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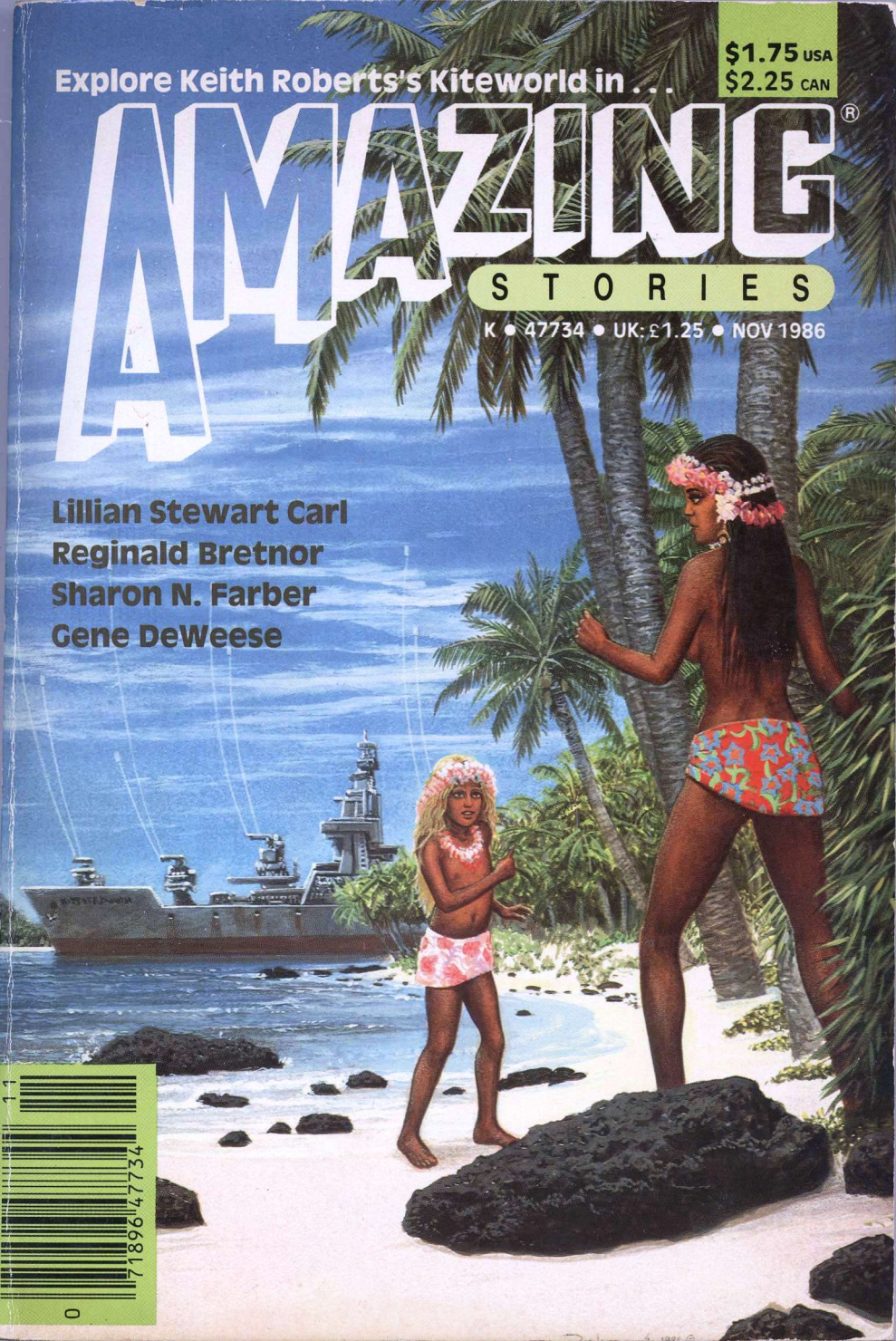
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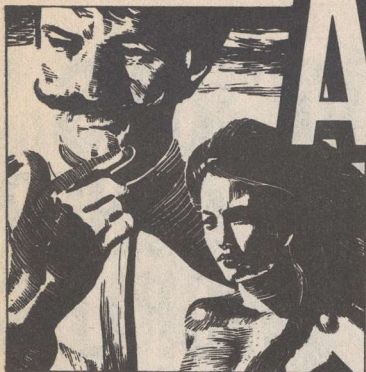
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Reflections

Robert Silverberg

I've been attending science-fiction conventions — those curious assemblages of readers, writers, editors, and that distinct subspecies known as "fans" — for something like thirty-five years. I started going to them when I was a teenage fan myself, who published a terribly scruffy little amateur magazine. I hung out with other young fans — my fannish contemporaries included people like Harlan Ellison, Terry Carr, Ted White, Dick Lupoff — and stared in awe at the professional writers nearby, Theodore Sturgeon and Robert Sheckley and L. Sprague de Camp and the like. When I graduated from fan ranks to the professional level after a few years, it seemed quite appropriate for me to keep on going to conventions, although I began to divide my time between my old fan friends and the contingent of writers. Even now I still turn up at two or three conventions a year, though by this time I have only the vaguest idea of what's happening in fandom, and regard the conventions purely as a professional pastime.

Conventions are important social events for me — opportunities for reunions with friends I've known for decades — and they've often provided useful business opportunities, too. Though I go to fewer of them now than I used to — these days it's just the Worldcon that's held every year during the Labor Day weekend, plus one or two of the West Coast regional shindigs and sometimes the World Fantasy Convention — I wouldn't

want to give them up altogether. Yet I'm starting to think that convention-going may be pernicious and dangerous to the mental health of the serious-minded science-fiction writer, and perhaps those writers who attend them ought to be given the literary equivalent of the Surgeon-General's warning before they set foot inside.

Conventions, you see, have changed enormously since I first started going to them back in the early 1950s. Party-ing and jollity were a part of them then as now, of course. There was always a poker-playing contingent, a hard-drinking contingent, a let's-throw-bags-of-water-out-the-hotel-window contingent. But by and large there was an undertone of seriousness to them. The readers who attended were passionate analysts and historians of science fiction who sat through all the panels with deep scholastic interest. The fans pursued their own subspecialty of fandom — its arcane terminology, its proliferation of amateur publications, its rites and customs — with dedication and earnestness. Though I was an adolescent myself when I went to those long-ago conventions, it seemed to me that everyone else was older than I was — in their twenties and thirties, mainly — and even the silliness that went on went on in a relatively adult manner.

Somewhere in the 1970s things began to change. The costume masquerade, which was once a playful two-hour Saturday night event, somehow spread to engulf the entire con-



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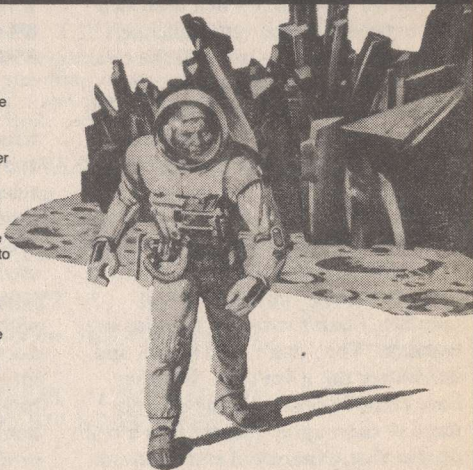
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vention, so that the hallways and convention suites became filled with barbarian slave-girls, Darth Vader clones, creatures with hideous fanged heads, and worse. In the dealers' room it became hard to find genuine books for sale, but there were long lines of kids waiting to buy autographed glossy publicity photos of Godzilla and Mothra. No one went to the formal panels at all, but great mobs queued up for the round-the-clock showing of monster movies and horror flicks. When video games were invented, they became hugely popular among the con-goer.

In short, the conventions were invaded by hordes and hordes of nice dumb youngsters who find reading a pretty difficult task, but who are turned on by the Hollywood sci-fi product and enjoy dressing up in goofy costumes. It's a harmless amusement and at least keeps them off the streets.

But they have made going to conventions an embarrassment for all the rest of us. Obviously when dignified-looking middle-aged types like me check in at the hotel and tell the clerk we're with the SF convention, the hotel staff isn't likely to think that I'll be out there too in my Conan the Conqueror costume as soon as I can unpack my suitcase. But having to admit that I earn my living trying to write for the kids in costume is almost as painful as being suspected of closet costume-freakery myself.

In fact I *don't* write for the kids in costume. They don't read much, and when they do, it isn't me. But they have come to dominate the conventions so thoroughly that there is a real danger that writers will start to think they are the entire audience. Which is depressing enough to send a thoughtful young writer off to some other field

entirely. If the audience is made up entirely of amiable nitwits who collect monster photos, what point is there in striving for excellence? Why work for modest wages to produce stories and novels that are beyond the comprehension of the readers? Better to flee and get an honest job than to exercise one's skill and vision for the benefit of the subliterate.

Standing in a hotel lobby looking at all the kids in costume, I've given way more than once to just such feelings of despair. It is then that I drag out the statistics to remind myself that *the convention-goers are not the audience*. They are a subgroup, an aberrant little sideshow.

Consider the survey taken by Charles N. Brown's *Locus Magazine*, the chief trade journal of the science-fiction world. A thousand subscribers responded to the 1985 poll — writers, editors, readers, fans. Their median age was 33. 19% earned more than \$50,000 a year. 44% were married. 41% owned their own home. 73% had B.A. degrees or higher — including 8% with Ph.D.'s. Science fiction was 85% of their reading.

Kids? Barbarian slave-girls?

A few months later William F. Battista, the associate publisher of *Analog* and *Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine*, released the results of a survey of a thousand readers of those magazines. The findings were quite similar: a median age of 36, 86.9% who had attended or graduated college, 24% with advanced degrees (10% with doctorates), an average household income of \$41,200. Battista's group had an even higher percentage of home ownership — 75.3%. Those in professional/managerial occupations came to 57.6%.

It's a mistake, then, to think that the kids in costume are the readership.



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Science fiction now, as it has been for a couple of generations, is read by adult, thoughtful people looking for intelligent fun. The writer who generalizes from the convention scene is off base — and woe betide him if he tries to write for the audience he sees there, because they don't read books. It might be safer for impressionable writers to stay away from conventions altogether.

But perhaps things are changing. The World Fantasy Convention forbids all costumes — and it has become the clear favorite among professionals in the field. Now comes word that a group of experienced old hands in the convention field are going to start a similarly austere science-fiction convention, the first of which will be held in California in January, 1987. The grown-ups may be reclaiming the conventions from the berserk kids at last. The kids will still have their own cons to go to — and when they get tired of running around in capes and swords, they'll be able to come to ours. Who knows, they might even start reading my books and yours. ●

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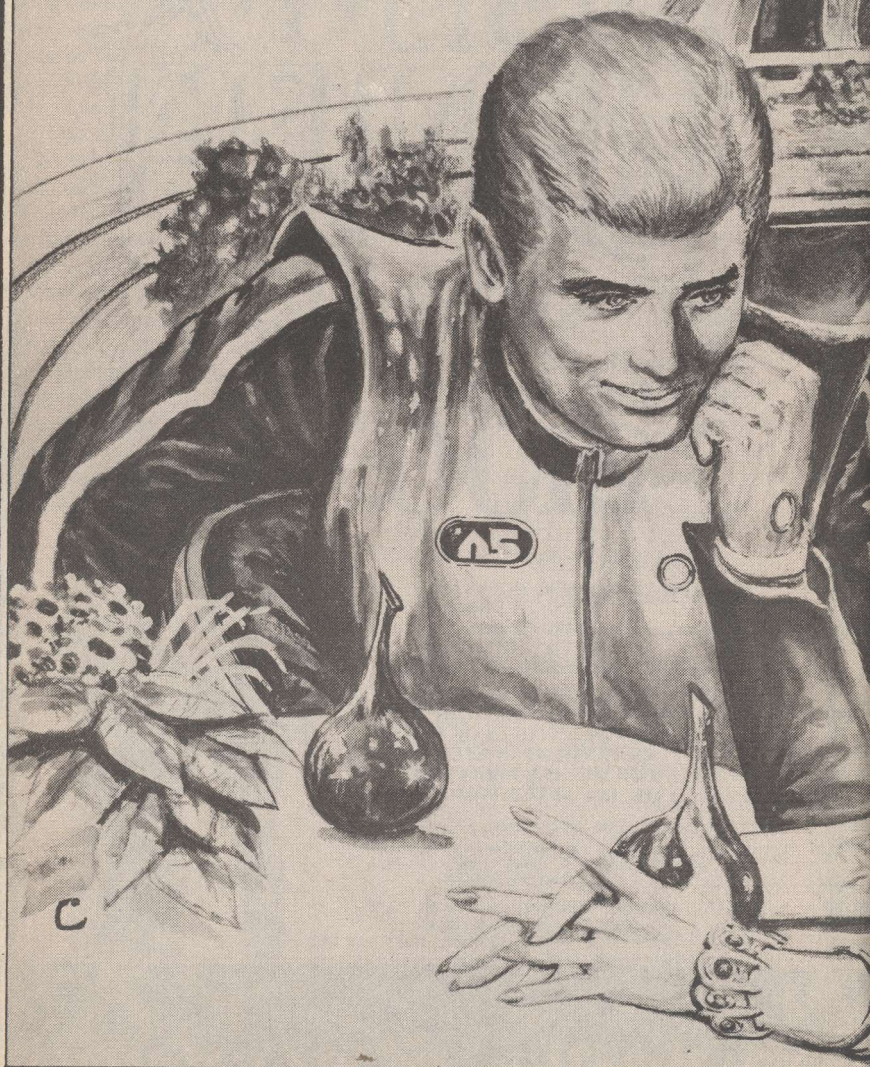
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PLEASURE PALACE
by Lillian Stewart Carl
art: Doug Chaffee





Lillian Stewart Carl's first novel Sabazel was published by Ace in 1985; at least one sequel is to follow. Her shorter fiction has appeared in various publications during the past several years; "Upon This Shoal of Time" was in our March 1985 issue.

The Company gives, Varina thought, and the Company takes away. Blessed be the name of the Company. . . .

She threw a few toilet articles into her bag and slammed it shut. Admittedly she was long overdue for leavetime — one terrahour in the mines on Io and she'd been long, long overdue. The breath masks, the air recirculation systems, could never quite filter out the scent of sulfur. The dark visors and bonded glass in the portholes could never quite conceal the roiling yellow flames — a sea of fire, spitting sparks at the black shroud of a sky.

She picked up her comb and jerked so roughly at the tousled strands of her hair that tears started in her eyes. The chemicals in tears caused by pain, she thought, are different from those in tears caused by grief. And all the chemicals in her body were carefully recorded, percentages defined, proportions monitored — the comb snagged the cap covering the end of the cannula imbedded in her skull and she winced. Foolish, the brain feels no pain.

The Company computer found that the biochemical spectra of her pituitary were growing irregular; the Company computer decreed leavetime. Foolish to resent leavetime, just because it meant time to think, to dream. . . . Varina wondered suddenly if even her dreams had been regimented and ordered into Company patterns.

She stamped out of her grey metal cubicle and down the grey metal hall. Indentured engineers had no rights, she reminded herself. Sign the contract and the Company disposes, manipulating a human being into a docile worker.

The door of the grav-tube opened before her and she stepped in, floated upward, and propelled herself onto the grey metal shuttle deck. A few other miners waited, clutching at their own belongings, for transport to the Recreation Station. The Pleasure Palace it was called by those returning, their winks and knowing smiles quickly concealed behind visor and mask.

