. Status is everything to a rider. But being singled out for punishment by Mark and still to be alive was a mark of attainment, like being cursed by the gods. If anything, they regarded me with awe. It does not appear in my journal, but I remember — I think — one or two of my crew coming to clean me. Things like washing or finding a public toilet sometimes seemed too trivial when I was on the peak. And once I found myself finishing up a striptease on the steps of the D'drendt Liaison Hall, to no apparent audience reaction, when I heard lone applause and a whistle behind me. I turned and bowed to a young man in gray jeweled shorts. His companion, an older woman, hustled him away. "You idiot," she said, embarassed. "That's Ceece, the Timerider. Don't gawk at her." So even the citizens were ignoring me, with an eerie politeness that wrote me out of their existence.

Three months went by; Mark kept me on full pay, considerate as always. And one day Banny came to see me, where I sat in the main Spoke. "Mark wants to see you," she said, handing me a handkerchief. I had a cold, and the medico was off-limits to me during the punishment. Banny was my Second,

a sweet-natured, chunky, black-haired girl. She was only nineteen, the youngest Rider I knew of. I picked her straight out of School, and if she hadn't made Probationary Citizenship I don't know what I would have done.

"What's the news?" I asked.

"You think he tells me?" She helped me up. I was midpoint in the cycle — Mark had timed it well. "Want me to call you a chair?"

"I can *walk*, you know."

"Sorry, Ceece. I didn't mean anything."

Of course she didn't. I was irritated by a vague memory that was tickling the back of my head, of yelling at Banny — actually hitting her? Hell, I probably dreamed it. My dreams had been varied, of late.

I dug up a smile for her. "I know. Just don't worry about me. I'll let you know how it turns out."

I watched the people I passed on the way to Mark's, saw them politely not watching me. Maybe today I'd be taken off the cycle. Maybe I'd be back at work in a few hours.

I killed that thought with the ease of long practice. I never anticipate what Mark's plans are.

In Arizona, a long way away from me, Brian Cornwall was experiencing his first vision. It was a hot night in June, 1957. His room was on the top floor of the boarding house, a small, dark room with lilies on the wallpaper, a cracked window, and one forty-watt bulb on the ceiling. The window was open.

He turned over again, wondering if he should go downstairs to the porch. No one would mind if he did, but the other boarders would rise early and he hated to have strangers watch him when he slept.

He fell into a troubled sleep at last. One dream led to another in a succession of shadowy figures and places, until suddenly a light broke through his mind, a fierce and compelling light that cleaned away all lesser images. He dreamed that he was sitting up in bed, and the light had become softer. It suffused the room, covering the bed, the bureau, the trunk and bookshelves in a glow like a nighttime snowfall back home in Vermont.

In the center of the glow now he could see a figure. A woman in a long white robe with a white crown on her head, her arms held out. Her face was still unclear.

When he saw her, he knew she would be beautiful.

Before Mark there comes Narses, the lion at the gate. More of a bad-tempered cat, actually, but with claws and ready to use them. Narses is never a welcome sight, but even less so then; he reminded me of Byzantium.

"You'll have to wait, Ceece. He's conferring." Narses claims he used to sing with the boys' choir in the church of Saint Sophia; his voice is still

soprano, but in my opinion, not a very fine soprano. If they made him a eunuch it was for political rather than artistic reasons. Before Narses, I had pictured all eunuchs as fat and middle-aged, with knobbly hands and too many rings, and probably not all that bright, either. Narses was just on the full side of plump, by about ten or fifteen pounds, quite tall for his locus-of-origin, and rather good-looking in a blondish way. (Another stereotype fallen, as I had thought all Greeks and all Turks were dark.) He was sharp enough when it came to petty details . . . sharp enough to cut yourself on. And he reported everything to Mark.

He barely finished speaking before the door split open. Mark looked a careless twenty-five, with curly brown hair and dark eyes and not a worry in his head. He had looked just that way when I met him, ten years ago. "Carol, please come in. Narses, you can empty the tubes."

Environment tubes? Had he really been conferring with D'drendt, as rumors had it? I followed him in and saw the tubes retracting into the floor. Too late, whatever had been in them was gone.

"Carol, I trust you've been well. Take a seat; the one by the pandidor is the best." He's the only one who calls me Carol. Carol Celia Cordray, that's me; but it's been Ceece since I was two, back in the sunny mornings of southern California. The only other person who called me Carol . . . never mind, it was a long time ago, in all senses of the word. And we don't have to talk about what it was like before we were recruited.

Mark smiled politely. "I hope my point has been made about following procedure in your step-throughs. Convenience for one's crew is all well and good, but we can't let it conflict with D'drendt policy. May I assume I need not bring up Byzantium again?"

I said evenly, "I guess you can assume that."

"Excellent. Please report to the medico after our chat and have him take you off the cycle." He handed me a folder. "I have something rather unusual coming up, that I think you can handle. Keep it low-key; I don't want anyone outside you and your crew hearing about it."

I was looking through the folder. There were stat sheets and a picture of a young man, dressed circa 1955. Close enough to my own starting point to recognize. There were other pictures, at various ages, and a medical profile; none of the pictures showed him any older than the first. "Brian Cornwall," said Mark. "Twenty-eight years old, locus 1957; born in Montpelier, Vermont, in July of 1929."

"The name seems familiar."

"He was an artist of some reputation. Mostly posthumous, I gather, but you might have heard of him; it was near your timeframe, wasn't it?"

Actually, I had been — I did some mental arithmetic — about five years old at that particular locus; and if anyone else had asked that question, he would have been livid. Riders do not ask these things. But after all, he was my recruiter; I could hardly pretend he didn't know.

"Close enough. I suppose I could have heard of him in college. My memory is pretty hazy about that time."

"Not important. Nor is Brian Cornwall, actually; have you checked the sheets? High intelligence, introverted, low self-esteem . . . a personality pattern that would have been labeled in the picturesque parlance of the age as a potential schizophrenic."

"We could cure that now."

"So we could. We're not interested in curing it, though, but of aggravating it. Notice how his lifeline comes to an abrupt dead-end. He was killed in a fire at the place where he worked."

"So we're recruiting Brian Cornwall?" It fit well enough. A high potential and a self-perceived failure, a life easy to pick up without disturbing the pattern — like me and everyone else.

"We have no interest in Brian Cornwall. We are interested in *this*."

Not a sheet-photo this time, but a real three-dimensional repro; a sculpture of some mellow, shiny stone. I took it for an abstract at first, but as I followed the flowing lines I realized there was a neck, and an eye . . . "It's a bird," I said, delighted.

"Mmm. A seagull, carved in chalcedony. Created sometime in the late 1870s, by an unknown Japanese artist. It made its way through a succession of small museums and shows for a century or more. Finally it started to be noticed. Its value has been growing, little by little, ever since . . . it's been priceless for quite a while now."

"We're salvaging it? Doesn't sound difficult. Who was the 'unknown artist'?"

"Literally unknown. I tried to track it, to establish its provenance, but it was created at a bad window. The time weather around Kyoto was awful; there's a storm going on there for a six-year span. It showed up in San Francisco twelve years later, though, and its history is well-documented from that point on." He took back the repro. "You'll have to take my word that the best locus for salvage is 1957. I've been waiting for a good weather report for years; the watchers notified me this morning that a perfect window will be opening any time now. The wave is close enough to us, in fact, that you should be able to observe — as soon as you're through with the medico, take Banny to the lab and start getting the feel of it."

"O.K. And Brian Cornwall?"

"We may be able to use him as a sort of extended agent. He's practically on top of the locus, for one thing; the seagull is in the museum where he works. He's perceived by his neighbors as being out of touch enough with reality that we can contact him without worrying about what he might say. And his past suggests that he might be amenable to persuasion. Read the stats."

He said it in a you-may-go-now type of voice, so I stood up. "By the way," he added, "I've already begun contact. Don't be surprised."

Surprised by what? Why should I care if he'd already begun contact?

We walked out of the office to where Narses sat, looking sour. Mark said to him, "Why don't you give Carol an O.K. for the medico?"

Narses reached slowly into a drawer for the stamp. As he pressed it into my hand, I said, "Cheer up, honey. Next time it could be you."

Mark smiled; he liked it when people were rude to Narses. I would have been rude to him anyway, just as a personal inclination. I saw as he put the stamp away that his bracelet was silver-and-sapphire, a twin to the one Mark was wearing. It had been gold-and-rubies when I'd last been in a condition to notice. The punishment cycle had kept me away for longer than I had thought. I hoped all the changes were so minor.

I told Banny to wait for me at the lab while I saw the medico. Angelo Poguno had been a rider for almost as long as I had, though he worked the medical end and never actually rode the waves. I should say just "Angelo," as Mark confined us to one name apiece, a policy he felt made us more like the citizens — and possibly more like the D'drendt. So far as I know, I am the only one to this day who knows Angelo's full name. I once got a long look at some personnel records . . . there's a story behind that, and no one's ever going to hear it. But sometimes the gaps between the records and the stories riders tell about their pasts are amusing.

"Ceece, love, it's about time you came off punishment. I've been holding this for you for weeks." He picked up a stoppered tube with "Ceece" written on the front, and began fiddling with his needles.

"I'm back riding, too, starting today."

"Huh! That screws up your system worse than drugs. Face it, honey, you're a genetic misfit. You should be in the service corps, like me. Say the word, my sweet, and I'll find you a place in medical . . ." As he spoke, he let the first needleful into my vein.

"You've said this before, paisan. But you don't get Merit points in the service corps — I'd have to live another five hundred years to buy my citizenship."

"What's being a citizen mean? I like my life as it is. I've got my friends, my status, living quarters I never dreamed of back in Napoli. And the citizens fall all over us, like we were movie stars."

"Only because they're too ignorant to know better." It must have been the effects of coming off the emotional cycle, but I found myself talking more than I would have, even to Angelo. "Ang, when I first came to the Spokes, I thought the citizens were Olympian. You know what I think now? They're the dregs. They're the scum that got left behind when the real humans left."

"Oh? Where did they go?" He went on working with quiet efficiency as he spoke. A second needleful found its way painlessly into my arm.

"Where do the riders go who buy their citizenship? Out there, to see the universe. That's what I'll do someday, if I live through this. I want to see

where we've gone. I want to see if D'drendt are everywhere. I want to find our descendants and ask them if the D'drendt really won the war."

Angelo looked a trifle alarmed. We were probably being recorded. But speculation is no crime; or at least, everybody does it — rather like marijuana-smoking in my locus-of-origin. "Love, you of all people must know who won the war. You've got access — look in the timewaves."

I shook my head. "They keep those years sealed up. Bad weather, they say. All over the planet? And another thing —"

Now he looked really alarmed. I knew I shouldn't tease him, so I laughed and said, "Angelo, unknit those unkind brows. There are perfectly good, orthodox, government-approved reasons for keeping those years sealed. And it's just as well, or I might try following my second ambition."

"What might that be?" he asked, on cue — one of the reasons I like Angelo. In him curiosity and discreet self-preservation mingle in equal, massive doses.

"I want to kick over the traces — stick my fingers in the pie — see if time can be altered."

"It can't be."

"Hell, sugar, don't just spout back what we both heard in school. Who says it can't be, but a lot of people who have a vested interest in seeing that it isn't? I'm tired of maintaining the status quo. I'm tired of lugging holocams through the timewall and bringing back documentary evidence of whatever the government wants to prove this week."

"I never heard that Mark's assignments were all that boring."

I ignored him. "I want to either get out, or make my own assignments. I want —"

"You want a lot of dangerous things," he said firmly.

"Don't worry, my friend. I'm a coward at heart. What I want has nothing to do with what I'll actually do, given the chance. I just came off punishment, remember? I'm going to be a good girl."

I meant it, too. Which meant I wasn't going to mention to Angelo some of the things I'd been thinking about between the emotional hills and valleys I'd just been riding. Like: Why were some of my assignments more than just off-site recording? I could understand the removals — salvage was an accepted part of our function — but a couple of times I'd been ordered to leave things behind. And once to destroy some machinery. Was it all part of a fixed pattern laid down at the Big Bang? Or was I changing history, making it somehow easier for a D'drendt victory? Was this what they'd meant in training school about the "retroactive rights of the victor?"

The trouble, you see, wasn't so much that I wanted to *do* dangerous things — it was that I wanted to *know* dangerous things.

Angelo was shaking his head. "I stay away from policy entirely, darling. We Neapolitans much prefer the emotional and artistic life."

Neapolitan, hell. Angelo was Jersey City, 1964. I said, "And have you

made any progress in that area?"

"It's not my progress I'm worried about. It's yours. I don't think you've slept with anybody since you've been here."

"What can I say? I'm naturally reserved."

"Naturally reserved! Tell me about it! Do you realize we were in the same class in training school, and then you had to come in here for treatment practically every day when you started riding — and it was still two years before you said anything to me outside of 'Should I roll up my sleeve for this one?'"

I had to smile sheepishly. "I was a little preoccupied in those days. Honestly, Angelo, it was nothing personal. Psych put me through a rough program when I first came; I still don't remember a lot about my past, I mean, before recruitment. But I've opened up a lot, haven't I?"

He rolled his eyes. "When was the last time you went to a citizen's party?"

"Oh, Ang, they're the most incredibly boring things."

"There's one at North Spoke tonight. One of my ex-lovers will be there. You can come with me, and I'll impress her with how I've gotten Ceece the star timerider, cold fish who goes with nobody, to come to a party with me."

"Is that how everybody thinks of me?"

"Don't worry, love, it only adds to your status. But risk it a little, as a favor to me, all right?"

"I suppose it won't kill me. All right. It should be interesting to see what bizarre fads the citizens are following now."

He kissed me on the cheek, chastely for a supposed Neapolitan. It was a pity there was no real attraction between us; I admired Angelo a great deal. Certainly he did very well for himself in the society we had found ourselves in. Which reminded me . . .

"Ang, have you heard anything about this assignment I've got from Mark?"

His face went expressionless. "What should I have heard?"

It was so annoying, and so like Angelo. He felt about information the way some people feel about the old junk in their attic. It may look useless now, but why give it away when someday someone might want to buy it?

I sighed. "I'll see you tonight, then."

Banny and the crew already had the locus under observation, which jarred me; I wasn't used to coming into something midway. I drew her aside. "What goes, Ban? Have you heard anything about this? Or should I go over the stats before I ask?"

She looked troubled. "I don't know. We've just been going ahead with Mark's instructions. Nobody's even given us a script."

"Mark's been instructing you himself?"

"Sometimes he sends Narses. But, yes."

So Mark was doing his own timework under the table. I knew something was up when he told me how he had tried to establish the seagull's provenance; he would never have concerned himself with such details unless he planned on selling the piece himself. There were signs that Mark had clandestine dealings with D'drendt; certainly he had far more money and power at his disposal than could be explained by his rank. After all, he was only a section chief, one of four, and a human at that.

I didn't know just what his plans were, but Banny was my Second. She would have to know more. "Sit down with me for a few minutes before we start. We'll go over the stats."

She smiled with relief. We spread out the hard copy and began learning about Brian Cornwall's life.

He had been a withdrawn child, with few playmates. He grew up on his father's farm in Vermont, with his father and two older sisters — his father was a gentleman farmer apparently, a successful artist himself. The stats enclosed a copy of an ink drawing Brian had made at the age of nine; it was remarkable. An Arthurian knight, riding in a forest, with a bowman hidden behind a tree. Utterly professional, engrossing, somehow . . . *ruthlessly* beautiful. It was difficult to believe that any nine-year-old could have done it. "Good lord, Ban." I handed the picture to her.

She looked up after a few minutes. "It says he was *nine* —"

"I know, I know." I read on. He and his sisters spent a great deal of time going through their father's library, which leaned heavily toward Sir Walter Scott, Tennyson, the Morte D'Arthur, and the like. He had been remarkably old for a twentieth-century child when he learned that fairies aren't real. But where had the failure complex come from? Anyone who could draw like that . . . ah, here we were. His father, a wise and supportive man who educated Brian at home and then paid his way through Yale, had never spoken to him about his art. Out of jealousy? Out of some misguided wish not to interfere with his son's talents? We were never going to know. But Brian had interpreted it as shame at his lack of ability.

"Psych spent a lot of time watching here. Must have run Mark quite a bill," I said.

"He'll just charge it to the D'drendt," said Banny, puzzled.

Not if he's running something on his own that he doesn't want to make official, I thought. Sometimes I wonder about my co-workers — are they being discreet, or just dense? Even Banny, sharp as they come . . . well, they probably were being discreet. Probably they were all perfectly aware of Mark's little tricks, and were simply too interested in self-preservation to comment on them.

I put the stats aside. "What's the hook? How are we getting him to cooperate?"

Banny looked embarassed. "We were just following orders, you know, blindly. We didn't know what it meant."

I looked at her. "Well?"

"We ran a holo on him. I guess Psych set it up. It was one of those archetypal things — we started it while he was asleep and let him wake up while it ran —"

"Let me see it." It wasn't like her to wander around the point like this.

She played it for me. There was a soft radiance, and then Brian's name just at the threshold of awareness. An archetypal figure appeared in the center of the light, a goddess/madonna, shining and beautiful. I could imagine the associations with his childhood worlds — Mary, Guinevere, the Queen of the Fairies; there was an aura of gentleness and innocence about the whole thing that made you ache to believe it. As the holo faded I found that I was clutching my chair in sheer anger.

Mark had given her my face.

I helped the crew set up for my watch without saying anything, and they avoided speaking to me. They seemed embarrassed to have gone ahead with this without me, but as Banny said, they were only following orders. Riders didn't get choices. "What are the waves like?" I finally asked Banny.

"We're almost parallel," she said. "Right now they're .7 faster than we are. We're in synch enough to watch, but not to take or send any objects through."

"Except for holos," I said, regretting it immediately. I forced a smile. "I forgot to say, you've kept things going nicely while I was away. Thank you."

"You're welcome." She strapped me into my chair. Then she said, "We missed you, you know." She went over to the console to establish the link, pausing only long enough to swallow her pills. I wished I could take some too, but I'm allergic to them. It's ironic, in a way. I'm one of the best riders around, but my body is defenseless against the waves.

"Go ahead when you're ready," I told her, and almost before I finished speaking the ocean swirled up around me and pulled me along.

It was a fast current. There were shapes here and there in the mists, but I shot past them. I felt the exhilaration of speed and freedom from the body rush through me, making me drunk. It had been too long. Far too soon the current slowed almost to a stop; I was at the time window. I could see people and shapes coming into sharper view and I knew if I stayed at the window it would become clearer still. But I didn't want to stay; I wanted to ride the current some more. I pulled away, trying to reach the stronger waves that ran just outside the current I had taken. But Banny's voice was beside me, linking me to the lab. "The console says that you're at the window," she said. Banny, my reminder of duty and the possibilities of punishment. I forced myself back to the window.