Pleasure Palace. Would the Company know what would bring her pleasure, what dream-memory to plug into her like a psychotropic drug — the pleasure of the dream, and then the pain of waking?

Varina turned and glanced out a porthole. The cracked, steaming surface of Io stretched before her. Yesterday's eruption had already begun to darken into orange; soon the crawlers would be sampling it for mineral content, for market value.

A plume of fire billowed above the far horizon, consuming the stars; deep fissures glowed flickering red. Lucifer waited for the unwary, a rover slipping down a scoriated lava slope, a crawler caving in the edge of a magma

pool. A medieval Hell, painted by Bosch and orchestrated by the cries of the damned — except we, Varina thought, damn ourselves.

The Company did not create emotional cripples. The Company bought emotional cripples and fed them oblivion.

A Company robot hovered beside her. Its eyes were viewers, scanning her entire work record, scanning the molecules comprising her mind and body. "Well," it squeaked, somehow jovial, "you're scheduled for the next shuttle. Time to get those biochems in line again, right?"

"Right," she said. She turned her back on the porthole. Flames licked at the edge of sight, at the edge of the soul.

The robot reached to its chest and popped a selection of ampules from the row of cylinders hanging there. "Here're your traveling goodies. Have to be in shape for the Pleasure Palace, right?"

"Right," she said between her teeth. She took the ampules and pressed each in turn against her forearm, mainlining happiness.

"Good girl," the robot said, and turned to stalk someone else.

Good girl. Nice, docile worker. Brain and body teeming with the appropriate nerve receptor stimulants and suppressors, the appropriate reactions, the appropriate feelings. She'd long ago stopped asking questions; Company-generated feelings were so much easier to handle.

Varina lay back in her seat in the shuttle, eyes not quite focussed out the window beside her, watching curiously as her own thoughts drifted in ashes through her consciousness. Stale air, mechanical air, not sulfurous — acceleration, and Io Habitat falling behind. Its aluminum/titanium stilts straddled the gleaming surface of the moon like some absurd insect, seismological antenna extended, quivering, toward a suspicious temblor.

It was gone, snatched into darkness. The horizon curved, flames fading into a warm, distant glow. The vast shape of Jupiter filled the sky, blotting out the stars — a great ball of multicolored cotton candy, Varina thought with a shred of amusement. Narrow rings caught the light of a tiny sun and pulsed gently. . . .

It was her own mind pulsing, winding tighter, tighter. Varina clutched at the armrest, suddenly dizzy. Damn, they got the dopamine/serotonin ratios wrong again. The brain was only a biochemical machine, you'd think it could be handled properly — but the agony caught the back of her neck and shook her like a dog would shake a mangled rat. Peter! she moaned silently. Peter, I'll come back rich, Company hazard wages, rich; we can start again, Peter, and this time it'll work for us. . . .

The bulk of Europa spun by outside the window, vanished. Ahead, a silver glint hung against the sky. Varina swallowed her pain, forced it down until her jaw muscles ached with it, leaned her face against the cool glass and eyed, doubtfully, the glittering wheel of the Recreation Station.

"Been here before?" one of the other workers asked.

"No," she said. Her voice grated harshly in her own ears.

They walked from the shuttle deck into a glass tunnel. The planetesimal curved above, around, below a sweeping expanse of light-studded metal nestled against the cloudy colors of Jupiter as if in a jewel box. Several repair robots, supervised by a space-suit-clad human, floated out through an air-lock and tethered themselves to a bristling bank of sensors.

"This is the Bridge of Sighs," the man said conspiratorially. "You sigh with anticipation going in, with exhaustion coming out."

"Yeah," Varina replied.

He peered at her, shrugged, moved on to join the others.

Varina followed, through another door, into a monorail. And the car hummed up a long tunnel-like tube to the interior of the Pleasure Palace.

It was a pleasure. Green, rich green, arching away on either side of the monorail track, curving around and closing again overhead at a long ribbon of luminescence — sunlight, sky, whatever the imagination could make of it. Plats of wheat, soybeans, corn; fruit trees; tidy pods of vegetables and herbs. Of course, this was where the food came from, this was where the drugs were manufactured — Varina realized she had thirsted for the color green as desperately as she thirsted for — what? For herself?

She watched bemused as the others around her murmured delightedly, turning from side to side, drinking in the viridescent light. Something we couldn't sign away, Varina thought — some deep molecular memory of Earth and green.

The car stopped. She alighted, testing her footing in this different gravity, this different orientation — the sight of fields arching overhead caused a slight vertigo, as if one misstep would send her falling upwards.

A trolley took her bag and went whirring off into a maze of corridors, leaving her to hurry behind. Winding silversteel corridors, popping into balconies, sealing themselves again only to shoot unexpectedly over bridges — a kaleidoscope of buildings, gardens, terraces, of lolling bodies and attentive robots.

Robots? But some of those bodies were surely the fabled androids of the Pleasure Palace.

The trolley whisked through a doorway, deposited her bag, spun about and disappeared. Varina stepped inside.

Small but luxurious. Olive-green fiberglass carpet, lit from beneath; wide bed draped in a subdued floral print. Holograms of Earth scenes, mountains, oceans, forests, spaced around the walls like windows. Bathroom with a tub shaped like a giant seashell, and a closet hanging with silken dresses in the golds and russets that would perfectly complement her coloring. . . .

She had to laugh at it, at the absurdity of such bodily comfort, at her own hypocrisy in liking it. The body was only a support system for the brain, the brain only a mass of electrochemical circuits, opening and closing in response to certain peptides and to the will of the Company.

The dresses fit, of course. The bottle of perfume by the sink was matched to her own natural pheromones. "Not bad," Varina muttered, glancing at her reflection in a long cheval glass. "Not bad at all." But her eyes were haunted, dreaming stubborn dreams no luxury could buy. She remembered suddenly why she so seldom looked at herself in a mirror.

Stubborn. Too stubborn to let Peter go. Coming out here not to forget him but to make enough to buy him back. . . . She turned the glass to the wall.

A tray held her ration of drugs. She considered them for a moment, then rejected them — this place was supposed to adjust those biochems for her, to calm that pulsing in her mind. She arranged her hair to conceal the cannula, opened the door. "All right, I'm here," she announced to the shining hallway. "Pleasure me."

"What is your pleasure?" said a voice.

Her heart jerked crazily and she spun about. No, she thought. No, this isn't fair. . . . He was tall, slender, blond and grey-eyed — a face like a Botticelli angel. Not a simulacrum of Peter, but a memory of him as he should have been, young, bright, idealized.

Not quite human. "You're an android," Varina said.

"Yes. Adan-series-five, designated your Companion."

The Company knows too damn much about me, Varina told herself. They know what dream to plug into me, and I resent this. . . . But Adan was an innocent child, programmed for her needs, harmless. If nothing else, he could guide her through the labyrinth of the Recreation Station.

"What is your pleasure?" he repeated, and he smiled.

Her heart jerked again; no, he was not a child. "Music," she croaked. "Food and wine, air and growing things. Light conversation."

"Certainly." He offered her his arm. Warily she laid her hand on it; beneath his shirt his polymer flesh was cool, his aluminum bones firm.

He too was scented, faintly sandalwood, the male pheromone — she closed her eyes, mumbled, "On Jupiter did the Company a stately pleasure dome decree . . . No, that's not it."

"Not quite," Adan replied. "But it scans."

She opened her eyes and walked beside him down the corridor.

The balcony was suspended over a flower garden and a pool. Roses, so intensely red that they burned the retina; golden fish like lightning flickers beneath the water. Varina inhaled of the clean air and scoured the sulfur taste from her throat and lungs.

Adan handed her a bulb of liquid and she drank. Some fruit-based intoxicant, it seemed, well-matched to the artistically arranged tray of protein bits at her elbow. And in the center of the table a container of Sobrex — it wouldn't do to become drunk and miss something. Shows, games, vids, food, and drink . . .

She met Adan's calm grey eyes, considered the tiny image of herself mirrored in the lens. So the pituitary sample said that I needed to get laid, she thought. Fine. Do I have to feel anything for him?

His eyes were vaguely disturbing and she looked away without analyzing why. The balcony and the adjoining building were filled with vacationing workers. Geologists from the ice crevasses of Ganymede and Callisto, biochemists from the dark seas of Europa, her fellow miners from Io. Support technicians, supervisors; the omnipresent robots, shapes and forms varied according to function.

A different Hell for each sinner. Dante, with his geocentric allegory, had not been far wrong.

Adan sat quietly, unperturbed, waiting patiently for her wishes. It was chilling just how patiently he waited. It's not as if he's real, Varina assured herself. A deluxe robot, whose function is to simulate humanity. He's not out to get me, nor me him, and I don't have to play games with him.

Humanity. In order to simulate it, you must define it; humanity, a cluster of physicochemical systems . . . I should have taken those drugs, Varina thought. She gulped, emptying her bulb, and held it out to Adan for more.

The insistent pulsing in her mind became music. There, on another balcony, a virtuoso synthesizer playing a popular song. Almost a human voice, except for the vibrato — randomly generated, of course, but still too regular to be real.

Peter's acoustic images were real. The classic starving artist, working in harmonics — I'll be rich, Peter; you can afford the best components, the best canvases, you can work . . .

Adan's hand placed a fresh bulb on the table before her. Long, tapering fingers, smooth nails, the bones jutting in subtle angles — Peter had stubby fingers, not an artist's hand at all.

And I'm left with a machine. A tear took her unawares, overflowing her eye and tickling her cheek. Adan intercepted the droplet, held it on his fingertip. "I'm sorry," he said.

"You're not going to analyze it and prescribe an antidote?"

"Is there an antidote?" he asked.

"Sure. Work. Dreams. Psychotropic drugs."

"Ah," he said. He touched his fingertip to his tongue. "Salt. The seas of Earth flowing through your body."

Strange comment. But then, strange to be having a conversation with a robot. She began to pick aimlessly at the protein. "And you?"

"My prototype was created by Marion Brand in 2020. It was field-tested on Mars. I was constructed here, in the Jovian system."

Varina listened to the tone of his voice rather than the words. Warm and even, like a cello, perhaps; the timbre shifting just enough to resemble a man's. Nice friendly synthesizer.

"I've only seen Earth," he was saying, "in the eyes, the minds, the bodies

of human beings.”

She shook herself from her reverie. “How can you do that?”

The glistening smile again, appealingly gentle, almost shy. “The hunger for other life, for companionship, for words. The need to touch and to feel. Earthborn consciousness, a living being that grows and changes and spreads outward, carrying in its wake little bits of jetsam such as me . . .”

He turned away, ostensibly reaching for a platter of fruit on a nearby rack. He turned away, Varina thought, because he was about to betray himself.

Foolish to think an android even had a concept of self. He was simply well-programmed to please her — a sensitive, attentive machine. But he wasn’t real.

And what is my concept of self, she wondered. Am I real? The music slipped imperceptibly into an ancient ballad: *Alas, my love, you do me wrong, to cast me off discourteously, . . .*

“Yeah,” muttered Varina. “That pretty well sums it up.”

Adan reached across the table and took her hand. “How may I help you?”

“Can you help me? Or are you just for a terraday’s amusement?”

“That’s up to you.”

She picked up the bulb of liquid, put it down again without drinking. She considered her hand, flesh and blood encompassed by his mechanical grasp. “No, it’s not up to me. Physicochemical determinism, you know; biology predicates behavior. The Company disposes. God disposes.”

“You choose nothing?”

She smiled thinly. “Only which Hell, out of many Hells, to inhabit.”

He nodded as if he understood. She envisioned the circuits whirring behind the arch of his cranium, beneath the bright figerglass hair. “You’re programmed to psychoanalyze me?” she asked.

“I’m programmed to please you.”

“And I’m programmed to respond. Simple as that.”

“Is such cynicism a normal human trait? Or is it only yours?”

Varina reclaimed her hand and turned away. His eyes, tiny mirrors, somehow disturbing . . . Across the balcony the man who’d spoken to her on the Bridge was nuzzling a female android, laughing, face flushed.

“Only me.” She sighed. “Some imbalance in my brain, no doubt. The Company computer will figure out the right dosages eventually.” And, “Come on. Show me what else you can do.”

Varina awoke. She stared upward into muted lights, across the room to the holograms, artificial dawn breaking over an artificial Earth. And an artificial lover beside her . . .

Curious, she turned to him. Adan lay outstretched, the line of his back and shoulders an elegant composition in light and shadow. One hand was curled beside his face; his hair was tousled across the pillow, his lashes making little crescents of darkness on his cheeks. Not bad, she thought. Deli-

cately precise, responsive to every nuance of her expression, of her body — fake passion was easier to handle than real. No need for reciprocity . . .

She abandoned that thought. “Adan,” she said.

His lashes parted, revealing bright, alert eyes. Faking sleep as well, she told herself.

He smiled. He raised his hand and lightly stroked the line of her jaw, soothing the tightness there. “How may I help you?”

“You are helping me.”

“By pleasing you?”

“Yes.” By pretending to be Peter, so I can dream again. She threw herself back into her own warm spot beneath the covers, and stared again at the ceiling.

He took her into his arms and set his face against her hair. His body was cool, absorbing the heat of her own. “Do you feel better now?”

“Measure the peptides,” she said tartly. “You tell me.”

“But you’re a human being; you’re conscious of yourself.”

Consciousness was altered by the very act of observing it. The brain was only chaotic quanta. “I think,” she said. “Therefore I am. Therefore you are, too. We’re alike, Adan.”

“You dream,” he said. “I can’t.”

“You don’t need to. Dreaming is just the brain’s inefficient way of processing data.” Trying to accept the unacceptable . . . Her mind began pulsing again, a slow, swelling rhythm tightening her sinews into quivering strands of pain.

“I can’t cry,” he said softly.

He had her there. She pulled away, rose to her feet, stretched. A hologram of Mount Fuji wavered before her eyes, clean, cool, quiet. “And beauty?” Adan asked. “Can you define beauty? But you can sense it.”

Stop it, stop it. . . . “God, a self-pitying robot,” she said. “You’re not missing a thing, let me assure you. No self-awareness, no pain — simple.”

“Is it?” he asked.

She shrugged away his question, shrugged away the apology that rose to her lips. It’s not as if he had feelings to hurt. “Come on. Show me some more of this place. I hear there are free-fall rooms available.”

Obediently he rose and reached for his clothing, his face set in an affably neutral expression. But his eyes clouded, no longer reflecting Varina’s image, as if he kept her image and her words to himself.

At last, Varina thought, I’ve put myself in a padded cell.

The free-fall chamber was small and cozy, the walls, floor, ceiling covered with cushioned fabric. Tubes holding living plants were affixed to the corners, spilling tendrils of clematis and orchid into the room. Varina propelled herself to a cabinet and checked out the supply of intoxicants and drugs.

Adan drifted to her side, reaching out for her, and she turned into his

arms. Yes, he knew all the tricks of zero-g sex.

She responded to him, and he to her responding, circling, circling, with a desperate passion. . . . Fake passion or real, she no longer knew. She no longer cared. For a few precious seconds she almost achieved her dream.

They floated, knotted together, her breath ragged against his shoulder. Peter's shoulder — but the illusion was scratched and faded, a vid run too many times. It was her breath only; the skin beneath her cheek vibrated with a mechanical susurrantion, circuits opening and closing.