The center of the window was at the museum. Things were in sharpest focus there. But I couldn't see Brian Cornwall there, although it was daytime and his job would presumably require him to be present. I found a

cross-current and rode it outside, to a small park with a fountain that didn't run. Brian was there. I hoped he was sketching something that I could have the console take a picture of; it was too out-of-focus for me to steal a look right now. As I came closer I saw that he was only feeding some pigeons. I was disappointed, but took the moment to look at him in "real life." I suppose someone who wasn't a rider might have wanted to laugh at him; his time was flowing by at .7 of mine, and to me it was as though I were watching a speeded-up tape. He jerked his arms out suddenly, scattering seed on the pavement. I knew enough to discount the effect and merely watch his face. It was a fine, thoughtful face; but with an uncomfortable look in the eyes, as though he went through life with shoes that pinched. Poor Brian. Perhaps he would be relieved if he knew how little time he had left.

Back in the lab after my reconnaissance, I took advantage of my two minutes of grace to talk to Banny about our strategy.

"Do they have any projections as to when we'll reach synchrony? If it's not till after his death, we're wasting our time with him."

"They're not sure. They're never sure, you know weather forecasters. But he's not due to die for another three months, his time. It looks good."

"For us it does," I agreed. "It's too bad. That drawing was incredible."

"He's not bad-looking, either," said Banny, and I saw she was holding his picture in her left hand.

I hadn't thought he was anything special physically. He was blond, first of all, which made him not my type, and other than that he just seemed rather ordinary. A thoughtful face, though, as I said earlier. "To each her own taste, I guess; I prefer Dervan's people, myself."

"Dervan's people are like a dream. For a human, this man is good enough."

I shrugged, because no one can argue this sort of thing. "Ban, have you heard anything about a party at North Spoke —" I stopped, and motioned wildly. My two minutes were up. Banny withdrew, and left me alone to be sick into the bucket we kept by the chair. The next half hour would be a long one for me. God, I wished I wasn't allergic to the pills.

I decided to take a walk through the Riders' Spoke before going back to my quarters. For one thing, it had been a long time since I really paid attention to the scenery. For another, I had had a look at the next holo they were going to run on Brian Cornwall, and I wanted to get the taste out of my mouth.

I passed a lot of people I knew, and they smiled and sometimes saluted me. I was glad that my status was still good. I picked up some Chinese food at "Chan & Chin's" — the place was crowded with riders, as usual. Chan and Chin are the only two riders I ever heard of who bought their citizenships and stayed in the Spokes. They had gone off Basic Allowance years

ago, and were making a bundle of money. I saw a couple of teachers I remembered from training school, and at the table with them some retired riders. I could tell they were retired because they were all fat. It's hard to get out of the habit of gorging after a timeride, even if you skip the ride. They were still high-status, still valued, still helpful in training the new recruits — but they weren't citizens, and they weren't on antigy. Their faces were getting wrinkled with age. Don't let that happen to you, Ceece, I told myself; get your citizenship and get out of here.

That's an easy order to give, but tough to carry out. If my status got high enough, I might be offered antigy; and with the added years of antigy, I could accumulate enough Merit to get my citizenship. One twenty- or thirty-year span couldn't do it. But status is a hard thing to control, and I would have to be careful never to let it slip — I might get it back, but I couldn't afford the time it would cost me. Look at those riders there, I thought; they're off the rolls, they'll never make full citizen now, whatever their status.

I was depressing myself, and I had had enough of that in the last few months. So I left and went out along the Spoke past the training school. There was a concentration exercise going on in the yard, led by a teacher I remembered from my own student days. She didn't look any older (Antigy? or just biology? The only rule about antigy was never to ask or tell —) and she wore a heavy gold Cretan necklace around her olive neck. "Let yourself go," she was telling them in her soft voice. The conditioned memories I had were such that I almost went under myself. The students, twenty or so, were sitting with their faces toward the console in the middle of the yard. Most of them were blank-faced, with their eyes closed, breathing in a rhythm that matched the console screen. About a third of the students appeared restless, bewildered, unsure as to what was expected of them. They would have to get the point rather quickly, I thought. I had never asked what happened to failed students, but the answer seemed clear.

I took a short-cut tunnel out past the school into Main Spoke — and almost ran smack into Dervan. Dervan had been in my dreams (oh yes, *those* sorts of dreams) since I was recruited. His back was to me now, but I knew without having to look the fine, delicate face, the arched brows and cobalt eyes, the aquamarine feather-hair that swept back past perfect ears and touched the back of his neck. I tensed myself — as always around Dervan, I would have to be very, very alert.

It took me a moment to realize that there was someone else in the tunnel. A student of about nineteen or twenty years, still in uniform, and Dervan was talking to him. The student was oblivious to me, wrapped up in Dervan's eyes and voice and the way all Dervan's people have of creating intimacy with whomever they choose.

Damn Dervan, anyway. Taking his victims from training school was like picking ripe apples. After all, what sort of students do we get? They don't

just want people who are "spoken for" — marked to die or disappear. They don't just want people with intelligence and adaptability, and the impossible-to-pick-for talent of riding the waves. They want people who have screwed up their lives so badly they will docilely follow anyone who promises to make things make sense. New recruits are a pitifully cooperative lot. I know I was.

"Excuse me," I said loudly. The student looked angrily at me, no doubt annoyed at having Dervan's music interrupted. "Why, Dervan! How nice to see you. I don't know if you've heard, but I was out of things for a while, on a punishment cycle . . ."

"I'd heard." He said it calmly, without the added something in his voice that he been using on the student. Even so, it was a pleasure to hear him speak.

I tried to think of something to say that would separate him from the student. I don't know why the Good Samaritan compulsion came over me, but there it was. "Will you be going to the North Spoke party tonight? I'm on my way there now."

"I may. I haven't decided yet. Perhaps Paul here would like to come with me." Paul looked eager, like a puppy being promised a walk.

"He'd need a pass from the teachers, though, and you know how they hate to give those out." Don't glare at me, you idiot, I thought at the student. You'll be lucky if they lock you up until training is over. How did I ever make it through to graduation alive? That must have been mostly luck, too.

"Oh, we might just go to the party and apologize later. I have some influence with the teachers, Ceece, if you'll remember."

I looked at him. "I don't think that would be a good idea, Dervan. I really don't."

He watched me speculatively . . . Lord, that incredible face. "I suppose not. Someone might tell the teachers before I had a chance to get my words in. Never mind, Paul," he said, turning back to the student. "We can do it another time."

The idiot was practically ready to cry. I said to Dervan, "Go on ahead and I'll see you at the party. I'd like to talk to Paul for a minute."

Dervan smiled. "If you like wasting your time, go ahead." And he walked off down the tunnel and disappeared, as Paul and I watched in silence for a moment, leaving us only an impression of grace.

Paul turned to me fiercely. "What do you think you're doing? I don't even *know* you —"

"Shut up!" I said it like a Timerider Crew Captain, which I am. He shut up, surprised. "Now why don't you think about it for a minute, and tell me what I've done?"

"You — we were going to go to this party, you know —"

"What party? Where?"

He tried to remember. The party, of course, had made no impression on

him; it was not what he was angry about. He just had the feeling that something terribly important and beautiful had been happening, and I had stopped it.

Luckily for him. I tried to tell him some of the facts of life, starting with the idea that it was not all rainbows here in the Far, Far Future.

"I know things aren't easy," he said with contempt. "The teachers told us that we'd have to earn our livings, and it would be hard."

"Bully for them. But they don't have time to warn you about every lion you're going to meet in the jungle. They deal in percentages. They let you rookies wander around unprotected, and if half of you make it to graduation they pass around champagne and have a party."

"You're twentieth century, aren't you?" said Paul suddenly. "So am I."

"Good for you," I said, and I wasn't being ironic that time. "You've got a high probability of being picked up by a top team when you do graduate. A good section chief will weight his force heavily toward twenty/twenty-first century recruits."

Paul frowned. "Isn't that illegal?"

"Never mind. The point here is that you make it to graduation. Dervan is someone you want to avoid, and anyone who looks like Dervan. They're not human, and they're not D'drendt, and they're not good for humans to mix with. Some of them, anyway, and you're not sophisticated enough to tell the good from the bad."

He looked stubborn. I didn't take it personally, I understood Dervan's effect.

"All right. Let's have a little xenobiology lesson. First of all, you're only going to meet the males of Dervan's race, never the females. The females aren't really as intelligent . . . well, that's not quite true. But the females are off doing the shitwork of the moment for whatever males they're attracted to. You see, the males are the pampered peacocks, and the real scholars, and the travelers, and the people who have all the fun. Dervan's wives, if he has any, are back on his home planet living for his memory, see?"

"No."

I sighed. "It's like imprinting ducklings, all right? Have you ever read Konrad Lorenz?"

He was getting annoyed again. I said hastily, "The way Dervan's species bonds, for mating, is by having the male imprint the female. It usually happens in adolescence. Then the female is emotionally tied to that male for life. She thinks only of him, wants to bear his children and raise them, and loses all interest in life outside of him. I guess from her point of view she's having fun too, since she gets to see her personal god every day . . . but I don't think you had that in mind for your life, Paul, did you?"

"Huh?" I'd gotten his attention.

"This imprinting power only works on the females of their own species, not on fellow males. Imagine how shocked they were when they found out it

worked on humans of either sex. Some of Dervan's people were so thrilled at the ability to do it to males — people of equal status, from their habit of thinking — they became perverts. In the eyes of their race, at least. That's why Dervan lives in the Spokes. His own people would ostracize him if he lived at home."

He looked a little like I'd hit him. I said gently, "Dervan is a crew-captain, just like me. Only his crew would die for him, literally. Sometimes they do, when step-throughs don't go the way they're planned. If you don't want to be cannon-fodder, stay away from Dervan."

I left him there to think about it.