She opened her eyes, leaned back, looked into Adan's face. He was staring, unfocussed, over her head, contemplating some infinite sorrow. As if he was capable of feeling sorrow.

You're not missing a thing, honey, not a thing. . . . Her nerves sang, winding tighter and tighter, unappeased by artificial passion, no matter how desperate.

Adan realized she was looking at him. He was instantly attentive. "Are you pleased?"

"Yes, yes, yes, already. Are you?"

"I'm pleased by your pleasure."

"Is that all?"

He smiled slightly, distantly. "I was created to give emotion, not to take. To help you, if you would allow it."

"But if I don't want help . . ." Her nerves shrieked. She extricated herself from him, pushed him away and managed only to slam herself against the wall. "You know too damn much about me. The Company knows too damn much about me. Every last hormone quantified . . ."

"Can you quantify awareness?"

"I don't want awareness!"

"God, a self-pitying human."

She struck at him, pounding at his chest; he fended her off and held her wrists tight with a superhuman strength. She kicked at him, and he pinned her neatly against the ceiling. "You may not damage me," he said quietly. "I'm Company property."

"So am I!" Varina screamed. "So am I, so am I, so am I, . . ."

Calm, cool, "No. You're a human being. Not a victim of physicochemical determinism as you think — your own vital input, your own mind, that's what controls your brain. Any drug they can give you is only a momentary palliative, because you accept it."

The pulsing in her mind wound upwards to a frenzy and burst. From some great distance she saw it explode, spewing marketable chemicals, no doubt, little spiral galaxies of quanta eddying in the perfumed air of the Pleasure Palace.

She screamed, wordless, mindless spasms, Peter, I hate you, I hate me, God help me I don't want to be me any more. . . .

Adan cradled her writhing form against his own, holding her clawing fin-

gers away from her face, restraining her from beating her head against the wall. And somewhere from the height of her hysteria she saw his expression — Oh my dear God, that couldn't be pain on its face —
She succumbed to her agony, and the universe faded.

A hazy dream, Peter and a new acoustic image — Mount Fuji, swelling upward, pumping "Greensleeves" from its caldera . . . The image burst into silversteel shards, dissipated, died.

Varina was in her bed in her room in the Pleasure Palace. Saffron-coated medtechs leaned over her. A cloying taste of anise coated her mouth — no, the taste was not in her mouth at all. They were probing the biochemical balance of her mind.

Of her brain. Through heavy lids she watched a medtech spooling the sensor leads and stowing them away. The cap snapped onto the cannula; she felt the pressure, but no pain. The brain feels no pain, only the mind. . . .

"I don't know what happened," the younger medtech said. "The doses were quite correct."

"A bifurcation," the older medtech said. "A change in parameters creating a chaotic mode — quite normal in the human brain."

"A new prescription, then?"

"No. Take her off the drugs for a while. Let her create her own biochemical signals."

"Mind over matter?"

"Of course."

The voices wavered, drifted away. The door opened and closed. Varina floated, grasping after her dream, but it was gone. She forced her eyelids apart and the room pulsed around her. Her natural endorphin levels must be off the scale.

At least it was the room pulsing now, not her mind.

Adan was standing in a corner, a discarded machine. As her gaze fell upon him he straightened. One corner of his mouth twitched in an almost imperceptible smile.

She struggled to sit up. "Hello, Judas."

"Judas?"

"You turned me in, didn't you?"

"It was what you wanted — to be a good Company robot."

She fell back against the pillows. "Yeah. That just about sums it up."

He strolled forward and sat gingerly on the edge of the bed. "But they're going to let you heal yourself, it seems."

"Surprising. I thought the Company wanted me docile, controlled . . ."

"They want you to work. To function. As a human being, not a machine."

"A machine gives. I take. I take, even while denying that it's my free will to take." She closed her eyes. "Peter, I'm sorry. I really am sorry."

The room was silent. So silent that perhaps she could hear the magnetic

song of Jupiter's rings . . . She drifted again, and again she woke. The taste of anise was gone.

Adan was still there, waiting with preternatural patience. "Hold me," Varina asked, extending her arms to him. "Just hold me. No more artificial passion."

He lay down beside her and pulled her close to his cool metal shell. "I would love you," he said. "It's what you want. But I don't know how."

"You'd burn yourself out," she told him. The magnetic song of his circuits was oddly beguiling; she chuckled in her throat. "I've never had sex with a machine before."

"Neither have I. Not with a machine blessed with humanity."

"It's not all it's talked up to be, you know."

"Sex? Or being human?"

"Both."

"The sex I provide is only simulated loving. I'm only simulated humanity. A bit of jetsam carried along in the wake of life."

Varina brushed his cheek with hers and kissed the smooth planes of his mouth. "How can I help you, Adan?"

"Dream for me."

"Even the dreams hurt. They hurt, but you cry to dream again."

"I can't cry," he said. It was sorrow, it was pain on his face.

She wept, gentle tears that welled slowly from the seared edges of her soul, as the musical instrument of his voice fed her with tenderness. She wept for them both, mechanistic human, humanistic machine, until at last she slept, dreamlessly, hoping that somehow that night it was the machine who could dream.

Varina took her leave of Adan there in the small pocket of luxury. She would have asked him to go with her on the monorail to the Bridge, but she wanted to spare him the knowing scrutiny of the other workers. As if he had feelings that could be hurt.

"I would love you," she told him. "But I'm not sure I know how to love."

"Save it for Peter," he replied. "Or another man. Not me."

She set her hand against his face and regarded it thoughtfully. The Company could simulate a brain, but the mind — that was something else again. The protein chips that were Adan's brain had been recorded and re-recorded repeatedly over the course of time, but their patterns could be traced back to some real human mind.

"They never quite filtered those emotions out of you, did they?" she asked softly. "Not fake emotions. Real ones."

He turned away from her, taking her hand from his face, squeezing it, releasing it. "Go on. The shuttle's waiting."

She went. She paused at the turning of the corridor, glancing back — the grave, elegant machine stood alone, not waiting, but pursuing some —

awareness? . . .

A blind, deaf and dumb child, knowing that there was something more — knowing that he was irrevocably excluded from it. A solitary left brain looking for its other half, looking for that blending of hemispheres that was consciousness, free will, values — the value of life.

"Yes," she murmured. "I know beauty when I see it. And tragedy."

Varina turned and fled down the passageway.

The Company robot greeted Varina at Io Habitat with an ampule of vasopressin to stimulate her intellect, to set her to work. And she worked. Each terraday cycle that passed she worked, designing the great mining machines, overseeing their function, repairing them. Engineering her own consciousness.

And somehow, she was not surprised at the news that greeted her at the end of the third or fourth shift after her return from leave.

She laid her tray of vegetables on the table and sat down. Next to her was the man from the Bridge. "Have a good time?" he asked, winking.

"Yes, thank you."

Someone sat down on his other side. "Did you hear what happened at the Pleasure Palace?"

"What?"

"One of those androids threw himself out the airlock on the Bridge of Sighs. Wasn't damaged, of course, but the radiation scrambled his circuits and he had to be scrapped."

Varina's body jerked as if with an electric shock. Her fork clattered into the tray. Oh God, what have I done . . .

"He?" the first man asked. "Not Tessa-series-nine, then?"

"Naw. Dan or something like that — no matter. More components for us."

Cannibals, Varina howled silently. Carrion birds, picking over the bones of the dead. Oh God . . .

"Odd," said the second man. "Robots almost never crash like that."

"Bifurcation," Varina spat, each word a droplet of acid. "A change in parameters, an overload in the system, producing a chaotic mode — happens in the human brain often enough."

Both men swiveled curiously around to her. "But not in a computer."

"A living computer." She shoved her tray away and scrambled from the table.

The grey metal halls streamed around her; the portholes flickered with orange fire. Lucifer, waiting for the unwary — Lucifer, light-bearer; it was her duty to sort component shipments. It would be her duty to touch them reverently, as cells of a formerly living body.

And when he shall die, take him and cut him out in little stars . . . But he wasn't dead. Only his mind, extinguished by his own free will.

She gained her cubicle and threw herself on the cot, wrapping herself into a fetal position. God, she thought, her mind spinning. The Company'll find out what I've done and make me pay for him, garnishee my paycheck, skim my savings account Earthside. . . .

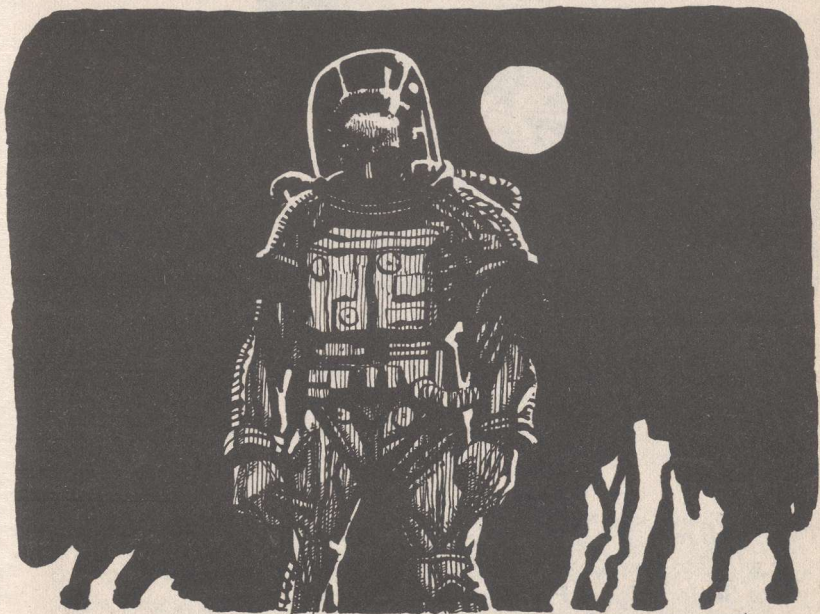
She hadn't done anything at all. She'd taken, not given. It was his will, and none of her own. All she could do was what he asked.

She closed her eyes. She dreamed an acoustic image, like Peter's — but this one was hers. The Pleasure Palace. A slender, finely sculpted android, a cap of bright hair. Eyes grey pools, deep, deep. The silver wheel spinning away behind, blending into the starfield, and the gaudy clouds of Jupiter reaching out to envelop, softly, warmly, the falling body. The music of the spheres, become one with a nascent mind. And then gentle oblivion.

"Adan," she murmured, "I'm sorry . . ." She cried, tasting the salt of her own tears.

The Company gives, she thought, but the Company cannot take away. Blessed be the Name of — humanity. Because we're going to need it.

Io Habitat shifted its long legs and settled itself safely among the flames of Hell.



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FUNGO THE UNRIGHTEOUS

by Reginald Bretnor
art: Jack Gaughan



Those who read "Deep Song" in our September 1983 issue will find here another side of the author, represented by The Schimmelhorn Files; and look for a complete novel, Schimmelhorn's Gold, from Tor Books.

It was the great good fortune of the people of the Triple Kingdom of Upper, Middle, and Lower Vuthland that they never experienced the political uncertainty besetting their neighbors; for from the day their Sovereign ascended the throne to the day of his (or her) death, the course of the reign was as fixed and determined as the procession of the suns. It was a splendidly simple system. When it came time for the incumbent to die in battle, or (far more commonly) to perish of a surfeit of lampreys, or to be sleeping slain (as was of course right and proper), the Astrologer Royal would convene the entire membership of the three Royal Vuthlandian Colleges of Astrologers, Diviners, and Soothsayers; and they would solemnly attend a beasting, where they would consult the entrails of a virgin male cwisamp (of the footed variety). Then they would proclaim the name the heir to the Throne would bear, the character he would assume, the number of years he would reign, and the date and nature of his death.

It worked wonderfully. Over the centuries, the Kingdom had been ruled by such memorable figures as Grundius the Ungodly (802-847), Throd Tanglewit (870-879), Hargust the Torturer (1055-1102), Scrandeg the Conqueror (1147-1152), the infamous Waltzing Matilda (1205-1233) about whom a song was written hundreds of years later, Aproprong the Profligate (1256-1286), and Herf the Merciful (August 1314).

Now it so happened that in the fall of 1388, when Yarskald Throatbiter was all set to die in the third year of his reign, next in line for the Crown was a handsome young prince named Fungo. He had every virtue. He was always merry and open-handed, kindly and courteous. He loved to go off for days together, dancing and singing with the Gypsies, with whom he was a great favorite. (Their Queen, an ancient crone called Mama Gabor, had formally adopted him into her tribe.) He was a great horseman, and a great hunter and swordsman as well. Indeed, if he can be said to have had any fault whatsoever, it was in his extreme naïveté. This deeply distressed the lovely Lady Clysomel, with whom he was madly in love and who loved him dearly, for she was the step-niece of Kostra Karbunkel, the Astrologer Royal now for more than one reign, a bitter, lecherous, treacherous old man who was also, by a royal edict he had connived for, her legal guardian.

So, when it became known that Yarskald was on his deathbed, she pleaded with Fungo to take her away, to flee far from the three Vuthlands. "Let's take swift horses, my love," she begged. "There are those in your stables none other can catch. We'll take gold and jewels enough, and our most faithful servants. Even if we cannot be King and Queen, we shall be happy." And she began to weep softly.

Gently, Fungo smoothed her glistening black tresses, and gently he tried to dissuade her. "Beautiful Clysomel, you shall indeed be a queen. Before the week's out, you shall be *my* queen. I cannot believe that your step-uncle, unpleasant as he undoubtedly is, can wish anyone as sweet and charming as you any real harm."

"Harm?" cried she. "Fungo, he not only wishes me *harm* — he wants *me*, that vile old man! He wants me for *himself*. And the gods only know what he'll read in that poor cwisamp's entrails at the beasting."

But Fungo was much too innocent to believe her, for it was not in him to believe that anyone could be as cruel and as despicable as she had painted her uncle. So, when the old man had departed, she betook herself, escorted only by one trusted groom, to the camp of the Gypsies in a birch forest near Farvath, the capital city, and there she bared her heart to old Mama Gabor.

Gravely, shaking her head once in a while, the ancient Gypsy listened to her. She read the lines in her right hand and the lines in her left. For perhaps fifteen minutes, she peered intently into a crystal ball that gleamed on the table between them. She consulted a curious and frightening Tarot deck known only to the Gypsies of Vuthland. Finally, she clapped her wrinkled hands, and a pretty young Gypsy came in with a smoking samovar on a tray, and teacups; and Mama Gabor showed the Lady Glysel how to swirl the leaves around after she'd finished her third cup.

Then, staring at the pattern of the leaves, she spoke. "Soon, soon," she said, "you, dear child, you and your good Prince will suffer distress which you will think you cannot survive. The old man whom you fear will part you. He is determined on a terrible destiny for Prince Fungo, and one even more terrible for you. What he is even now reading in the entrails is what his own twisted mind dictates, and he will proclaim it tomorrow at the enthronement. . . . Hush, hush, my dear!" she soothed as Clysel burst into tears. "Though you are facing something unspeakable, you must not lose heart. No, no! You must hasten back to the Palace with this message from Mama Gabor for Prince Fungo. Listen well! Tell him I say that when he is ordered to do evil, as he will be, he must *not* follow his true nature and refuse. Instead, he must wait till we Gypsies come up to kneel at the Throne, for that is when he must ask me one question, which I have written on this piece of paper. Tell him, and tell him again, my Lady — for all will then depend upon him. But he must not unfold the paper until that very moment!"

So the Lady Clysel, somewhat heartened, hastened back to the Palace, sought out the Prince, and told him all that had occurred. He, of course, took little notice of it, but simply to set her mind at ease he took Mama Gabor's message and promised faithfully that he would ask the question written in it when the time came.

Yarskald Throatbiter died at seven of the evening, exactly on schedule, and at once bells began tolling and trumpets and conches started braying all through the land, informing the folk that the King was duly dead and they would have a new King on the morrow.

Naturally, they had already assembled by tens of thousands: rough, surly Lower Vuthlanders in their hairy goatskin breeks, sleek Mid-Vuthian silk

and spice merchants and subtle artisans, gangling, boastful mountaineers from Upper Vuthland all swaggering in cwisamp-hide capes and bragging in coarse nasal voices. Everyone who could possibly get away was there, for the enthronement of the new King was the most exciting event of many a year, and till it was accomplished no plans could be made, no courses of action decided upon either in business or agriculture or even in matters of romance. But the crowds were in excellent spirits, for they all knew that Fungo was heir to the Throne, and all wished him well.

Immediately after the death of the King, Prince Fungo was ceremoniously taken in charge by, among others, the Lord Chamberlain, and solemnly invested with the regalia and raiment of Majesty: the Great Necklace heavy with beautifully polished cwisamp gizzard-stones, the Mace, the Sword of Power (which had, incidentally, been used to end four previous reigns), the Three Crowns symbolizing each of the realms, and the enormously heavy Robes of the Sovereign. Encumbered with these, Fungo presided at the ritual banquet, at which any number of dignitaries devoured the late King's funeral meats. He would much rather have been with his Clysmel, but he did what he knew was his duty, telling himself that next day, right after his enthronement, he and she would be united in marriage.

He slept well that night, breakfasted cheerfully, and shortly afterwards suffered himself to be escorted to the Great Square facing the Palace, where it seemed the entire population of the country had assembled, cheering themselves hoarse. The Throne stood on a dais which had three levels, surrounded by a squadron of Royal Guard cavalry and a battalion of Royal Guard infantry. On its lowest level stood the Lord Mayor of Farvuth, many members of the petty nobility, and the more worshipful sort of civil servants. On the next level up, the great nobles were proudly arrayed, all in their picturesque regional costume and gaudy with decorations and gems. But on the highest level of all, besides the Generals of the Royal Guard (of whom there were several), there was only Kostra Karbunkel and a score of his most important fellow Astrologers, Diviners, and Soothsayers.

Fungo ascended the steps to the Throne, pausing occasionally to acknowledge a bow or a curtsy, or allow his hand to be kissed — but doing so very abstractedly, for his mind was on Clysmel, who was nowhere in sight.

"Pray seat yourself, Majesty," said the Astrologer Royal, his voice like a crow's caw, and his dry, narrow face a mask of unconcealed triumph. Fungo, looking at him, saw that on an ivory table at his side was a silver salver bearing the cwisamp entrails that had decided his fate. They smelled dreadful, and he wrinkled his nose. "Where is Clysmel?" he demanded.

Karbunkel leered. "She's been told to stay home, Sire, for she has no part in these ceremonies — no, nor in your Royal future." His thin tongue darted out, licked his lips. "But I have other nice little plans for her, never fear!"

We'll see about that! Fungo thought grimly, but he forced himself to say nothing.

Then Karbunkel blew a single shrill note on an ancient horn he drew from his robes. "Let the rites proceed!" he proclaimed; and he was instantly echoed by eighty stentorian heralds stationed in every part of the square.

First the Generals of the Guard came up, knelt before Fungo, and swore absolute obedience to his every word and whim. Then the greater nobility did likewise, followed by the lesser nobles, the Lord Mayor, and the civil servants.

There was a moment of breathless silence while Karbunkel stood there, both arms held up to heaven. "*And now,*" he declared, "*now you shall learn what the history of our King Fungo's reign shall be, as revealed by these infallible signifiers!*" And he pointed at the entrails, over which a great many flies were now buzzing.

"*You, Noble King, from this moment on shall be known to all men as FUNGO THE UNRIGHTEOUS! You shall exact the cruelest taxes in our long history! You shall ravish maidens, and have innocent men put to death! Your name will be a stench in the nostrils, and will be reviled throughout the length and breadth of the Three Kingdoms! You will savagely persecute all those of whom the Astrologers Royal disapprove, especially the Gypsies! You shall be cursed by rich and poor alike, for your every act from this moment on — from this most auspicious moment on — shall damn you as enemy of all righteous men and all righteousness! You shall marry the Princess Savaka of Utt, and with her you will sleep every night of your life —*"

Here a great groan rose from the crowd, for not only were they all deeply shocked at the prognostication, but they knew that the Princess Savaka was renowned for her temper and promiscuity.

"— and —" cried out Clysomel's step-uncle, raising his voice, "*you shall rule for the term of twelve years, nine months, and eight days, and shall perish finally of fish-spears thrust severally through you! I have spoken!*"

Fungo was thoroughly stricken. He sat on his Throne, trying manfully to hold back his tears and to keep his hands from trembling too visibly, and conscious that he was pale as a ghost. He had almost cried out that the last thing he wanted was to be the *Unrighteous*, but fortunately he had remembered the message. The Astrologer bowed to him mockingly, then stepped aside so that the traditional approach of the King's subjects to the foot of the Throne could begin.

Usually, at this point in the ceremony, there was a mighty shouting from the multitude, a blaring of horns and a ruffle of drums, an eager pealing of bells, as people surged forward to pledge their loyalty. Now there was dead silence. No one moved.

Then suddenly, out of the crowd, the new King beheld two figures approaching. The first, wearing bright silken robes and garlands of precious gold coins, was Mama Gabor, tall and erect in spite of her age. Her companion, obviously younger, was similarly garbed but had her face veiled demurely.

"Let the old witch approach, Majesty," hissed Kostra Karbunkel in King Fungo's ear, "then tell her what persecutions you have in mind for her, ha-ha-ha!"

Fungo had been fumbling nervously in his purse, fearful that he might have misplaced the message, but finally he'd found it. Now, surreptitiously, he unfolded and read it.

"Your Majesty," he read, "you must ask me this question: *Mother Gabor, must I obey the cruel prophecy about my behavior, which is so much against my real nature?* Then you must not be surprised at my answer. Fear not."

As Mama Gabor knelt at his feet, he reached his hand out to her. In a loud, strange, clear voice, he asked her the question, and throughout the square the eighty heralds repeated it.

"Lord," answered the Gypsy. "No man has ever dared to dispute the auguries, so you must obey. You must obey literally and without reservation. You must become the enemy of all righteous men, and the more righteous they are, the more cruel must you be to them." Her black eyes glittered, and she winked at him. Then she stared directly at Kostra Karbunkel. "The most righteous first!"

King Fungo, naïve though he was, was by no means stupid. He stood. He looked at Clysomel's step-uncle. "Mother Gabor," he said to the Gypsy, "you can read the future, and you can delve into the natures of men. Who is the most righteous man in my Kingdom?"

"Who but your esteemed Astrologer Royal?" replied Mama Gabor.

King Fungo thereupon drew the glistening Sword of Power. "She speaks truth!" he declared. "I, Fungo the Unrighteous, shall commence my reign with the most unrighteous deed anyone can imagine. Ho! To me, Generals of the Guard!"

They came to him at the double.

"Seize that man!" he ordered, pointing at Kostra. "Bind him hand and foot. Throw him into a dung-cart, and take him forthwith to the stinking bogs and fens of our Lower Vuthland. There let him be thrown to the cwisamps (those of the footless variety) which now are in rut!"

Kostra Karbunkel struggled to prostrate himself at the King's feet, but the Generals restrained him. "Merciful Lord!" he shrieked. "How can you do so evil a deed? Don't you know that footless cwisamps in rut are so mad and mindless that they have no idea of species at all? Think what will become of me!"

"I am," King Fungo replied levelly, and the Generals bound the weeping man hand and foot and bore him away. "And I think all my loyal subjects, gathered here together, will agree that it's about as beautifully unrighteous as anything you could imagine. And now, Mother Gabor, who is the *second* most righteous man in the Kingdom?"

She did not answer, but both she and the King turned to look at the First

Assistant Astrologer Royal, a very fat man named Whelpstone.

The King nodded. "Yes, I think so," he said with a very cold smile. "Yes, indeed."

At that, poor Whelpstone came forward, quivering and shaking. "Majestic King!" he exclaimed. "I — I — we — that is — we've been considering those entrails. Yes, we have. We have reached a conclusion. Kostra Karbunkel misread those entrails. Oh yes, completely. His prognostication was full of gross errors. May we have your Royal Permission to examine them one more time?"

"If you hurry!" King Fungo replied. "You may consider them while the crowd sings our Royal Anthem. After that, I want them thrown away. Those flies are unbearable."

It was later remarked that never had the twenty-eight verses of the Anthem been sung so enthusiastically, and when the last mighty chords had died away, the whole square seemed to be waiting.

"Well?" said King Fungo to Whelpstone.

"Your Heroic Majesty, yes, yes, we have reexamined the entrails — and they've been thrown away, as you ordered, though I must say they were as fine a set of entrails as ever I've seen. I *can't* understand how Karbunkel, poor old man, went so far wrong with them. They were clear as crystal, Noble Sire —"

"Come to the point," ordered King Fungo.

"Ha-ha! I shall, I shall. The point is that, first and foremost, it should *not* have been *Un*righteous. No, never. The entrails were explicit. Sire, you should have been Fungo the *U*prighteous, a horse of a very different color —"

"Very," said King Fungo.

"And he wasn't only wrong about that, no indeed! He also was wrong about what you would do, for it was indisputable that under your benign, wise rule crops will improve, there'll be no crime problem to speak of, we'll have excellent foreign relations and a most favorable balance of trade, and you'll lower taxes and imposts dramatically. And not only that, my Lord, not only *that* — he was also wrong about the length of your reign, which will last fifty-five years, eleven months, and at least nineteen days, after which you and your Queen will succumb very peacefully of old age —"

"My *Queen*?" said King Fungo, with an edge to his voice.

"Oh, yes, Majesty, he was wrong about that too. You aren't going to marry Princess Savaka. I can't imagine how he could've missed it — you're going to marry the Lady Clysomel, his very own step-niece, and you're going to marry her this very day, right after supper!"

At that point, Mama Gabor's companion dropped her veil, and King Fungo saw that she was indeed Clysomel. Instantly, he stepped down from the Throne, put his arm round her, and brought her to sit there beside him. (It was a very wide throne.)

Of course, the heralds had dutifully echoed everything that was said, and

now the assembled Vuthlanders became almost hysterical, shouting LONG LIVE GOOD KING FUNGO! LONG LIVE FUNGO THE UPRIGHTEOUS! and singing verses of the Anthem.

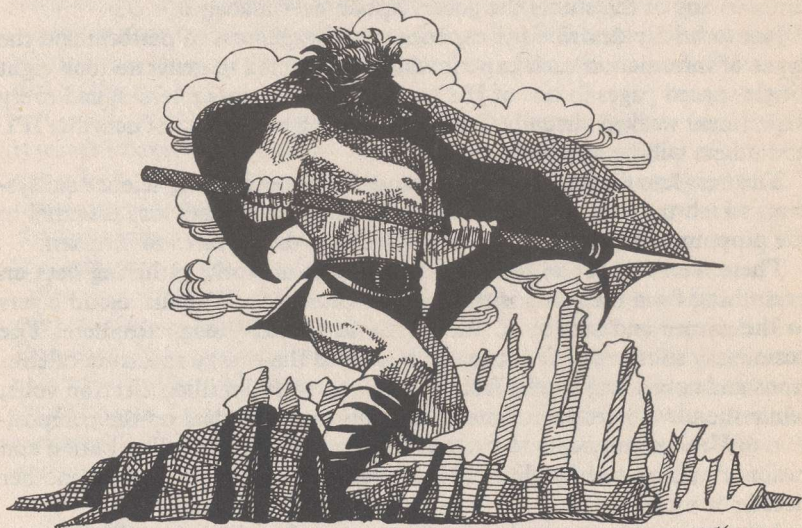
In the midst of it, Whelpstone approached the Royal couple. "Would Your Majesties, er, that is — would you consider me staying on as — as Astrologer Royal?" he asked timidly.

"As long as you mind your Ps and Qs," answered good King Fungo.

Riders sped forth, and that night there was revelry in all three Vuthlands, singing and carousing and good humor and dancing in the streets.

King Fungo and Queen Clysomel had been duly married and put to bed, destined to reign for at least fifty-five years, eleven months, and nineteen days, to have several beautiful and intelligent children, and to leave behind them a country happier and more prosperous than it ever had been.

And as to what befell Kostra Karbunkel in the stinking bogs and fens of Lower Vuthland, the less said the better. ●



Kleinism

If a machine part can be put on backward — someone will.

— Professor Arthur L. Klein (1898-1983)

URANUS, JPL, AND I

by Gene DeWeese

SCIENCE FACT

Yes, Virginia, there is a JPL.

Or, for those with longer, pulpier memories, Captain Future is alive and well and working at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

At least those were my impressions after a three-day visit to JPL during the *Voyager-Uranus* encounter. The amount of information the scientists have gotten back from the *Voyagers* is certainly enough to make you believe in an outer-space Santa Claus, and the way the JPL scientists have not only kept *Voyager 2* working during its trek from Saturn to Uranus but have even improved it, all at a distance of more than a billion miles, is at least as miraculous as any of the stunts the good Captain ever managed.

Just to briefly describe the experiments *Voyager* was to perform and the types of information each experiment was expected to generate took eight single-spaced pages in one of JPL's pre-encounter press releases, and every experiment worked virtually flawlessly, sending back reams of data that JPL and others will be analyzing for years.

The best-known data, of course, came from the imaging science subsystem, which not only produced the spectacular photos but was essential to the pinpoint navigation accuracy that allowed the pictures to be taken.

There were, however, ten other subsystems at work, gathering data on everything from the composition and temperature of Uranus' cloud layers to the nature and source of the plasma in Uranus' magnetosphere. The cosmic-ray subsystem, for instance, measured the energy spectrum of electrons and cosmic-ray nuclei from 0.5 million to 500 million electron volts, while the ultraviolet spectrometer not only gathered data on the composition of Uranus' atmosphere but will continue to study the distribution and ratios of hydrogen and helium in interplanetary space, perhaps for another decade or more.

Among the many immediate and unexpected findings was the fact that Uranus' aurora, unlike that of any other planet so far studied, requires both ultraviolet radiation and excited electrons. And the planetary pole that has been facing the sun steadily for decades was colder than the pole that has been facing away from the sun for the same period.

And, of course, there was the magnetic field of the planet, which turned out to be tilted a full 55 degrees from the rotational axis. As one news story put it, it's as if Earth's north pole were located in Oklahoma City.

At least as remarkable as the discoveries themselves, however, is the sim-

ple fact that the spacecraft is not only still functioning but, in some ways, functioning better than it did when it was launched.

First, consider the obstacles the scientists have had to overcome simply to communicate with the spacecraft. Probably the best-known obstacle is the minuscule power with which the spacecraft broadcasts all its information back to earth — approximately 20 watts, which is about the same as what the light in your refrigerator puts out. (The total power available for the entire spacecraft, including the eleven science subsystems, is less than 500 watts, which is less than half what your average electric iron uses.) Being able to pick that kind of signal up at all from two billion miles away is a bit on the mind-boggling side, even considering the massive antennae of JPL's Deep Space Network around the world.