Timewave under surveillance, 7.3 concurrence (someday I'll tell you how I know these things):

Brian had been waiting for her to speak. That he would dream again, he knew already. He did not doubt his sanity, or at least he discounted the question as trivial. His painful and beautiful childhood had left him enormously vulnerable, but also enormously adaptable.

This time she came to him in his little room at the museum, where he sat after hours cataloging and updating the files. It was routine, dusty work, but he didn't mind; it left his mind free to remember.

Her coming followed on his thoughts so well, he thought at first it was only a memory. His visual memory was so sharp that it often led him astray.

"Forgive me, Brian." She knew his name! Her voice had undertones of music — no, that was too crude. Of *remembered* music. "Forgive me, but I need your help."

Second Holo, Brian Cornwall, June 28, 1957.

Sonic attachments. Refer Psych, 96/4RC.

. . . Forgive me, but I need your help. I've come a long way to find you. [2 sec. pause] No, don't speak to me now; I can't hear you, we're still too far away from each other. [Up sonics .4] I can't tell you now what I need, except your understanding. I only wish that I could tell you, that you were here with me and we could speak to each other the way I want us to. Maybe someday it can happen. But for now, all I can say is that I am in great danger. . . .

I was more happy to try to forget about the holos and Brian Cornwall by going to the party with Angelo. I had my bathroom paint me and powder me and oil my skin. North Spoke Park was in summer mode, so we would probably be wearing the usual dress for citizens in summer — not much beyond a loincloth, a bra for those women who felt they needed one, and lots of jewelry. But when the house announced Angelo, I was disappointed to find he was in top hat and tails.

"Oh, Angelo, don't tell me they're *still* on the historical kick."

He shrugged a good-humored "don't blame me" sort of shrug. "Lady

Mary's giving the party, and she's a little slow on picking up hints."

For the better part of a year now all the citizens' gatherings had had historical themes. It was part of their general tendency to watch and emulate timeriders, but we found the whole process tedious — not to mention annoying, when the historical inaccuracies crept in, as they always did.

"Is there a time range for this one?" I was half-tempted not to go. But that would mean sitting at home, thinking about things . . .

"Nineteenth-century Britain."

"You're a little off, I think. That looks more 1920s, 1930s."

"Only some of the riders will be able to tell. Now get dressed, darling — I'm starving, they're bound to have tons of food, and I'm not going to give you a chance to change your mind."

I made a face at him and went off to be fitted up. The house wardrobe found me a gown it claimed was in the London style of 1898; I took it, but left off the corset. Torturous things women allowed to be done to them — but I guess the things people will do to appear attractive to potential lovers cannot be taken lightly.

North Spoke Park was full of people that night. There were lanterns and torches and a soft breeze was blowing. It rustled through the gowns of the ladies and made the damask tablecloths sway. Lady Mary was holding court in the center of the park; she had had a fountain put up, with a cluster of statues in the middle and a score of fishes spouting what looked too dark to be water. I tasted it; it was Coca-Cola. (One of the things I hold against the D'drendt is that they have a grudge against alcoholic beverages. They don't prohibit it, but nobody has the bad taste to serve alcohol in public.)

"Ceece! I'm so glad you came!" Lady Mary made a point of knowing the name of every rider of reputation. "You haven't been to a party in ages." She stopped for a second, feeling she might have trodden too close to the subject of my recent punishment. Then she brightened. "But here you are at mine. Have you tried the fountain?"

"Yes. Very nice." It's hard for me to match the citizens' enthusiasm for Coca-Cola.

"And Angelo, it's been far too long." She took his hand and smiled up at him slyly. Another of my Angelo's past lovers, no doubt. Lady Mary looked about nineteen and lovely, but so did practically every female citizen I'd ever met, except for the eccentrics. I tried not to be contemptuous of them, I really did, but why they were here in Earth orbit when an entire universe was open to them . . . Damn them, and not to me. Not yet.

"Should we go mix?" I asked her, trying to be polite.

"By all means. Now don't just stick to other riders, you two. Get around, talk to people; you'll have a better time. There'll be a surprise later."

And she batted her eyes, so help me, and patted Angelo's hand as she dismissed us.

"I can't wait," I told Angelo.

"Patience, Ceece. We only just got here." He steered us straight to the food tables, pausing only long enough to wave or smile at about ten ex-lovers, male and female.

There was a slight stir near the fountain. "Oh, lord," I said, "Dervan's shown up after all."

"Are you still interested in him?" Angelo's attention was almost wholly on the food, and a half-eaten sandwich made his words hard to catch.

"I am *not* interested in him. I mean, no more than any other warm-blooded human being would be. It's a simple biological fact —"

"Ummm." I couldn't tell if he were referring to the sandwich or to what I just said.

We wandered around the tables, found Banny sitting on a statue, and talked shop talk and gossip with a few riders we passed. I congratulated myself on not having thought about Brian Cornwall in over an hour.

Then Lady Mary called us together for her surprise. It was to be an old English fox hunt, with hunting horns and red coats for everybody. They brought the fox in in a cage.

"It's going to be difficult to ride horses around the park, isn't it?" I asked her. "Especially in these clothes."

"Horses?" she repeated blankly.

"I'm not running after the damn thing," said a rider standing nearby.

"How are we going to know where it is in the dark? And where are the dogs?" There was some general negative murmuring. Lady Mary looked upset.

Then there was a laugh I would have recognized anywhere, and Dervan stepped to the front of the crowd. He released the catch on the cage and pulled the door up. The fox was gone in one frightened blur. Dervan lifted some torches from their poles and passed them to his hangers-on. Then he pulled off the long black jacket he was wearing, followed by the ruffled shirt. He kicked off his boots and threw them into the bushes. "Don't fall too far behind," he called to his hangers-on, and laughed again. And he ran into the darkness after the fox.

Sometimes it is not hard at all to remember that Dervan's people are descended from birds of prey.

People still milled around the fountain, talking rather uncertainly. Lady Mary started to cry; I wondered how old she really was. Angelo apologized to me and sat down beside her on the fountain edge and told her that everyone had had a grand time, him included, and that you couldn't expect everything to work out all of the time.

No wonder he had so many lovers. It was all superficial, though; the truth of the matter was that he couldn't stand to live with any one person for more than six weeks.

I passed the time with Banny. We rather rudely threw stones into the Coca-Cola fountain. Banny told me that she had spoken with Dervan earlier

in the evening, and he had seemed angry with me. As angry as Dervan ever gets, anyhow; what happened?

"Just a misunderstanding. It all depends on your point of view. Maybe he was right, and I should have minded my own business."

There was no need to go into detail, and anyway, the hunting party was coming back. From what I could see of their faces in the darkness, the torchbearers looked tired; but one of them carried the dead fox across his shoulders. The man's shirt was bloody around the collar and down the back. Dervan entered the clearing last, his face flushed with victory. He had left the corpse-carrying to one of his crew, but he raised the palms of his hands, showing the bloodstains. There was general applause, particularly from the citizens. The light in his eyes and the look on his face made him seem more than ever like some god; Dionysus, perhaps, or some hunters' god I didn't know about.

He saw me watching and walked through the crowd to where I stood.

"I won't forget your interference earlier today."

The torchlight flickered across his face, making it a gorgeous light-and-shadow mask. I shrugged and controlled an impulse to throw myself in the dust at his feet.

He motioned to one of the torchbearers. "Not that it did you any good." The man came nearer and I saw that it was Paul, the student from the tunnel.

Well, it was none of my concern. I had crew of my own to worry about, and my own skin.

Banny had sidled nearer to hear what was going on. Dervan said, "When Paul graduates, I'm going to bid for him. Do you think my chances are good?"

"Very good, I'd say." Paul looked pleased at my words, which were the truth. Who else would want him, now that he was imprinted?

Banny looked concerned at the tone of conversation. But as a rider, I was technically safe from Dervan's tricks. Had I ever shown signs of imprinting (and like love, it's impossible to hide), Mark would have had him stretched on the rack, and rolled on carpet tacks. Perhaps literally; Mark had once or twice taken people on private step-throughs into the timewaves, and they had returned much chastened.

True, Dervan was a citizen who chose to be rider, not a refugee like me; but we both worked for Mark, and we both knew who could make us sorry if we got out of hand.

Dervan measured me for a while, perhaps hoping I would be more argumentative. Then he took Paul away and went to celebrate his kill.

Banny said to me, "Isn't it dangerous to annoy him? I mean, he *could*, you know, do that thing to you." Dear Banny, she actually blushed. Banny is one person I have never dug up background on, but I strongly suspect a Victorian childhood.

"It's not that likely." I explained to her that Mark wouldn't stand for it. "But just in case," I added slowly, thinking about it, "you shouldn't talk to him much. Especially not if you're feeling any kind of emotion. The imprinting needs interaction from the victim, you know, answering his questions, talking back to him. That speeds up the process. If you ever suspect it may be happening, just close your mouth and walk away."

Banny shook her head, clearly planning to avoid the entire situation.

We broke apart for the night soon after, Banny allowing herself to be picked up by a male citizen who, physically at least, looked the same age as she. I looked around for Angelo, but could find neither him nor Lady Mary. Poor woman — she had had an awful night. And much as I respected Angelo, I hoped that she didn't come to depend on him for any emotional support. It wasn't in him to give. Maybe that was why my mind turned stubbornly away from finding him the least bit attractive, although he was popular enough with the citizens. He was too easy to lean on, and you forgot it was temporary. I could grow to hate him if he let me down, and I wouldn't like that at all. I had never been able to tolerate ambiguity in a relationship. There was a lot in my past that was fuzzy, but that fact seemed to stand out in my mind. No . . . that wasn't quite accurate. It was just that I couldn't tolerate it in anyone close to me. Luckily, no one was really close to me, so it wasn't a problem.