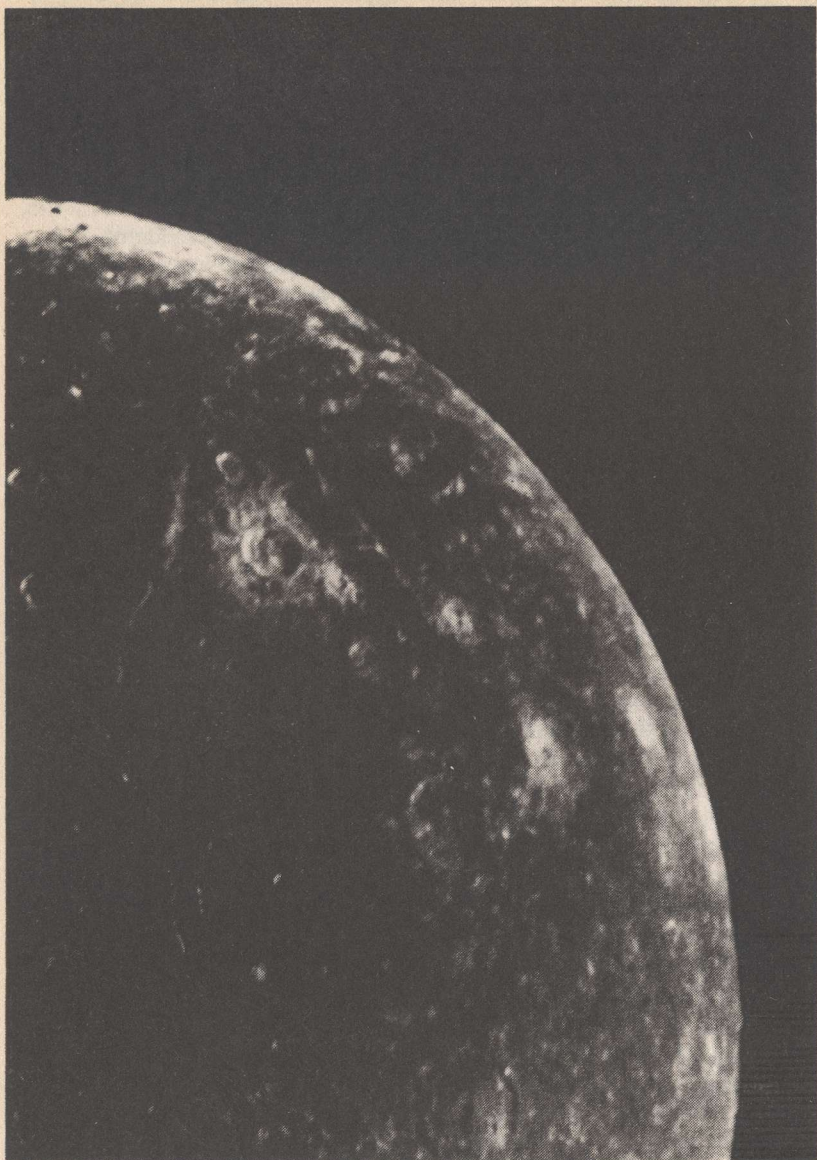
Also fairly well known is the fact that the spacecraft's main receiver died early in the mission, and the back-up receiver has a problem of its own. The nature of that problem, however, is possibly not as well known.

Originally, the receiver had a bandwidth of 200,000 hertz, which meant that as long as the signal from Earth was anywhere within that 200,000-hertz range, the spacecraft receiver would lock onto it, like the automatic tuning in a car radio. (For comparison, that 200,000 hertz is about one fifth of the entire commercial AM broadcast band, from the bottom of the radio dial to the top.)

A malfunctioning tracking-loop capacitor, however, has reduced the receiver's bandwidth to only 200 Hz, one tenth of one percent of the original, which means that the signal sent from Earth has to be very precise. To make matters worse, there are all kinds of variables that are continually changing either the frequency to which the spacecraft's receiver is tuned or the frequency at which information is being broadcast from Earth.

For one, there's Doppler shift because the receiver on the spacecraft is obviously not stationary with respect to the transmitter on Earth. And the Doppler shift is continually changing. The increased speed of the spacecraft as it was accelerated by the gravity of Uranus changed the Doppler shift by 28,000 hertz, for instance. And the shift due to Earth's rotation is another potential 3,000-Hz shift, either plus or minus, depending on whether the antenna the scientists are transmitting from is on the part of Earth that is rotating toward or away from the spacecraft.

Then there is the temperature of the spacecraft receiver, which, though controlled, still tends to change whenever the spacecraft changes attitude or configuration. For each $\frac{1}{4}$ -degree-Centigrade change in temperature, the frequency changes 100 Hz, which means that if the scientists guess wrong by a half-degree in either direction, they will end up sending a signal whose frequency is completely outside the receiver's range. And since it takes over two hours for the signal to reach the receiver and another two-plus hours for a confirmation to get back to Earth, you can see that they can't afford much trial and error. Sending the same command at different frequencies in rapid



This computer-assembled mosaic of Ariel includes many of the high-resolution frames obtained by *Voyager 2* during its close flyby of the Uranian moon. Ariel, roughly 1300 kilometers (800 miles) in diameter, exhibits varied geologic provinces. Photograph of Ariel by the Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

succession is one method they have used to work around the crippled receiver, but it's still a ticklish situation.

Despite the problems, however, JPL scientists were able to virtually completely reprogram the spacecraft's computers during the flight from Saturn to Uranus.

One of the major changes accomplished by this reprogramming was in the way images were transmitted back to Earth. Because of the greater distance to Uranus, JPL scientists knew they were going to have to transmit the images more slowly and, therefore, would not be able to store and transmit nearly as many of them. To get around this, they used what they called *data compression*. This allowed them to take more than 6,000 pictures, which, while far less than the 33,000 taken at Jupiter and the 30,000 taken at Saturn, was still far more than was thought possible when the spacecraft was launched.

For those interested in how data compression works, it's not all that complicated in theory. As most of you know, each picture is made up of thousands of picture elements, or pixels, and each pixel has a numerical value from 0 to 255 corresponding to one of the 256 shades of grey the cameras are sensitive to. Normal procedures would require eight bits to be transmitted for each pixel — 01111111 for 255, 01111110 for 254, 00000000 for 0, etc. With data compression, however, only the difference between the levels of successive pixels is transmitted. Thus, if one pixel were 254 and the next 255, the second pixel could be transmitted with just two bits, one representing a +, the other representing a 1.

All of which is easy enough to understand, but coming up with a program that will do it and then actually feeding that program into a computer a couple of billion miles away was undoubtedly another ball game altogether.

Another problem, of course, was aiming the spacecraft's cameras. Since the round-trip time for radio signals was roughly five and a half hours, there was no way the cameras could be controlled directly from Earth. Everything had to be controlled by the spacecraft's computers, which meant that the computers had to know *precisely* where the spacecraft was at all times. *And* where the Uranian moons they were to photograph were. Neither could be determined with sufficient accuracy solely by observations from Earth. With only Earth-based observations to rely on, scientists would have had to settle for a margin or error of almost a thousand miles.

During the last 32 days before the encounter, therefore, the spacecraft itself (the imaging science subsystem) made observations of the moons against the stellar background. These observations of the moons precisely determine the relative positions and speeds of the moons and the spacecraft. According to a pre-encounter press release, JPL scientists had the expected error down to 55 miles, which, they pointed out, was equivalent to hitting a target smaller than an aspirin tablet at a distance of 25 miles. From the way the actual photos matched planned photos, however, the final error must

have been far less even than that. They literally hit the head of a pin.

The final problem was the fact that the scientists would need fairly long time exposures at Uranus. The sunlight out there, after all, is roughly only $\frac{1}{400}$ what it is on Earth. About what you would get from a full moon. The problems with time exposures, however, were that the spacecraft would be moving at more than 40,000 miles an hour, and that the camera would also be moving almost 200 miles during a single fifteen-second exposure. The best resolution they could expect under those conditions was 56 kilometers, or 35 miles.

To compensate for this motion, they again reprogrammed the spacecraft's computers, this time to rotate the spacecraft during each exposure, causing the camera to move in much the way you would move a camera here on Earth to get a sharp picture of a car that was speeding past you. Most of you have probably seen the results, particularly the spectacular shots of Miranda, where resolution was estimated to be a truly amazing *600 meters*.

And all of this, remember, with a spacecraft that, when the congressional hatchet job in the seventies reduced the grand tour to a mini-grand tour, was designed to last only until the Saturn encounter in 1981.

Meanwhile, back on Earth, just to add a dramatic footnote, JPL got a call from the European space agency literally in the middle of the Uranus encounter (5:00 A.M. on January 24, 1986), asking for help with its Halley's mission. Communications from its spacecraft, it seemed, had suddenly disappeared. The European space agency was unable to pick up any of the spacecraft's signals, and it wanted to "borrow" one of the antennae from JPL's Deep Space Network in an effort to reestablish communication and, it hoped, find out what was wrong. As it turned out, JPL was able to oblige, and the Halley's problem (a temporarily misaligned spacecraft antenna) was solved.

All in all, it was an exciting weekend, and you couldn't help but come away with the feeling that JPL's people could deal successfully with almost anything that came up. They were even moderately successful with the huge mass of reporters and the flock of science-fiction writers and other semicelebrities they were hosting during the encounter.

As for how I came to be included in the weekend, I'm still not all that sure, except that a lot of luck was doubtlessly involved.

It started almost two months before the encounter, back in early December, 1985, when my wife and I received a VIP invitation to the JPL visitor center for the Uranus encounter, January 25, 1986. My first thought was that it must be from a different JPL, that the whole thing was probably some science-fictionally oriented version of the come-ons we get all the time that offer various prizes to get us to visit a land development and listen to a two-hour sales pitch for lake-front cottages or desert condominiums.

A call to the number on the invitation, however, proved that it was indeed from *the* JPL. No one at the number, however, knew all that much about

what the invitation entailed or how we happened to have received one. Instead, they transferred me to the public relations number, and from the people there and from other SF and science writers, I came up with at least a nebulous picture of what had happened.

At the Jupiter and Saturn encounters, I was told, a number of SF writers were given press passes, enabling them to sit in on news conferences, watch the information as it came back from the spacecraft, and just generally wander around the press facilities. For Uranus, however, press passes were much more limited, and the SF writers and other non-press types were to be entertained and informed somewhere separate from the press. Also, it was said, someone involved with the encounter was an SF fan and wanted more SF writers, maybe even the entire SFWA membership, to be invited. Since there obviously wasn't room for all those hundreds, apparently a lucky few were picked more or less at random from the membership.

In any event, once it was established that the invitation was for real, it became a question of whether or not it was affordable, even though it would be tax deductible. When my first call to the airlines revealed that the standard round-trip fare for two was well over \$1,000, the answer seemed a definite *no*. In the end, however, three things tipped the scales the other way. First, there was an eagle-eyed travel agent who found a couple of red-eye specials for in the neighborhood of \$400 total. Second, I stumbled across someone who works for Milwaukee-based *Astronomy Magazine's* little brother, *Odyssey*, and he offered me tickets to a pre-encounter symposium at CalTech with Carl Sagan and Freeman Dyson (the grandfather of *Ringworld*, so to speak). And finally, your then-*Amazing* and obliging editor, George Scithers, offered not only to buy a short article on the weekend but also to get me a press pass to go along with the so-called VIP invitation.

As a result, on Friday, January 24, 1986, I found myself driving to Chicago in the middle of the night to catch a 4:00 A.M. flight to Los Angeles. (My wife was taking a later flight at a more civilized hour, early Friday afternoon.) Luckily, I was able to doze for a couple of hours on the plane, so I was at least semi-alert when I finally reached L.A. at about 6:00 A.M. Even if I had been sound asleep on arrival, however, I would have been wide awake after being driven to the car rental agency a mile or two from the airport. The driver, a chatty sort, seemed set on proving that his high-rise minibus could take corners as well as any ground-hugging sports car.

The next problem was finding JPL. JPL had included a map and detailed instructions, but, as with most such things, reality tossed in a few glitches that hadn't shown up in the theory. (Even JPL isn't omnipotent, it seems.) The main problem was that little of the terminology on the dozens of free-way signs I was supposed to follow actually matched the terms on the map or in the instructions. In the end, I simply followed the signs that pointed to Pasadena, found the motel at which I had reservations, and got another map and more instructions there.

Even with the problems, I was able to locate JPL and get my press pass in time for the daily 10:00 A.M. news briefing in Von Karman auditorium, where a full-size *Voyager* spacecraft stands across the room from a display showing everything that was included in the famous "long-playing record" sent along with each *Voyager*. *Voyager* information aside (by the time this sees print six or more months after the fact, you will undoubtedly have seen the pictures and read the reports elsewhere), this and subsequent briefings were something of a revelation in a couple of ways.

First, there was the sheer enthusiasm of the people giving the briefings, particularly project scientist Dr. Ed Stone and Dr. Laurence Soderblom of the imaging science team. They and most of the others were as absorbed in the wonder of what *Voyager* was sending back as any SF fan could be, probably even more so because their exhaustive knowledge of the science involved gave them greater insights into how truly startling and remarkable many of the discoveries were.

Then there was the press.

I have to admit that I was somewhat prejudiced going in. In the sixties I worked for several years on Apollo, writing manuals on the LEM and Command Module guidance systems and programmed instruction texts on space navigation. When I saw the often misleading and occasionally inaccurate coverage of Apollo on the TV networks and in some newspapers, it struck me that, if the coverage could be this far off base there, it was probably equally off base in other areas.

Since then, my suspicions had been confirmed often enough to let me hang onto my prejudices. However, sitting in on these press briefings and doing a little watching and listening forced me to realize a couple of things.

First, when you are working on a deadline under relatively chaotic conditions on a story concerning matters in which you are not yourself an expert, and especially when you are trying to condense a huge mass of information into a few hundred words that cover only the highlights, it would seem to be virtually impossible *not* to make a few errors.

And second, I realized that there's more to the press than TV, newspapers, and news magazines like *Time*, *Newsweek*, etc. I had read *New Scientist*, *Science News*, *Scientific American*, and others for years, but I had never thought of them as part of the press. They were the publications where the *real* stories of what was happening in science appeared, the places the press used as sources. At these press briefings, however, it became obvious that many of these were indeed part of the press, laboring under many of the same difficulties as the rest of the press.

Despite all this, however, and despite the fact that I gained an increased respect for the scientific press, my prejudice against the general press hasn't been totally wiped out, particularly after looking through the coverage of the Uranus encounter provided by a dozen or so major newspapers. Only one that I saw (the *Chicago Tribune*, I believe) had anything on the front

page, while most others, like the *Milwaukee Journal*, buried the coverage far inside and limited it severely.

Incidentally, the difference between network-level press and scientific press leaped out at me a couple of times during the press briefing in which the 55-degree tilt of Uranus' magnetic field was announced. One of the science reporters, for instance, asked if it was possible that the tilt was not permanent but that *Voyager* might have caught Uranus in the middle of a magnetic field reversal of the same type that has happened several times here on Earth. On the other hand, all that one of the network reporters wanted to know was how many pictures *Voyager* would take during the encounter and when they would be available.

After a few hours in and around the press room, however, it was time to head back to Los Angeles to pick my wife up at the airport. Between her flight being late and my usual troubles navigating the freeways, we made it to the symposium at CalTech back in Pasadena just in time.