I spent the next few weeks hard at work on the Brian Cornwall project — or, as Mark referred to it, the seagull project. As you can see, we both had it tagged in our minds according to what each of us felt was the major factor involved. I badgered Psych into giving me a copy of the shots they'd taken of Brian's personal journal. There were sketches in it, essays, observations, descriptions of people he'd met. It reminded me rather of the pillow books I liberated from Heian Japan and kept on a shelf in my bedroom. I read from the journal every night; it was like taking a nice, cool bath after a hot day. Meanwhile, we played three more holos for Brian. By the last one, Psych had stopped pussyfooting around and let the poor guy know that his goddess was interested in the chalcedony seagull in his museum. This sudden descent into materialism was accepted by Brian in good part; mythical people were always looking for some sort of talisman, and if he could help to provide it, he was more than willing.

I threw my souvenir silver fountain pen across the room after than session. He was being so nice about everything! He was clearly intelligent, educated, imaginative — how could he be so *nice* about everything?

"Idiot!" I fumed to the crew. "Psych has him down to a T."

Banny shrugged, knowing I wasn't really mad at Brian. She changed the subject. "Henry's done a new design for us," she said, pointing to one of the banners that hung on the lab wall. It was a red circle on dark blue, with two black triangle-shapes in it, suggestive of wings. Every crew had a nickname,

usually some kind of bird or flying thing; this symbolized our nickname, Darkwings. It wasn't a name I would have chosen, tending as it did to remind me of shrieking things whirring up out of cave mouths, but I'd inherited the name along with the crew. It wasn't as bad as some names I'd heard.

"Henry!" I called to him, where he was screwing jacks into the console. "You did a beautiful job." He smiled and went on working. Henry used to be a famous writer in his locus-of-origin, and I happened to know he was working on a novel now. I had read all his books myself, in my own locus; it would be interesting to see what he came up with.

We shared labquarters with two other crews, and Henry's Darkwings design was far better than the designs on the banners that hung beside it. Anything that added to our status was welcome.

I began to feel guilty about throwing the pen against the wall. I didn't want to sound depressed when I was with my crew, for they would interpret it as our being in some sort of trouble. And I didn't want them to think I was unhappy with their work. On the contrary, I was far too proud of them; they were all talented, quick-witted riders, with enough power to send me as deep into the timewaves as any rider has ever gone, and indeed, enough power to maintain *five* of us during an actual step-through — as in the most recent step-through when I directed the looting of the palace in Byzantium. If I hadn't been so concerned about the energy drain on them, I wouldn't have taken the short-cuts I did and ended up in trouble with Mark . . . but the past is the past, except when it isn't, and there's no use crying over spilt milk when someone's paying you to clean it up.

"I'll grant you one thing, though," I said to Banny. "He's not bad-looking, after all."

Mark called me out of the lab one day soon after. I walked down Riders' Spoke to his office, my mind full of the project. Brian's timewave — the one we had been observing all this time — had finally reached full concurrence with ours. It was 1/1, and had been for two hours. Weather watchers estimated it would probably stay concurrent for several days; of course, they added (as they always did), "you never know." Several days or not, the time had come to retrieve the seagull. There would be a fire at the museum twenty-two hours further down the line, and Brian would be dead.

"You'll have to wait," said Narses, as usual, where he sat at his desk outside Mark's door. He began filing his nails ostentatiously, and I saw that each nail was inset with a small sapphire in the center. "Do you like them?" he asked, seeing my glance. "They were a present from Mark for my birthday."

"Lovely," I said.

Narses was in a mood to gossip. "Did you hear about the two riders they caught making private step-throughs? They were picking things up and sell-

ing them on the black market."

"No!" I said in surprise, gratifying him immensely. "Anyone I know?"

"I shouldn't think so. Hideo's section. Not any of *our* people."

"So what happened to them? Are they dead?"

"Not yet. They're being outcast, though, so it's only a matter of time."

It *would* only be a matter of time for a noncitizen without the weight of the timeriders behind him. Anyone could do anything they liked to an outcast. Citizens could use him for their next foxhunt, instead of a fox. And there were aliens I had seen, whose inclinations didn't bear thinking of. Dervan was a saint beside them.

"In my time," went on Narses, "we would have dealt with people like that much more severely. Why, they were barely questioned as to who their black market contacts were! One thing of which I have never approved in this society is its lack of understanding in regard to torture. I think that its absence simply means that the government no longer *cares* what its people do and think. In my time, we cared. We questioned. We followed every postulate to its logical end. We had the rack, the fire, the iron bands —"

"Uh, yes, those were the days. Look, Narses, I think maybe Mark is waiting for me. Have you told him I'm here?"

He sniffed. "He's quite aware of your coming, Ceece. He has important guests in his office. When he's ready —" A light lit on Narses's board; apparently Mark was ready. Narses sniffed again and coded open the door.

Yes, Mark had important guests. The two environment tubes were occupied, and by two D'drendt. It was the closest I had ever been to our conquerors. I tried not to show how scared I felt.

Each D'drendt was more than half again the size of a man. They did not stand or sit, but *clung* to one side of the tubes with little pink hands covered with suckers. The rest of their bodies were black, and wet-looking, and there were big, folded up parts that looked like wings. They may even have been wings, but I had never seen them unfolded, even in pictures. I stood in the middle of the office, wide-eyed.

"Please have a seat, Carol," said Mark gently. He motioned to a chair. I walked to it slowly, not wanting to take it because it would put one of the D'drendt partly out of my line of vision. The thought made me nervous, though I knew it couldn't leave the tube. I had a sudden visualization of where these two D'drendt would go when the tubes retracted into the floor; I saw them crawling out, along the D'drendt pathways that ran through every important building and under the streets, into the D'drendt-environment rooms everywhere. I suddenly wondered if these pathways were more extensive than I had ever guessed; I imagined D'drendt crawling behind the wall of the lab, or under our floor; I shivered involuntarily and quite noticeably. Perhaps they were too unfamiliar with human reactions to catch it. Certainly Mark was not. However, he simply said, "Carol, these visitors are interested in the project you are currently working on. Would

you tell us the status of it, please?"

I opened my mouth. Before I could say anything, the speaker box on the tube nearest me sputtered and said, "This is the human you told us of."

Mark nodded. "Carol-Celia-Cordray," he said, giving it as if it were one word.

"You will tell us more of her history." It was a fine, round voice, with a citizen's accent.

"In a little while," said Mark. I wondered that he could speak to them like that. "Please bring us up to date first, Carol."

I nodded. "The timewave we've been observing is in full concurrence, so theoretically we could send or receive solid objects any time now. The best focus we've gotten is on the floor above the place where the seagull is kept. Rather than take any chances on losing the wave, we're going to use that as the transfer point."

The D'drendt interrupted. "How will you move the art-object from its present location to the transfer point? Will you make a step-through yourself to do so? Is this not expensive? Will it not have to go in the record? I do not perhaps feel —"

Mark could also interrupt. "It's taken care of," he said briskly. "Explain it to him, Carol."

I turned to the D'drendt and forced myself to look at him. Experience is good for you, I told myself. And if there really were D'drendt everywhere, I would have to learn to deal with them. "This is not a step-through assignment," I said to him patiently. "We are using an on-the-scene person, native to the timeframe, to move the seagull to the point of focus."

"And will he not talk? There are laws about interference —"

I decided to interrupt someone myself; everyone else was doing it. "He's not going to talk. He's due to be dead within the next twenty-two hours, his time."

The D'drendt shut up, apparently to chew that one over.

Mark looked quite pleased with himself, in a quiet sort of way. "You're doing a fine job, Carol. Only keep it up."

That was true actually, but he may have just been saying it to reassure the D'drendt that their project was in good hands.

I said, "Thank you."

The other D'drendt's speaker box came to life. "You were going to tell us of this one's history." It was a warm, female voice, that would have been appropriate to a woman of about fifty. I had not been expecting that, and wondered if it meant anything.

Mark said, "Carol's locus at the time of recruitment was 1974. That's very near the point we're watching now, so you can see that she is an appropriate choice for the project. She's naturally discreet, and won't cause anything to happen that would attract attention in 1957." Naturally discreet, indeed. What a lot of fertilizer he was laying out for the guests. I almost

missed what he said next. "I recruited Carol myself, in California State Prison, where she was awaiting trial for murder." I looked at him, unbelievingly.

"This does not sound like a stable recruit," said the (possibly) woman D'drendt.

Mark shrugged. "She was on trial for killing her father, who was a very disagreeable human, one that any sane society would have dispensed with for her. Believe me, I've had the chance to observe many disreputable humans in my time here, and even pass on some for training, and this man was not worth anyone's time. Certainly not worth Carol's time, so I offered her a job instead of a prison term."

"Surely she was missed —"

"We paid for her lawyer and saw that she was sent to a mental institution, where she was due to commit suicide soon after. We fudged that a little." He smiled. "No one paid a lot of attention. Someone else's body — a drowned face isn't that recognizable, anyway. Psych had to work with her heavily when she first arrived, but I must say she's been worth every penny."

"We will have to rely on your evaluation," said the D'drendt. "And surely Psych must have passed her, or she would not have been allowed in school."

"Oh, yes. They had to remove rather more memory than they'd anticipated. And she probably doesn't believe what I'm saying now — another safeguard they put in. But they really brought her back to peak efficiency. I defy you to find a better rider, in anyone's section."

"This is well." The box stopped speaking, and began instead to chirp and squeal. The other D'drendt squealed back. I was in no shape to pay any attention. How could he *say* things like that? I looked at my feet, feeling a little dizzy.

It was true, my first memory of Mark was connected with some sort of institution; but I had thought it was a school or a hospital.