Sagan was, as always, interesting, but Dyson, with his suggestion that the next generation of spacecraft should be bioengineered and grown rather than designed and built, came close to stealing the show. Dr. Michael Hoskin of Cambridge, however, actually did steal the show with his account, told in the voice of Sir William Herschel, of the discovery of Uranus. At one point, he chided Sagan for calling the planet Uranus rather than using its true name, the Georgian Star, which he had given it in honor of his sponsor, King George. Sagan responded that it was a bit late to return to that terminology but that he understood Sir William's desire to use the planet to perpetuate the name of his "funding agency."

The next day, Saturday, was split between the VIP group and the press room, each of which had its advantages and disadvantages.

Food, for instance, was one of the VIP group's advantages. The room we were in was not only kept supplied with snacks of all sorts but was next to a cafeteria in case anyone wanted more than snacks. Those in the press room had to fend for themselves.

On the other hand, the VIP group had a few strictly earthbound problems the press room didn't. There was, for instance, the drape-and-tape dilemma. In addition to a series of TV monitors around the room, JPL had set up a large screen at the front of the room, on which it would not only show what was on the monitors during the press briefings but would show a series of background and PR tapes and a number of slides to illustrate some live presentations by various JPL personnel. Unfortunately, there was a huge window directly behind the screen, a window on which the sun shone directly, and the regular drapes let through too much light for the screen. The first solution was to tape some black, thoroughly opaque material over the entire window, and that worked beautifully — for half hour or so. At that point, the tape started coming unstuck.

The next solution was to move the screen to the opposite end of the room,

but the move was aborted when it was discovered that some of the equipment wouldn't work at that end. (A lack of some of the necessary connections, I think, but since I only overheard part of the discussion among the people trying to make the move, I'm not totally sure.)

The final solution was to find a different way of fastening the opaque material over the window, which was apparently done. Dr. Richard Green, the man in charge of the group, explained that the tape, heated to over 100 degrees by the direct sunlight, had simply melted, but that whatever they subsequently fastened the material with didn't have that problem. In fact, he said, he suspected that the main problem with this new material would be that, several months in the future, the building maintenance people would probably still be trying to figure out how to get it all removed.

Dr. Green, by the way, is another reason for the excellent impression JPL projected. Despite the problems and the hectic pace he had to maintain to keep everything under control, he was constantly courteous and willing — and able — to answer individual questions of all sorts.

For instance, in a minute or less, he was able to make sense of something that had been bothering me for years: how the so-called slingshot effect works. It had always seemed to me that, no matter how much energy a spacecraft gained falling into the gravity well of a planet, it would lose just as much climbing back out. And yet, *Voyager* had gained thousands of miles per hour when it swung by Jupiter and again when it swung by Saturn.

Hello:

Neptune

Goodbye:

This logo was designed by Govert Schilling (Utrecht, Netherlands) and Susan Slater (Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada) on January 24, 1986.

The energy, Dr. Green explained, comes not from simply falling into and climbing out of a planet's gravity well. It comes from stealing a tiny bit of the planet's *orbital* speed. It's roughly analogous to being in a glider and hooking onto a freight train with a long rubber band. If the train were standing still, the glider would be pulled in by the rubber band, would fly past it, and would, when the rubber band was released, continue on with roughly the same speed it had before.

If the train were moving, however, it would be a different story altogether. The glider would be pulled toward the train as before, but because the train would be moving, the train's speed would be added to the speed gained simply by the contraction of the rubber band. The train itself would lose a small amount of speed in the transaction, but it would be minimal.

In the case of Jupiter and *Voyager*, the contrast is even greater. According to Dr. Green (if I can correctly remember the figures he gave me), *Voyager* gained more than 30,000 kilometers per hour, while Jupiter lost approximately one foot per 400,000 years.

And speaking of scientific explanations, one of the JPL people also managed to make the term *forward scattering of light* a lot clearer than anyone else I had ever heard. Forward scattering of light is what scientists look for when the spacecraft passes through the shadows of a planet's rings. In the case of Saturn, it was said, there was much forward scattering of light, indicating there were many small, dustlike particles in the rings. At Uranus, however, there was virtually none, indicating, it was said, that the rings were made of much larger chunks of material.

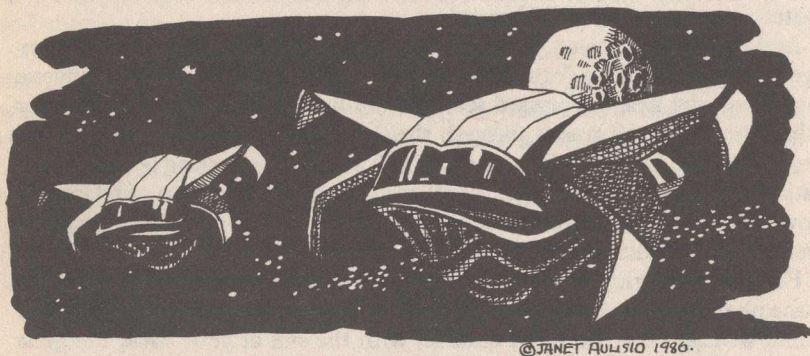
Forward scattering in planetary rings, the speaker went on to say, was the same phenomenon you observe on Earth whenever you look through a dirty window. Looked at from the outside, with the sun at your back, the glass will look clear. But if you look out from the inside, toward the sun, you will see every smear and every smudge with perfect clarity — all due to the fact that the sun's light has been *forward scattered* by the tiny particles of dirt on the glass.

Oddly enough, my only negative impressions that day came not from anyone connected with JPL but from indirect encounters with some of the other SF writers present. This is not to throw stones indiscriminately because several old hands — Jack Williamson, for instance — were obviously as interested in seeing and hearing the presentations and news briefings as were first-timers like my wife and I. Several others, however, seemed to be there primarily to chat with each other, as if the encounter were simply another regional SF con in whose programming they weren't particularly interested. Even here, however, Dr. Green came through, eventually managing to herd the talkers out into the adjacent cafeteria so the remainder could watch and listen and question without having to put up with cocktail-party background chatter. And to a few of those obviously interested ones, he extended an invitation to return Sunday for a second, unscheduled day

with another VIP group. Needless to say, we jumped at the chance.

As I said earlier, it was an exciting weekend, in more ways than one, and I only hope that *Voyager* will still be working when it passes Neptune in 1989 and that I will be invited back to watch.

Gene DeWeese has been writing both fiction and nonfiction regularly since the mid-sixties. He has won both best novel and best juvenile book awards from the Council for Wisconsin Writers. His short stories have appeared in The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction, Mike Shayne's Mystery Magazine, Amazing® Stories, and many other publications. With Robert Coulson, another long-time contributor to Amazing Stories, he has cowritten several novels.



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HUMAN AFFAIRS
by Robert Coulson
art: Nicholas Jainschigg



Robert ("Buck") Coulson and his wife Juanita are SF fans of long standing; their fanzine *Yandro* won a Hugo in 1965 but in the past decade has moved asymptotically toward the back burner as professional writing took precedence.

Buck has written a number of novels in collaboration with Gene DeWeese; for a couple of "Man from U.N.C.L.E." books they used the pseudonym "Thomas Stratton."

Adam looked up from the TV when the door slammed. "About time you got back," he said. "I'm hungry."

"You could always fix yourself something, you know," Eve told him. "It was such a marvelous day, I walked down to the woods and then watched the volcano awhile. It was a very stimulating experience; you should try it sometime."

Adam snorted. "I haven't got time to watch volcanoes."

"You have time to watch TV, though, I notice. I can't see how you can stay glued to it, when all it has are animal programs and cartoons. It's a vast wasteland. Now, if there were a few shows about real people . . ."

"How can you have shows about real people when there aren't any except us? Anyway, after I've spent a day doctoring a sick hippo, I don't feel like being stimulated. I want to relax. And I'm still hungry, so what's for supper?"

"Oh, I don't know. I might try a spinach soufflé, whole wheat toast, vegetable soup, milk, and perhaps strawberries and cream for dessert."

"We had that last night."

"It's a good healthy meal. You can't exist on cheese sandwiches and beer, you know."

Adam shrugged. "Whatever you want to fix." The program ended, and he shut off the TV. "I suppose you just happened to meet the snake while you were out."

"No, I didn't just *happen* to meet him; I went past his place deliberately."

"I don't like the idea of you seeing so much of him. I don't trust him."

"Well, you never seem to have time for me. You're always off doing something with your animals, and when you come home you grab a beer and sit in front of the TV. You don't even appreciate my cooking."

"It's just that . . ." Adam began.

"Besides, what harm can he do? This is Eden, where everything is perfect. Not to mention monotonous. Nothing ever happens here; a little harm might be interesting."

"You don't even know what harm means. Look, Eve, I have to be out with the animals. We have dominion over them, and that implies responsibility. I can't just walk away from it; there's a lot of work to do. You could help, if you would."

"Oh, keeping the house clean, cooking, washing dishes, doing the laundry isn't enough for you? Do you know how hard it is to launder a fig leaf? I'm not going to do your work, too."

"Think of it as joining the labor force, making a career for yourself."

"If I have a career, you're going to have to help with the housework. I'm not going to get a job just so you can watch more TV."

Adam sighed. "Have it your own way."

After the meal, Adam went back to the TV, leaving Eve to wash dishes. Finally she came back to the living room. "If you really want a different

meal . . ." she said, and paused.

He looked interested. "You have some ideas?"

"Well . . ." she hesitated and then continued. "The snake mentioned that animal flesh should be edible."

"You want me to kill an animal?" Adam was outraged.

"No, no, I don't want you to kill one. But they die sometimes, and, well, they're not *using* their flesh after they're dead. And you said we have dominion over them."

"The idea is utterly revolting," Adam snapped. "Forget it."

Eve sighed theatrically.

The next day Adam had to extract a rotten tooth from a tiger, and came home tired and a trifle bloody. The tiger's other teeth, he'd discovered, were in perfect shape. The animal had apologized afterward, of course, but the bite still hurt. He threw open the door of his house and found Eve and the snake having cocktails in the living room.

"What's going on?" he demanded.

"Greetings, old boy," said the snake. "You look a bit disheveled, what?"

Adam snarled at him. He'd been taking lessons in snarling from one of the leopards, and this seemed to be a good occasion to use his ability.

Eve hurried over. "You look terrible," she said. "Hard day?"

He almost snarled at Eve, but restrained himself, and stamped into the bathroom to clean and bandage the wound. After changing clothes, he returned to the living room, where Eve and the snake were discussing all the recent gossip of Eden.

"... and then she said that she never knew that a leopard could change its spots," the snake said, chuckling at his own story. Eve laughed delightedly, while Adam looked bewildered.

"I don't see anything funny about that," he said.

"You never see anything funny about anything," Eve told him.

"One must envision the entire milieu to obtain the humor," the snake said.

"Well, don't tell it over again," Eve said. "Why don't you two relax, and I'll prepare dinner?"

Adam grunted, and the snake bowed, and they retired to the couch. After a short silence, Adam roused himself to the duties of a host.

"Want a beer?" he inquired.

"No, thank you, old fellow. I never drink beer; it's so plebeian."

"Skinny fellow like you could use the calories, though. I don't see you working all that much; how do you stay so thin?"

"Please, old chap, that's fashionably slim, not thin. I suppose it's partly nervous energy; I'm very high-strung, you know. And perhaps hereditary. Which reminds me of something I wanted to ask you. We animals are born and die, and in between we reproduce ourselves. I've been wondering why you and Eve do none of this?"

"We just don't, that's all. We have dominion over the animals; it would be inefficient if we died and God had to train somebody else."

"I suppose so. Seems to be a rather dull life, however. I suspect that Eve isn't satisfied, what? Females seem to have this urge toward motherhood."

"Watch your language," Adam told him.

"But don't you have any urge to question the . . . *err* . . . setup? Things could have occurred differently, you know."

"I don't see how. Why should I question anything? It works; I always say, if it ain't broke don't fix it."

"Yes, I know you do." The snake sighed. "Simply no imagination, old top. Pity, but there it is. You and Eve aren't really suited, you know. She's such a lively person; a Gemini. I suppose you're a Taurus."

"Huh?"

"Never mind," the snake told him, sighing again.

The meal was not an unqualified success. Eve and the snake resumed their gossip, while Adam glowered and methodically cleaned his plate. Afterwards, the snake declined Eve's invitation to spend the evening, and Adam went to bed early.

A week later, after another spinach soufflé, Eve brought out something for dessert that Adam had never seen before; it seemed to be something juicy baked inside a pastry shell. He was intrigued, and asked what it was.

"It's called apple pie," Eve told him. "I got the recipe from the snake. It's supposed to be an aphrodisiac for human males."

Adam ignored the latter part of the explanation as he rose in wrath from his chair. "You mean, you picked the fruit of the Tree?" he demanded.

"Yes, I did. We use the other fruit, and saying that we can't use that one is silly; there's no reason for it. Besides, you always complain about my meals being monotonous, and then when I try something different, you don't like it."

"Eve, you broke one of the prime laws. We'll be punished for it."

"Oh, you never understood the creative urge," she informed him, hand dramatically on brow. "True artists can't be bound by mere laws."

The next morning, Adam was approached by an extremely agitated rhinoceros. It had been a bad morning; Eve had apparently gone out without making breakfast, and he'd had to make do with orange juice and bread, because the toaster wasn't working. "Now what?" he demanded.

"I'm terribly sorry, sir," the rhino apologized, "but there's a rumor going around that Eve and the snake have defected, and we thought you should be informed. One of our owls saw them sneaking out the Gate last night, carrying suitcases."

"Sneaking out! What was the guard at the Gate doing?"

"Well, *err*, there was this female angel hanging around just before Eve and the snake left, and, well . . . We understand they've both been called on the carpet this morning."

The announcement from the manager that Eden was being closed for repairs didn't surprise Adam too much. His bags were already packed.

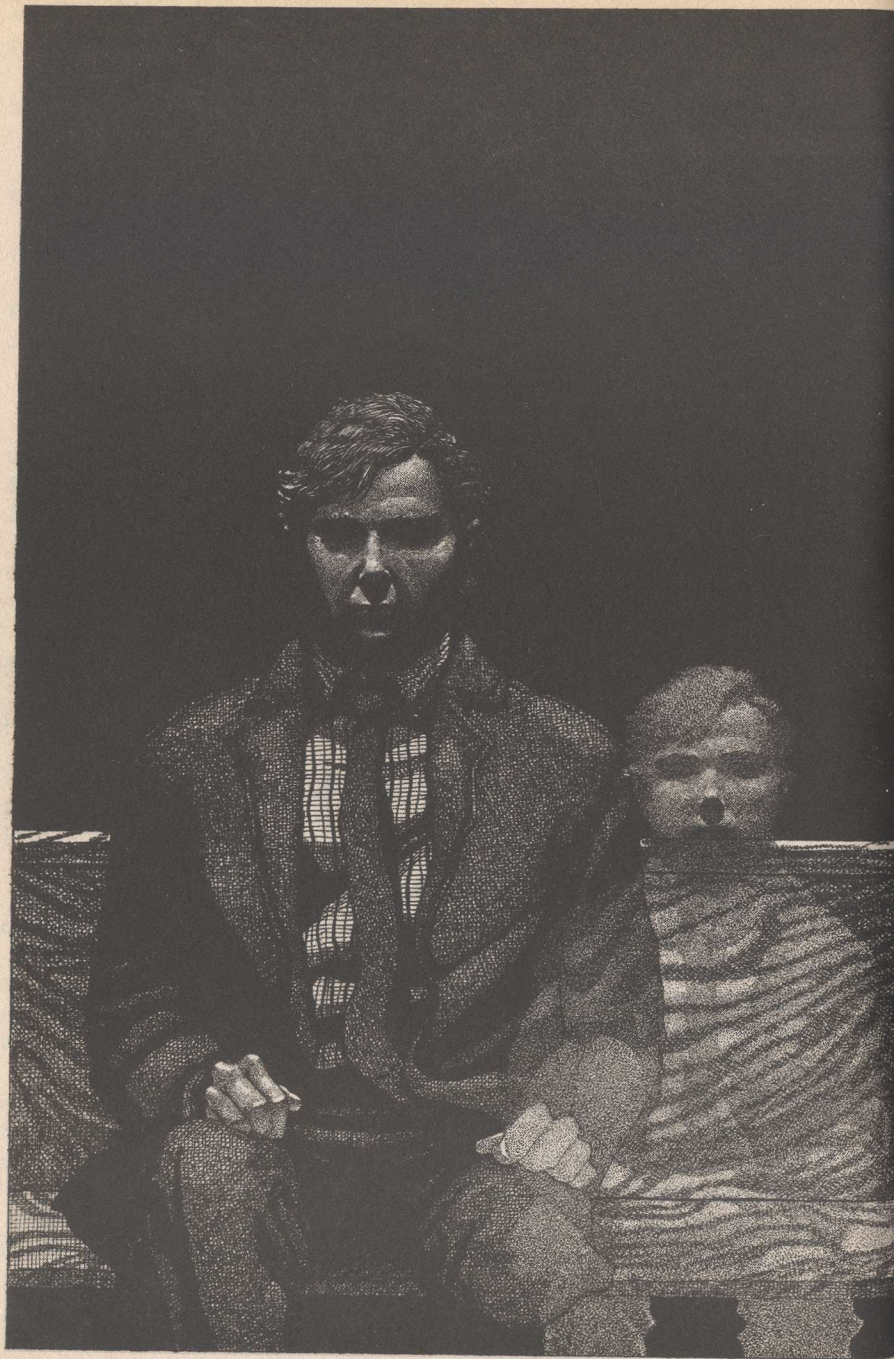
He never saw Eve and the snake again. In later years, he sometimes wondered if they'd had descendants, and what those creatures might be like.



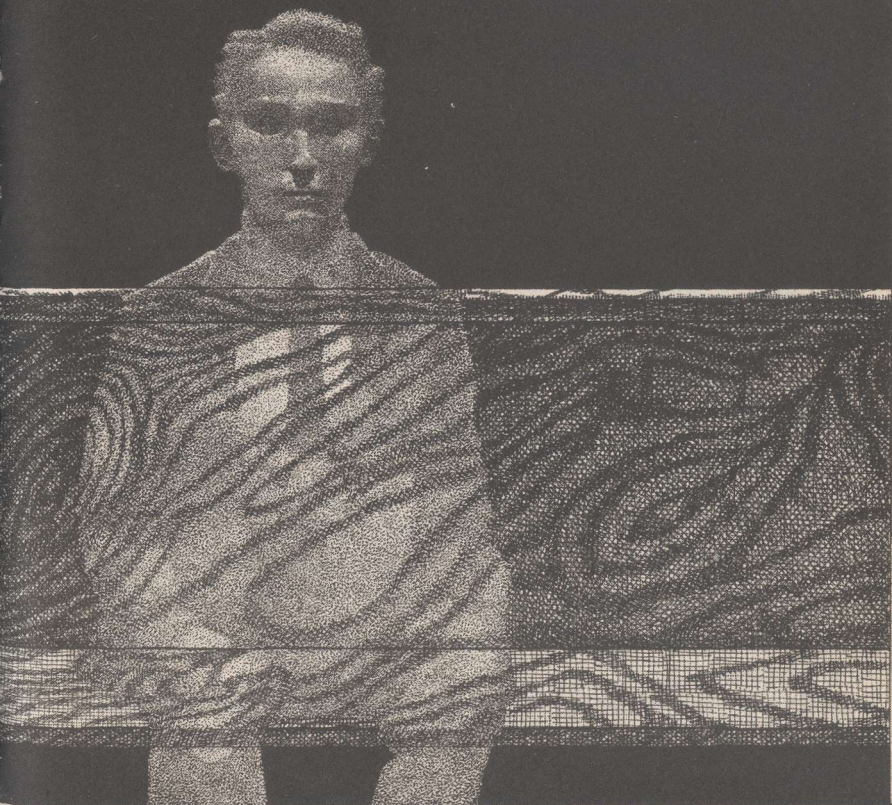
PALACES ON PLUTO?

Here the dream-automata, with a noise of whirling wheels
Open diaphanous orifices/in response to the sunspark; to life long hidden
Behind the dead body of Charon
Ice-tendrils
Drain the color out of day
As red chambers in the hills resound with work: the starborn engines
Year-worn, multi-jointed as the bones of a mad thought/ resume their task
Of building cities of ideal reason (against the gods of Absolute Zero)

— Andrew Joron



CAME UP RUNNING
by Forest Arthur Ormes
art: Janet Aulisio



When the train arrived, the conductor warned me as I got off: "If you miss the 6:10, you're stuck here till midnight, young man."

"Thanks," I said sarcastically.

I placed my foot securely below me, then securely onto the platform.

Thump.

Slight or near slips I hate. If I'm going to fall, I want to fall.

Thump.

It was misty outside, so I had to attend to the contour of the railroad's cement walkway as I set the tips of my crutches down.

Thump.

I could feel the handles becoming slippery as I moved.

I squeezed harder.

Thump.

As the gate went up, I could see the train slowly vanish. The trees behind the railroad station seemed to stare back at me now, as if their leafless, dark visage knew well the past I sought.

Thump.

I could have taken a taxi to my location, but somehow I wanted to walk.

Thump.

So I left the train station behind me and disappeared into November's mist. On my way there, a small, rat-like dog ran out from the narrow driveway of a wooden house and began snapping at my crutches. I shouted, but the mutt kept at it until the next block.

I pushed on.

Thump. Thump.

"On your stomachs!"

I stood in the courtyard and listened to him drill the boys.

"Push ups!" he snapped.

I had read the sign when I entered: GREENVILLE HOME SOCIETY. I had arrived at my destination.

"Up and running!" he shouted.

Behind the coach, facing the rows of boys, I could see the abutments of the long, familiar corridor leading to the dining hall.

"On your stomachs!" he commanded.

The spaciousness of the orphanage grounds had diminished over the past twenty-five years. Time can do that to one's perceptions.

"Push ups!" he snapped.

But the memory remains.

"Up and running!" he commanded.

Because I could not forget. I had stood among those rows of boys who came up running.

Behind the boys — who were only memories in their strained but smiling faces — I could see the high-hung swings of the playground. For short boys

like myself, they had always presented difficulty. I could see the stream flowing beyond the swings. The reality of an old, established subdivision obstructed my view to a clearer past.

I left the empty courtyard, the empty playground, the buried stream bed and pushed on up the sidewalk toward the administration building.

"Some come here looking for their roots," the Administrator was telling me. "One woman came to us looking for her birth certificate. We gave her a report card from the fifth grade instead, plus an apology that we did not have what she wanted. The woman was delighted. She had forgotten about her student days here."

He had introduced himself to me as Mr. Myron L. Sitloe, and had taken me up a flight of stairs to the only office on the top floor landing.

"So you store the files of former residents?" I asked.

"We preserve their records. Files from thirty or forty years ago will soon be on microfilm."

"That's a long time for some folks to look back."

"It seems to help," he answered.

Outside our window an old woman appeared from the mist, hobbling forward on a cane.

"Today our buildings house the elderly," Sitloe said, when he noticed me staring at her. "Twenty-five years ago, when you were here, it was reversed. Children outnumbered —"

"I know," I interrupted.

"You remember?"

"Too much."

He seemed to study me before asking: "How can I help you?"

After a long silence, I answered: "I have dreams."

"Oh?"

"Of a tunnel."

"We have a tunnel here. Connected to this very building."

"A chapel," I added.

"Remodeled," he answered, and smiled. "You just entered it."

"So my dreams have come from some reality. I always wondered about that."

"If you have come here to test that reality, I can provide you with the records of your stay here. I can take you on a tour. I can tell you about the history of the orphanage. Years, months . . ."

"I haven't come here for facts!" I snapped. "I've been living with facts since . . ."

Sitloe gave a quick look at my crutches.

"I'm sorry. Most people return here seeking only facts."

His grey, pin-striped suit and vest seemed to sag as he repeated sadly: "Only facts."

"That old woman who just passed? She was an orphan here," he informed me as he stared out the window.

"And now she has returned — like me," I answered.

"Many children came to the Home Society in those days, Charles. They came to us bruised, cracked, and damaged. Some few came shattered and broken. The Home Society did the best they could. Good, caring foster parents were found when possible. Too often, however, all we could do was feed and bed. And hopefully prevent further damage. Sometimes, years later, the Home Society is offered a chance to be of further service."

"Like the service you gave to that old lady with a cane? Listen, Sitloe! I haven't come here for services. I've had more services offered to me than you can shake my way in a hundred years. I've had orders for a prosthesis that, when it arrived, fit so badly it rubbed my leg raw. I've had medical students come around and ask me to raise my 'stump, please, sir.' A second-year resident came into my room and gave me a textbook explanation of why I still felt my leg where I could only see a white sheet, then said: 'I've seen a hundred cases like yours.' And when I screamed: 'This is the first time for me, idiot!' he had me put on tranquilizers. Oh, and just in case you're thinking of offering me the services of the Greenville Home Society psychiatrist, forget it. The VA has thrown enough counseling my way to last me fifty years. I don't need any more head repairs."

I grabbed my crutches and pushed myself up.

"Thanks, Sitloe," I said. "If I'm still alive when I reach sixty-five, I'll apply for your senior citizen housing. At least that would fit the pattern. I don't know why I even bothered to return here," I shrugged. "So long."

During this time Sitloe had remained sitting at his desk calm and unperturbed. Only his short, conservative haircut appeared ruffled.

I turned and moved toward the door.

"What about twenty-five years?" I heard behind me.

I stopped.

"You said you have had dreams."

I maneuvered around to face him.

"I've told you as much."

"Of a tunnel, of a chapel . . ."

"Yes . . ."

"Of a friend?"

I didn't respond.

"Of a friend here in the orphanage?"

Sitloe had touched it. He had touched one side of the memory which had brought me back.

Once again memory was resurrected. I stared out the window as rows of boys waited for the coach to command.

"On your stomachs!" I could hear.

"Push ups!" he shouted.

I could see myself out there now.

"Up and running!" came the order.

Rising slowly. Tired but not so tired that I could not stand and begin to run in place. My friend ran effortlessly at the front of the rows — the leader of us all. I pictured him winking at me and saying: "Come on, Charlie."

"Michael Marchetti," I answered Sitloe.

"You were friends here together in the orphanage."

"Dead," I responded.

"I know."

"And you know that Michael Marchetti's death began here at Greenville Home Society?"

"Rockdale," Sitloe pronounced sadly.

The sound of the name stunned me. Rockdale was the other side of Michael Marchetti's memory, the other side of me.

I recovered enough to attempt to minimize Sitloe's utterance.

"Well, Mr. Sitloe. Reverend Rockdale was a man to remember."

"And his sermon?" he continued.

Now Sitloe had touched it all. He had touched the memory — all and complete — which brought me here: nine thousand, one hundred twenty-five reminders, repeated to me once a day, for the past twenty-five years. For the first six of those years, while I was in the orphanage, they had been an inspiration. For the next two years in the Army, they were a curse, then a torment when I was shipped to Vietnam. When I stepped on a mine and lay there with my own leg lying beside me, the reminders became rage. My rage mixed with grief, then obsession when Michael Marchetti was killed in action, forty-one days before he was due to return home.

"And his sermon?" he repeated.

I hesitated: "How do you know about Rockdale and his sermon?"

"I believe I can be of further service to you, Charles."

"How do you know about the sermon?" I demanded.

"As you know, he gave them once a year," Sitloe responded. And then asked: "Would you like a personal tour? We begin with the tunnel. It really does exist, you know."

"You haven't answered my question."

"The tour must begin with the tunnel, Charles. It can end with the sermon."

He got up and walked to the door.

"I'll meet you in the basement. Just take the stairs straight down," he said.

Then he disappeared out the door and down the stairs.

"I know about the sermon!" I hollered after him. "I was part of the audience!"

In the basement, Sitloe removed a solitary key from his wallet and

unlocked a steel-covered door. KEEP OUT, the sign read as it closed behind me. We began walking through the tunnel. Sitloe had to lower his head to avoid the low-hung pipes connected to the ceiling. Without difficulty, I moved upright.

"See, Charles," he said. "Your dreams come from substantial walls and ceiling."

He slapped the wall with his open hand.

I looked at him sternly. I was thinking about the sermon.

"The building inspectors condemned the tunnel as unsafe," he told me. "They said it was too old. That the walls and ceiling were unsound. Only on rare occasions do I use it now."

We climbed a short flight of stairs. At the top, Sitloe removed the same key from his pocket and opened a similar steel-covered door. Again I caught the words: KEEP OUT.

The door closed behind us.

Silently, he climbed another flight of stairs. I followed. We passed through a hallway and then on into an open room of boys who were at various points of climbing, tugging, and pulling themselves into shirts, ties, shoes, and slacks.

A blond, pug-nosed boy ran up and said, "Twelve-year-old night, Mr. Sitloe. We have to dress up, but at least we get out of doing stuff like dishes."

"I'm sure you're happy about that," Sitloe answered.

I could have told him about twelve-year-old night. How all the boys in the communion class were obliged to attend. How it was the same way when I was here, twenty-five years ago.

But the same attention-seeking voice interrupted.

"I'm a twelve-year-old, too," it said.

"Is that right," I said, and looked down, amused.

"Sure am. All of us here are twelve-year-olds. I'm still shorter than the other kids, but don't worry, I'll catch up."

I saw him glance at my crutches as he spoke.

"See that big kid over there?" he gestured.

I looked over at a tall, heavy boy holding his hand out to receive a stick of chewing gum from a handsome, well-built boy whose movement seemed sensitive and certain. The big kid accepted the gum as if owed it and — thankless — limped away. The giver looked on after him, then bent down to push a foot into his other shoe.

"He's almost toughest. He can even beat some of the thirteen- and fourteen-year-olds. He's not as smart and tough as the guy that gave him the gum, though. That's Mike."

"Mike?" I asked.

"Yeah. You know him?" he asked, defiantly.

"I had a friend once. His name was Mike, too."

"Well, I bet my friend is tougher than your friend ever was."

"Maybe," I smiled.

"... 'cause my friend Mike Marchetti can out-wrestle and out-box any kid around."

"Mike Marchetti!" I exclaimed.

"Yep. Mike Marchetti. And you know what else? He can run faster than any kid in his school, and shoot a basket from farther out than any . . ."

"Mike! Michael Marchetti!" I repeated, incredulous.

"Yeah, that's Mike all right," he said with a triumphant tone in his voice.

"And do you know what Mike says about tonight?"

I looked at him, amazed and shocked.

"He says it's not a bad trade. Not a bad trade at all. No dishes, and no gym class either."

"Gym class?" I asked, numb.

"That's right."

He went over to the window and pointed.