The D'drendt with the male voice said, "We would speak to you now alone."

Mark gestured me to the door and I found my way out. I paid no attention to Narses as I walked away.

Probably it *was* a school or a hospital. The horrible thing about Mark was that he was quite capable of inventing all that for reasons of his own that concerned his guests, or even just to keep me off-balance.

I was, I decided, just not going to pay any attention to it. Mark was no person to go to for the truth, after all. I postponed going back to the lab for a while, and decided to see if Angelo had anything in his medicine chest to calm me down.

"I've just had a session with Mark," I said to him, without preamble. "Do you have any suitable drugs for that?"

He laughed. I hadn't seen him since the night of the party, but I gathered

that he and Lady Mary had cut a swath through the North Spoke before they gave out the following morning. He even moved in with her for a week, which wasn't bad compared to his usual timing, and there were no recriminations. Gossip travels fast in the Spokes.

He pulled out a bottle of wine and looked at me with a question.

I shook my head. "Work to do."

He then pulled out a little glass container of crystal powder and handed it to me. But I didn't take it. A thought had come to me.

"Angelo," I said, "the two riders being outcast — the government must be taking them off all time drugs, so they can't escape. Are you the one administering the counteragent?"

"I might be," he replied (typically). "Why do you ask?"

If he wasn't the one, he could arrange to be. I said, "I'd like you to do some modification work on one of them."

He looked at me.

"They're going to die anyway," I said logically.

He sat back and folded his arms. "Talk to me, Ceece."

I felt wonderful. And it wasn't the crystal powder, because I didn't take any. If Mark had spun that tale to keep me off-balance (and all right, I would never know for sure), then the most obvious fact he would not want me to notice was that the two D'drendt visitors were his black-market contacts. There was a thriving market for genuine Earth art objects (the key word being genuine, and not a perfect copy — though a perfect copy seemed good enough to me, so I guess I don't have the collector's mind). I doubted that our seagull was ever going to see the inside of the government museum, or be sold to a rich tourist to help the Treasury.

For all the propaganda, I myself had rarely done an assignment that had anything to do with recording history. What I had done was a lot of looting. Riders are discouraged from talking about their assignments, so I had to wonder. Were we all engaged in looting on a grand scale, cleaning out mother Earth of her treasures? Or were the Darkwings just Mark's private circle of thieves? Oh, there are things I would love to know.

I met Banny back at the lab. She said, "Mark says to go ahead with the retrieval as soon as possible. He just sent down a message."

Maybe the D'drendt were getting itchy. I said, "It's night, Brian's time, right? And the museum's closed."

She nodded. "He's inside, just like we asked him to be."

"Okay, play through the last holo. The one that asks him to move the seagull to our focus."

There was no point in my watching it again as it went through, so I concentrated instead on our crewwork. They were quietly efficient, as always, and there was the quick understanding between them that marks people who have been together for a while. I give myself some credit for that; on the

couple of occasions when Mark sent us lemons instead of recruits I had bid for, I had carefully given the lemons a chance. I gave each of them several chances, in fact, because I didn't want the rest of the crew to think I was being arbitrary. When I saw them getting nervous, though, I would send the incompetent in question into a situation I knew he couldn't handle but he knew he could; thus getting him out of the way before he could be a danger to everybody. There had been a marked lessening of tension after these incidents. I don't know if Mark knew I had killed them purposely; they could so obviously have done it to themselves.

But the result of it was the best crew around, in my opinion. I was proud when I heard people say "Ceece's crew," the way I had heard "Fielding's crew" or "Balthasaar's crew" when I was in school. Not counting the lemons, we had the lowest fatality rate in the section.

"Ready to go," said Banny, interrupting my thoughts. I walked down to my chair in the pit and she strapped me in. Then she went back to the console, and everyone but me swallowed their pills.

"Let's take it," I said. The ocean pulled me in.

It was a fine, heady current; I flew along, the spearpoint of the effort being made by Banny and the crew. But as always, I was only tenuously aware of them. The seduction of riding is that you feel that it's all under your own power.

The ride was over too soon, and I was at the window. It was easy to see the focus — it was literally the clearest point I could see in the waves. The third floor of the museum, a dull wooden floor with showcases of Indian artifacts, starlight shining through the windows. Brian was waiting. He was holding the seagull in both hands, as though he were afraid to drop it. He couldn't see me, of course. Damn it all, Brian . . . I looked down at my own right hand, where I carried a perfect copy of the seagull. I put it down on that dull wooden floor, stepped back, and said, "Now!" to Banny. My crew pushed against the timewall for all they were worth. The seagull began to lose its look of reality and take on the dead-looking, artificial light that seemed to me to surround the waves. At the same time, Brian's eyes widened. Then he snapped to awareness, knelt down and picked up my seagull, and replaced it with his own. The crew was on it in a second, like a pack of wolves. It became more and more real, and I picked it up.

"Done," I said — to myself, because my crew already knew it. I let the waves take me back, dragging my feet a little. My image of Brian standing alone in the museum got smaller and less real, as though I were looking at him through the bottom of a glass.

Banny came to me first, as she always did. "I don't want to talk now," I said tiredly. "Wait until after I'm sick."

When I was ready I said, "Let me see the recorder." Banny moved away from the console. I played back the retrieval as the recorder would have seen

it (and as Brian saw it); the materialization of the false sculpture and the vanishing of the true. I followed Brian as he picked up the false one and carried it out of focus, into the fuzzier areas of the museum. He brought it downstairs and propped open the case he had taken the first seagull from; he was placing the substitute inside when another figure appeared on the screen. A man in uniform, who reached out a hand to Brian's sleeve, clearly interrogating him. I felt sick, although I knew it couldn't matter. His coming death made lesser matters trivial. Still, what could he possibly say? Surely he didn't make a habit of removing museum property in the middle of the night.

He was saying something, though, and quite calmly and naturally. The museum guard nodded. He helped Brian close the case on the seagull. They spoke for an minute, the guard offered a cigarette, Brian shook his head, and they separated. I realized I had been holding my breath. I turned to Banny, watching over my shoulder. "That's my boy," I said, a little shakily. "He was pretty good, don't you think?"

"Damned good," said Banny, and from the way she said it I heard Victorian echoes, as of a gentleman with great red mustaches congratulating his chums over cards.

I switched off the console. "Where's the bird?"

"On its way to Mark. I sent it up, via Narses, as soon as you brought it through."

"Good. This one seemed important to him; maybe he'll give us all Merit points."

Banny made a noise through her nose that suggested she wasn't going to hold her breath. Then she said, more thoughtfully, "I wonder how many Merit points Mark has."

To my mind there was no point in speculating, even as to Mark's citizenship. The only thing you could be sure about with him was that he was on antigy, and that only because the facts spoke for themselves. If he wasn't on antigy, then he wasn't human; and Mark's sicknesses were human sicknesses.

Banny went on, "He lives in the outer ring, I hear he's got *citizens* for servants. Do all the section chiefs live like that? It must cost ten times the Allowance — I don't know how he does it."

I looked at her, but kept quiet. My fellow riders were always *saying* things like that. What was wrong with them?

It had always been perfectly clear to me how he did it.

The crew was ravenous after the salvage, and if I kept them too long, it would be a toss-up whether they would eat first or fall asleep. I let them go ahead to Chan & Chin's, all but Banny; I told her there were a few odds and ends we needed to clean up. When we were alone, I told her what Angelo and I wanted to do.

"You don't have to get involved, Ban. There's always a chance it won't work out."

"Don't be silly. Is there anything I should do, or do I just 'hold myself in readiness'?"

I smiled in relief. "The first thing we do," I said, "is make a holo."

It was several hours later before I finally got to sleep; I had never held myself conscious so long after a timeride before. All this activity, I thought, was to partially assuage my guilt. I kept thinking of what Brian was going through on his parallel timewave . . . he had been led to expect that something earthshaking would happen when he brought us the seagull; he had asked his vision if he could join her in the other world when he did so, and certainly nobody had told him "no." What an anticlimax for him. No, use the exact work, I said to myself; what an *abandonment*. His suffering couldn't possibly last more than a handful of hours, but that thought did nothing to improve my state of mind. At last I let sleep suck me down into darkness, like a timewave pulling me under.

I usually sleep about twelve hours after a timeride, longer if it's a salvage job or step-through. This time I had postponed the sleep and it was deeper and harder to wake up from because of that. Finally I became aware that my bedroom was trying to tell me I had a visitor wanting entry. "Who?" I said blearily.

I let Angelo in, and he brought water from the bathroom and wet my face. "Wake up, Ceece. I can't afford to give you a stimulant right now."

"What time is it?"

"Six."

"So, I still have some time. Give me another half-hour . . ." I tried to slip down into the bed.

"You don't have any time at all. The weather watchers say we're losing concurrence with Brian's timewave. If you're going through with this, you'll have to do it now."

I stared at him. I shook my head roughly, trying to become alert. "Angelo, hit me."

"I'm not good at hitting people, Ceece."

"Do something. Wake me up."

He stood up, rolled me off the bed onto the floor and, with devastating simplicity, began to tickle me.

"No! Stop! Stop! Please . . . I — can't — *stand* — it!"

"Are you awake?"

"I'm awake. I'm awake!"

"We medical men are so put upon. Always on call to our friends, ready with the latest achievements of science . . . should I get you some food?"

"Yes. Something I can eat while I'm walking. I'll be dressed in a minute."

Two minutes later I was dressed and out the door, munching an apple.

"Better go ahead and have Banny send the holo," I told him.

"Change in plan," he said to me. "There's another crew using your lab."

I stopped walking. "What?"

"You'll have to get permission to clear them out. I know you were going to go ahead with this and try to talk your way out of it later. You'll just have to talk your way out of it in advance, that's all."

"Ang . . . it might not work. Before, I thought at least if I was successful first . . . but this way . . . I couldn't stand going through punishment again and know it was for nothing."

"You want to call it off?"

"No."

"Then what do you want me to do?"

I took a breath. "All right. Tell Banny to send the holo. She can get permission from the other crew for that, it'll only take a minute. I'll meet you at the lab . . . probably."

He kissed me goodbye on the forehead, a chaste Neapolitan/Jersey City kiss, just in case I was gone longer than I planned. I went alone down the Spoke to Mark's office, thinking of the holo I had made. On it I had said: Brian, I don't know if you really want to be with me. But if you do, come at once to the museum, to the place where you left the seagull.

The fire was due to break out very soon. Brian was due to die. If this thing I was trying didn't work, I would have killed him.

"Mark is in conference," said Narses, the eternal Greek chorus. He looked at me slyly. "I believe it's the two gentlemen that were with him before."

He was *still* talking with his masters? What the Hell were they going on about?

"Narses, I have to go in *now*. It's an emergency."

"He's not to be interrupted. Whatever it is, it will have to —"

I reached over before he could stop me and hit the three-digit code that opened Mark's door. I'd seen Narses key it in a dozen times; it was his own fault, he should have been more discreet.

"Name of God, Ceece," said Narses, aghast, as the door split open.

I walked into a suddenly silent room. The environment tubes were full once again, but I was getting used to that. "Forgive me," I said, very quickly, "but this is an emergency. We'll be losing the timewave, or I wouldn't have interrupted you."

Mark looked at me, deciding what line to take. But if he ever forgave my breaking the rules, it would be today, when I had delivered his prize.

On the other hand, this would be the perfect time to slap me down, before I got out of hand.

"Carol," said Mark with sudden heartiness. "Please join us. We must thank you for the delightful gift you sent earlier." He inclined his head to

the pedestal near his desk, where the seagull perched gracefully.

I almost hated it more when he was nice to me. But I could handle it, I said to myself; after all, Narses put up with Mark's intimacies well enough, and you only had to look at Mark to know that whatever they did together, it had to be pretty sick. "You're welcome," I said. "Darkwings is always happy to be of service. In fact, that's why I'm here — I have a suggestion, but we'll have to move quickly if you decide to go ahead with it." He looked expectant. I said, "I want to recruit Brian Cornwall."

"Brian Cornwall . . . refresh my memory."

"The native we used to retrieve the seagull." The D'drendt moved about in their tubes at that, as though surprised.

"Ah. But that case is closed, Carol, and very admirably on your part. I think you'll find we're grateful when the Merit points are posted."

"I would certainly . . . appreciate it if you would consider this recruitment. He's a classic case. I admit I have my eye on him for my crew."

He looked thoughtful, and I hoped I wasn't pushing it too far. Mark is a sadist, of course. If he could see that I wanted this badly, and he could, then he might give it to me. The trick was to keep him from seeing I wanted it desperately. Then he would turn me down just to see my reaction.

One of the D'drendt said, "These step-throughs are expensive. They must go into the record. This does not seem a wise use of funds."

I thought of Mark's occasional private step-throughs; this did not seem the time to mention them.

Mark said to the D'drendt, "But it would be a legitimate use of the budget. It would be quite proper if the record showed we had been working on a recruitment. It could even simplify matters."

"This recruit was going to die. We were told. He could speak of things, when he comes here."

Mark shook his head. "I'm sure Carol will keep him out of trouble. She has her eye on him for her crew, don't you, Carol?"

"Yes," I said, relieved, for if Mark was leaning my way I couldn't see the D'drendt as a real obstacle. "I don't think he'll be difficult."

"Well, then, go ahead; but as this was your idea entirely, I'm not going to assign anyone to help you. You'll have to find people on your own. We've spent enough of the budget already."

This was typical Mark "permission"; if I didn't already have Angelo and Banny waiting there would have been nothing I could do. "Thank you," I said, starting for the door. Time was weighing on me. By now Brian would be at the museum, waiting; and the wave could start drawing away at any moment.

"Just a minute, Carol; I'd like to speak to you outside." I stopped, impatient, on the other side of the door. Mark motioned to Narses, who scuttled away like a rabbit.

He leaned close and dropped his voice. "You know, Ceece, I've been

watching your career. You're one of the only riders who might one day be able to give me trouble. I don't know when that day will come, but when it does, remember I did you a favor."

It made no sense, and my mind was on Brian. Mark said, "Will you remember that?"

"I'll remember."

He let me go. I ran down the corridor and out into the Spoke, heading for the lab. It was many, many days later before I realized that he had called me "Ceece."

"We're going," I said to Banny. She had the rest of the crew there, dragged out of bed, coaxed, persuaded, ready to work. Banny grinned a wide grin and threw open the lab doors. "Emergency lab use!" she announced, running through the lab, scattering the other crew like so many pigeons. "Clear off! Emergency! Check with Narses if you don't believe me."

They left, muttering.

Angelo wheeled in a long pile covered in white and parked it in the pit by my chair.

The crew took their places. Banny was at the console, checking Brian's movements on the recorder. She turned a worried face to me. "Ceece, I can't find him."

"What?"

"He's not at the focus. He's not down by the seagull's case, either."

"He's in the museum somewhere. Keep looking." Surely he was in the museum. A true knight, having gotten a message from his lady, would not turn over and go back to sleep.

"I've got him!" She was triumphant. "He's in his little office . . . I can barely make him out, there's something wrong with the focus."

"He's out of range."

"More than that, I can barely see a thing. Ceece — it's smoke. The fire's started."

I joined her at the console and we moved the screen to the first floor. Orange flames, smoke, and the lack of focus made a pretty pattern. "It's not supposed to start yet."

"It's not supposed to be really big yet, but maybe it took a while to get going."

I looked at the screen. "It looks like it's going pretty well to me."

"Maybe they based our schedule on fire department reports. Maybe we've been working on an estimate."

"Never mind — what difference does it make? We could lose concurrence any time, whatever happens. The deadline is still *now*."

We brought the screen back to Brian. "He's not moving," said Banny.

His office was on the second floor, near the stairs. The focus was on the third floor. We couldn't pull him through from where he was, not on this

wave, and not with the concurrence about to drop at any moment.

Angelo came over to the screen. "Smoke inhalation," he said. "Your friend's unconscious."

I started down to the pit. "Step-through," I called out. "Take your pills." Reality hit me then — how was I going to get Brian's body up the stairs by myself? They say that adrenaline takes over in emergencies and gives you the strength of ten; I didn't want to count on it, though. "Any volunteers?" I added. "I could use some help." Angelo had disappeared while I was speaking; I didn't have time to figure out where. Banny waved her hand.

"Thanks, Ban. Henry, take Banny's place at the console. Three becomes two, four becomes three, down the line. Yu Kang, you'll have to do Cei's work and your own, I'm afraid."

"Not a problem, Ceece."

"Okay, no time to lose. Start it up." They shuffled their places and Banny took her pills. She joined me in the pit. Then Angelo suddenly showed up beside us, waving some gray plastic things in his hand.

"Gas masks," he said, breathing heavily. "We'll need them."

"We? Ang, this is not an excursion. If they lose concurrence while we're out there, we'll become anomalies. History can't be changed, and our bodies were never found in the fire. We'll just disappear."

"We'll argue about history later, Ceece. You and Banny can't drag that body by yourselves — not in five minutes, anyway, and who knows how long you'll have?"

I shook my head and found myself yelling, "Three to go! Somebody have that body on the cart ready!"

I saw Angelo grab Banny's pills. "Give me some of those," he said —

— And we were pulled in.

Lord, the whole place was smokey. Angelo stood next to me, beside the Indian artifact cases, looking pale. Being pushed through a timewall by a strong-willed crew is not the most pleasant of sensations. Banny walked ahead of us to the stairwell, where the smoke was rising. "Ang?" I said.

"I'm coming."

We took the stairs down to the second floor. The fire was still confined to the first floor, where it would do most of its damage; I was not worried about it at all. I was only worried about our waves drawing apart.

We entered the museum's offices and found Brian lying by the door. In the smoke I couldn't see if he was breathing. Angelo grasped him by the shoulders and he choked, a reassuring sound. "What — who —" he opened red eyes, and I knew what he saw: smoke and three alarming masks. He tried to thrash in panic. I pulled my mask up for a moment so he could see my face. "It's all right," I said. "We've come to get you."

"You're just a dream," he said.

"Not any more." Angelo lifted him roughly — there wasn't time to be

gentle — and he lapsed into unconsciousness again. Banny and I took the other end. We inched him up the stairs, feet first with Banny and me leading. He weighed a ton.

We set him down by the focus. For all we knew, concurrence could be gone already . . . but it wasn't. A body materialized beside us, looking remarkably like Brian. Angelo grunted and we all heaved again, carrying it to the stairs. We dragged this one down, no need to be careful. As we banged away to the first floor, though, I found myself feeling guilty over our treatment of the corpse and apologized in my mind to the rider it had belonged to. I had nothing against him for dealing in the black market; we all did what we could, in the world we never made. We left him for the fire. Probably all the searchers would find were teeth and bones, but we had to be careful.

Then back up the stairs again. Brian still lay by the focus, not moving. Angelo said, "Pulling him through the timewall will be a shock, in his condition. I didn't realize how much until I went through myself —"

And we were jerked through, the pain and jarring-ness of it forgiven in our relief.

Angelo pulled off his mask immediately and got Brian onto the cart. He got out his medical pack and covered Brian's face with a tube. He put one hand over his heart in an interrogative sort of way. The crew gathered around the cart and Banny shooed them back, giving Angelo room.

"Angelo —" I said.

"Shut up, darling, I'm busy." He took out a gleaming needle and emptied it into Brian's neck. Then he stood there, waiting. I didn't dare say anything more. Brian's fingers moved weakly toward the tube, then stopped. Angelo placed his square Italian hand over Brian's heart again and smiled. "He'll be all right. In time."

I threw my arms around Angelo, to my total surprise. My "natural reserve" had gone out the window. "Angelo, honey!" "Paisan!" We pounded each other. Suddenly I thought of something. I pushed him back and cried, "Sono tanto felice di nederti, mio caro!" I'd picked that one up a while back, and had been saving it for a special occasion.

He looked startled, and broke into whoops of laughter. "Cara, you know why I do these things for you?"

"No, carissimo, tell me."

"Because you're crazy, like a Neapolitan!" He almost broke my ribs.

I stood in my bathroom, turning the walls to mirrors for the hundredth time. There was a pile of clothing at my feet. I kicked a Cretan gown and picked up a blue satin robe, whirling it over my head and shoulders. It did look rather madonna/goddess-like. . . . I stopped myself, ashamed. It was better that he learn the truth now. That was why I was going to the hospital, wasn't it? To disillusion him?

I had already considered and rejected my usual at-home dress (shorts and

nothing else); there was no need to shock him. At last I put on my old work-clothes, the outfit I liked to wear when I was doing hardware work in the lab. The holo goddess had worn her hair up, so I let mine down. I peered at the faces in the walls: plain enough for anyone, I should think.

I blacked out the mirrors and left, before I could change my mind.

Angelo had given me Brian's room number when he called. (We spoke for a while, and I thanked him for all his help. He said — and I heard the smile in his voice — "I'd have gone further than that, to see our Ceece finally fall to Venus."

"A bit premature, paisan," I said to him, rather coldly considering all he'd done.

"I guess the ice doesn't thaw overnight," he said in response to my tone. I cut the connection on him.)

I found the room easily, pushed open the door as I wondered what to say.

I stopped. Dervan was in the room. He sat sideways on the bed, smoking a cigarette, looking Brian in the eye. Brian sat propped against some pillows, his hands in his lap. He didn't look totally lost yet.

"— sure she'll be along soon," Dervan was saying. "By the way, I didn't get your name. What is it?"

"Don't answer him," I said quickly.

Dervan's head snapped around. Brian closed his mouth and looked calmly at Dervan. The silence lengthened. Dervan measured us both, and I could see him deciding to put it away for a later time. Maybe it was just the hospital light, but I thought he looked rather cheap goods next to Brian.

Dervan shrugged and headed for the door. He dropped the cigarette from his perfect hands and ground it underfoot. "You can't stay with him forever, Ceece," he said sympathetically, and left.

Damn, it was my own fault, diddling around with clothes when I should have come straight here. I would have to go to Mark and convince him to ride herd on Dervan, tell him our latest recruit was in danger of being trashed . . . or maybe Banny and the crew and I could guard him in shifts. He'd be safe enough when he got out of training school; even Dervan wouldn't dare —

"Your name is Ceece."

I turned back to Brian. "That's right. It's short for C.C. — Carol Celia."

He shook his head, as though clearing it. "The doctor told me a lot about you. He said you went to a lot of trouble for me. That you saved my life. Thank you."

"You're welcome." His face was different, too, in the light of the present. There were tiny wing-shaped scars above his cheekbones, where Angelo had placed them during his unconsciousness. They were there to protect him in the days to come. Although it had no legal significance; how could it, when as a student he had no legal significance himself? But there would be two scars on his face from now on, to show that Darkwings "took an interest" in him for good or bad. There were beings who would leave him alone because of that; it was nothing to be ashamed of. In fact, it would add to his status when he graduated.

Of course, he might not see it that way right now. I felt uncomfortable about it abruptly; Angelo had suggested it, but I had said yes, since it seemed a good idea. Perhaps we would appear high-handed to him. I asked him, and he said that he was aware of the marks.

"Maybe we were wrong to put them on you. If they offend you, you can have Medical remove them."

"I'll keep them if you think it's best," he said simply. "You know more about this place than I do."

"Thank you." I added with honesty, "It would've hurt my status if you took them off."

His compliance bothered me. Why wasn't he screaming to me, calling me a liar? Then an answer came. The holo had been too perfect. Here I was, a flawed human being, and he could not associate me in his mind with the archetypal image. He didn't realize yet how he'd been tricked.

"Brian, do you know who I am?"

"Your name is Ceece," he said with patience and a trace of amusement. "You're a timerider crew-captain — the doctor told me. He said I would

learn what that meant, but it wasn't important right now."

"No, I mean . . . do you understand that I'm the one you saw, back in your room, back in the museum. I mean, there isn't anyone else —"

"Yes, I know that."

He must have seen something in my face, because he chuckled. It was a gentle sound, with the quiet strength of a force of nature. When I was very small, I was read a fairy tale about three brothers who contested for a throne. The youngest brother was always curious, so one day he followed a river to see how it began. The river became a stream, and the stream a spring; and the source of the spring, he found, splashed up from a walnut, which he stole and put in his pocket.

It had seemed marvelous and miraculous to me at the time. Since then, whenever I hear Brian chuckle I think of that story.

I went out to the corridor and passed Narses coming by, laden down with a bundle of papers. His jewelry flashed as he walked. He smiled condescendingly to show there were no hard feelings from my having coded open Mark's door.

"Well, well!" he said. "And what are we so happy about?"

"What business is it of yours?" I asked him.

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I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete:

Michael H. Cook, Publisher

The Observatory

by George H. Scithers

CBS News began its Fall, 1985, season of the TV series, "Sixty Minutes," with a program about (among other things) TSR, Inc.'s DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® fantasy rôle-playing game. Several thousand people will read these pages; several *million* saw that program. Obviously, the potential for abuse is enormous.

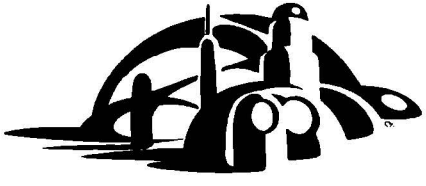
Were we abused? Not as much as we could have been. Briefly, CBS News claimed a connection between playing the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® rôle-playing game and teenage suicide. The program included an interview with a set of bereaved parents and a tearful, surviving sister; a visit to a suicide site with a police officer; and an interview with two senior officers of TSR, Inc.

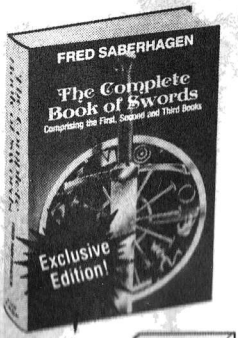
The grieving parents lived in Montpelier, Virginia; but CBS News did not present the local police version of this case. The suicide site in Lafayette, Colorado; but CBS News did not present *those* parents' version of what happened. (The *Montpelier* parents gave their opinion of the *Lafayette* case at length, on camera.) Much was made of a supposedly threatening letter, sent by TSR, Inc., to the city government of Lafayette; but CBS News did not reveal that TSR, Inc., had handed a copy of that letter to the CBS News team.

The Associated Press, which had initially reported the gist of the program on its wires, investigated further, picked up major discrepancies, and then sent out a follow-up that corrected those errors: The probable cause of the Lafayette tragedy was a pending car-theft charge against one of the brothers, their involvement with rôle-playing games was minimal, and their parents do not support the claim that the game was responsible. Some newspapers picked up both the initial AP report and the follow-up. Others, alas, ignored the follow-up.

Two additional points: First, if a teenager is deeply into rôle-playing games without the parents knowing it, they have **serious** communication problems. Second, parents of high-schoolers or younger shouldn't let them spend 48 hours doing ***any***thing without supervision.

Could it have been worse? Of course. As Mark Twain put it, "There are lies, damned lies, and statistics." Thus, a carefully-prepared hatchet job can "prove" anything; we are lucky that CBS News has no ambitions to replace "statistics" in Twain's aphorism. ✂





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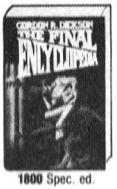

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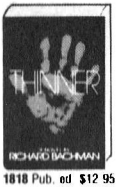

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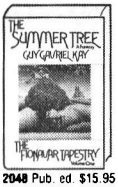

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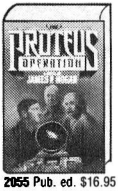

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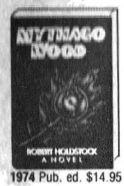

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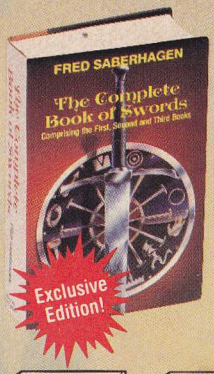

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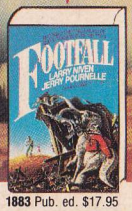

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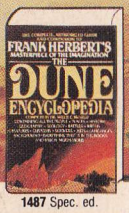

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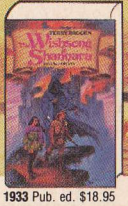

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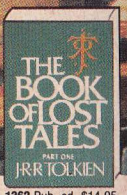

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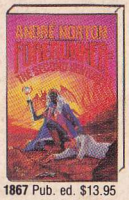

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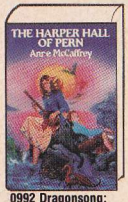

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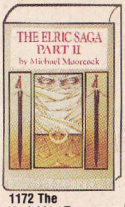

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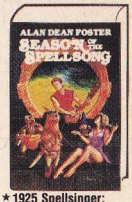

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