"Those are the little kids. They have to go to gym class. Not one of us twelve-year-olds have to go. Not one of us."

"On your stomach!" I heard, outside. And then clearly and unmistakably:

"Push ups!"

I rushed over to the window.

"Up and running!" I heard the coach shout a minute later.

In front of me, on the orphanage lawn, I watched rows of boys come up running. Beside them, the long, familiar corridor stretched into my view. Somehow I knew the high-hung swings groaned in pendulous clockwork on the other side.

The hills and river had returned.

"Not a bad trade, is it?" the pug-nose continued.

I tried to give him a nodding smile.

"And all we have to do is listen to Reverend Rockdale's sermon."

"Rockdale! Sermon!"

"Do you know Reverend Rockdale, too?" the voice asked.

I wanted to shout. I wanted to warn. I wanted to warn all of them to avoid the sermon no matter what chores they were assigned as punishment. Instead I heard the coach repeat his command:

"On your stomachs!"

"Pushups!"

"What about twenty-five years?" Sitloe had rattled off. And then he had taken me for a walk through a tunnel.

"Hey Mike!" the pug-nose hollered beneath my shocked face. "This man says he knows you! And Reverend Rockdale, too!"

The Michael Marchetti whom I knew as a twelve-year-old stopped dressing and looked up at me, and then down at the tips of my crutches.

"Does he say that? Or do you say that, Charlie Sullivan?" I heard.

"Sorry, mister," he said and looked up at me. "Charlie knows I don't know you."

He gave my crutches a troubled stare, then resumed buttoning a rarely used white shirt — rarely used, I knew, because I had grown up seeing it collect dust in my dresser drawer.

Twelve-year-old Charlie Sullivan looked up and gave thirty-seven-year-old Charlie Sullivan a hurt and angry stare.

"Tell him, mister. Why don't you tell him?"

I stood there, wordless. Outside, the coach was shouting, "One, two, one, two," in numbered rhythm.

"Up and running," I heard his voice echo.

Beside me, twelve-year-old Charlie Sullivan moved away from my unanswering silence. I watched as he took a seat on his bed and began pushing his arms into a vaguely familiar pink short-sleeve shirt too large for his undersized, twelve-year-old frame.

"What do you think Reverend Rockdale will say tonight?" I heard him ask, less than a minute later.

"Let's get dressed and find out," Mike answered.

"That's right, Michael. You encourage the other boys," I heard a woman's voice. My old house-mother appeared in the middle of the room.

"Mr. Sitloe," she said, noting his presence.

She glanced at my crutches, then looked at me.

"Hello, young man," she said.

"Ma'am," I returned, weakly.

She turned to the boys. "Tonight is special," I heard her say to them. "You want to be dressed properly. Ties or bow ties all of you," she warned.

I remembered her as an attentive house-mother, and she confirmed this by walking over and assisting twelve-year-old, pug-nosed Charlie Sullivan with his shoe.

"Loosen your shoes some before putting them on, Charles. That way you won't push down the quarter and they'll last longer."

She squeezed his unlaced foot affectionately — the same foot, I realized, as the one I now stood upon. Then she rose and walked to the doorway where she waited for the boys to begin their exit.

Mike passed through first. Charlie Sullivan passed in the middle of a stream of ones, twos, and threes.

After the last boy exited, she said: "Take care, Mr. Sitloe."

She stared at my crutches a moment, and added, "You too, young man."

Then she disappeared from the door, leaving the room empty.

I turned toward Sitloe. He appeared stooped and haggard, as if his trip through the tunnel drained him of flesh and energy.

"Why did you bring me here?" I asked firmly.

"I believe you know."

"Tell me what you believe I know."

"Numerous boys and girls have come here over the years. Greenville Home Society owes them a debt."

"Such as a return to . . . childhood ghosts? Is that how you reimburse them?"

"The tunnel belongs to you, Charles. This time . . . belongs to you."

" 'Only facts,' you said, Sitloe. And then you took me here, to this place."

"You can return to my office immediately, if you want."

"Come on, Sitloe! Fifteen years Mike's been dead! And I just listened to him apologize to me. Do you think I can go back after that? Do you really think I have a choice!"

"You do not have to remain," he said calmly.

He lay down upon one of the perfectly made beds. It was, I noticed, the same bed where twelve-year-old Charlie Sullivan had sat and carefully tied his shoe.

"Reverend Rockdale's sermon does not begin until after the boys have finished dinner," he said. "Wake me if you wish to return before it begins. Otherwise I'll awake in time for us to enter the chapel with the boys."

I turned my head toward the orphanage lawn. The coach had dismissed the group. I could hear the echoes from the shouts of the boys as they dispersed.

It was an austere place. The kind of place which excluded the kindness my house-mother carried.

Solid oak pews lined the aisles. A veneer of varnish covered the dark wood. Stained glass darkened the innards of the chapel. No statues; no gold cups.

I attempted to focus upon the baptistry at the front of the chapel, but Rockdale appeared in the pulpit to interrupt. Sitloe turned and stared at me as if examining the progress of his work. The twelve-year-olds — all of them — looked up.

I had not forgotten how tall the man stood. No, I had not forgotten that. But I had forgotten his bald head and the graying hair above his ears.

Rockdale stared straight into Sitloe and me, pressed his gray mustache firmly, then dismissed our presence with an intense stare into the middle of the boys.

I looked on.

Low-volumed did Rockdale begin. He made a joke about walking naked in November's chill, then pronounced solemnly: "Twelve-year-old night," silencing the nervous laughter he himself had generated.

"As I understand it," he said, "that's what you boys call this evening. Well, what does it mean to you?"

His tone was not inquisitive. It demanded an answer he knew the boys did not have.

"Perhaps by sharing my experience with you, together we can find

tonight's meaning."

He would provide the meaning for them. No perhaps about it. I had heard this sermon twenty-five years ago. Twelve-year-old Charlie Sullivan sat in the pew as proof of my previous attendance. Michael Marchetti, alive and listening, sat resolutely beside him.

"Boys. When I was one year younger than you, a hearse drove up in front of my house. It carried a coffin. When they set the coffin in the dining room and my father opened it, I saw my brother lying dead inside. At the time, all I had understood was death had taken my brother away.

"Death, boys. I resented it, and feared it as well," he said.

"A year later my parents were themselves dead and I realized another kind of fear: to be an orphan, at age twelve. Well, they had their orphanages in those days too — I'm not that old, boys," he chuckled momentarily. "So I was given a new home to replace the one I had lost. I lived with boys just like you in my new home. And these boys, in their own way, replaced my dead brother. As brothers we ate together, did chores together, slept in the same rooms together. . . . And together, we dreamed our futures.

"But a good home is not something always wanted. Many times I wanted to leave my home. Just as there have been times many of you, here tonight, have wanted to leave. The chores, the crowding, the lesser clothes, the lesser gifts at Christmas and, of course, the hope that someone, at some time, would come and adopt you. I've known all these feelings. Just as you've known these feelings and probably — many times — wanted to run away.

"Boys," he said. "Do you really think you'll be free by running away? Any of you?" He paused. "Of course not. This is the home you lost or never had. And believe me when I tell you — because I've been with the Home Society a long time now — grown-ups who want to adopt choose small children and babies. Not twelve-year-old boys on the verge of manhood as each of you are. None of you will ever leave here through adoption. Accept that, boys. This is your home, and will remain so until each one of you is old enough to leave."

Rockdale bowed his head as he finished pronouncing this reality upon them all.

I looked around. I saw Mike's face frozen upon the figure in the pulpit. Twelve-year-old Charlie Sullivan stared up at the same figure, nervously.

"When the time finally came for me to leave," Rockdale continued, "I honestly told myself I was at last free. And once free, I did those things that free men do. I got a job, lived in my own place. I worked ten hours a day, six days a week in my freedom. I spent my money and enjoyed the pleasure — yes, the sin — of the city. Finally, boys, I was free.

"Well, I began getting bored. In my freedom, I began feeling lost. Then, as God and fortune would have it, the war broke out in the Pacific, followed by our entry into the war with Hitler. And if I thought I wasn't free in the orphanage, I joined the army and learned just what crowding, chores, and

rules could be like. In basic training, I wanted to belt my sergeant a hundred times and when I finally did, he hit me so hard I didn't get up. To top it off, on the boat over to England, we were crowded together for three weeks. Free? Ha.

"And then the army brought me back to something I hadn't seen since I had stared at my brother laid inside a coffin. Death. Everywhere, all around me. From German rifles, German artillery, and German strafing. Or from a collapsed building if you were in Italy where the shells shattered the walls.

"It was in Italy where I met a guy who, just like me, had been an orphan. You'll find them out there, you know, where you think it's free.

"As God would have it, this orphan and I became buddies. Now a lot of GIs saw no wisdom in making friends with a fellow whose head might get blown off the next day. But my buddy and I didn't worry about that. We had both been orphaned and now we had become friends and so we didn't care to give death our worry.

"Well, my buddy had his head attached when I found him dead. And what I saw on his face taught me something I hadn't known: it taught me the truth about death and being free. You see, my buddy had a smile on his face. Death, it was obvious, had brought him a freedom which no one — orphan or not — can ever realize in life."

I saw Rockdale's glance go over and above me.

"Boys," Rockdale pronounced. "In the years ahead, you will hear other men speak with pride of how they served their country. You will respect them, and what they say. And you will respect their sacrifice. You will hear some few speak resentfully, with anger, about the uniform they wore. You will avoid them. You will remember my words of tonight — our night, 'twelve-year-old night' — and carry them with you into manhood.

"You may not fully understand what I say to you at this moment, gentlemen. But when you are ready to leave here as young men, you will be asked to perform a duty for a much higher authority than the Home Society. That duty will most certainly include the same drudgeries which you endure here. But it will also demand that you face the death I speak about. You will be asked to put on a soldier's uniform when you leave. Tonight, I enjoin you from any fear against the death such a uniform will demand that you face. Because, as my buddy's death taught us, it is only in death that you are truly free. Like the smile on his face, it holds no pain, no chores, nor obedience to rules. Gentlemen, when the time comes, and the question is asked, each of you will answer with these words: MY DUTY.

"Thank you."

Rockdale bowed his head and waited before speaking again.

"Boys," he said. "You have all been listening attentively. I want to ask one more indulgence from you. I want you to recite Psalm twenty-three together — in unison, gentlemen. Then we will have a moment of silence before you return to your room."

He bowed his head and closed his eyes, confident, I could see, of compliance.

" 'The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want' ," he began.

" 'He maketh me to lie down in green pastures' ," the boys drummed, in attempted low-volumed unison.

" 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death' ," I heard Rockdale emphasize.

" 'I will fear no evil' ," the boys, in unison, followed.

" 'And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever' ," they closed.

Rockdale maintained a bowed head; the requested silence followed. I recalled death as I had seen it: the bodies without arms, without legs; the faces staring terrified and angry. I remembered my outrage at finding one bloodied hand — minus its thumb. I looked over to see Mike's head lowered, and his eyes closed.

After the designated minute, Rockdale opened his eyes and gave a slight, reassuring smile.

"You may go, gentlemen," he told them.

The gentlemen — orderly, in shirts, ties and bow ties — filed out.

When the last boy had exited, Rockdale focused his stare down upon us. He seemed to give me a confused, vague recognition before disappearing into the side vestry. I heard a hanger fall to the floor inside as I removed a knife from my jacket pocket and moved from among the pews out into the open.

"Even better than a gun," I said to myself as I opened it.

It wasn't much of a weapon, but then I didn't need much to make it work.

"No," came a voice.

I turned. Sitloe stood gaunt in front of me.

"For too long, too many boys like Michael Marchetti . . ."

"Vengeance. Immediate vengeance. Is that how you want to use this experience?"

"Vengeance is your word, Sitloe. Not the word of Charlie Sullivan."

"Vengeance just the same."

I held the knife firmly against the handle of my crutches and pushed forward.

"What good do you see in filling his role, Charles? If you open that door, that is what you will be doing."

Sitloe moved with me as he spoke.

"You will remain an emotional amputee forever."

"I've always been one," I said over my shoulder. "Besides, I like what I've got."

I pushed on toward the vestry door.

"Which is bitterness and vengeance. Is that the kind of life you want, squeezed into a box like he is to his pulpit? Why not make peace with the past instead?"

I stopped at the bottom of the altar steps and turned.

"Because the past holds nothing for me. Michael Marchetti! He's dead! Remember! And take a good look at what happened to Charlie Sullivan."

I saw Sitloe glance at the vestry door above me.

"You will get stuck here, Charles," he warned.

"I don't care what happens to me. Or to these twenty-five years."

At the top of the steps, I squeezed my knife and moved toward the vestry door. I thought I heard Rockdale cough inside as I reached for the knob.

"Where'd you lose it, mister?" I suddenly heard behind me.

I spun around on my crutches.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Sitloe," came the same voice. "But I didn't know if he'd be back and I had to ask him."

"That's all right, Michael," I heard Sitloe's voice.

I watched twelve-year-old Michael Marchetti climb the steps, then stop in front of me and look up.

"Your leg, mister. Where'd you lose it?"

I had moved forward, so he couldn't see the knife up against the handle of my crutch.

"I lost it. That's all," I answered.

I glanced over my shoulder at the door to the vestry.

"You better take off before —"

"Did you lose it in battle?"

"Something like that. Now why don't you —"

"I'd hate to go to war and lose my leg."

"I'd hate to see that happen to you, Mike."

"I know you don't but you sure sound like you know me."

"In a way, I guess I do."

Mike stared up at me.

"I'm sorry, mister."

"Sorry?"

"Your leg. I'm sorry you lost it. It must be tough."

"I'm alive," I answered.

"I mean it must be tough, like lonely tough. Hard to be around people kind of tough."

"Sometimes. . . . Sometimes it's like that."

I saw him glance at where I had the knife concealed.

"You got people, mister? Family? Friends? Friends who are around when it gets tough . . . lonely tough . . . like that?"

"I guess . . . maybe . . ." I began.

"Hey Mike!" I heard behind him.

Twelve-year-old Charlie Sullivan stood beside Sitloe at the bottom of the steps.

"Did you ask him?"

Looking confused and embarrassed, Mike turned and headed down the

steps.

"Yeah, I asked him, Charlie," he said at the bottom step.

"And did he tell you? Did you tell him, mister?" he looked up at me and asked.

Mike looked up awkwardly at me.

"Yeah, I told him," I answered.

"Mike Marchetti!" the pug-nose exclaimed. "Knows everything, and the first to try anything. Not bad for a best friend, huh?" he said.

"Not bad, Charlie," I said.

And for one, long moment I expected Mike to turn and assure me that he, Michael Marchetti, was a boy again forever, alive and unafraid as ever — even of death. And that if I, Charles Sullivan, just remained here long enough I would be a child again, too, and with childhood whole in both spirit and body. And that these last twenty-five years had been reduced to the present space between us. Because we now existed in time past, which was the best kind of time to live in anyhow.

Instead, I realized that the door behind me had opened, and that Rockdale stood in its center.

"Let's see if your best friend can take himself and you back to your room, Charles," I heard Rockdale's voice. "You know better than to come back into the chapel and loiter. Both of you know better."

Mike glanced up — frightened — at Rockdale's scowl.

"Yes sir," he answered.

Mike turned to leave, then stopped and stared me right in the face.

"I know what lonely tough is like, too," he said to me. "You got only yourself when times get hard . . . and if you're lucky, maybe a friend. Even when it's OK, it's never easy."

He gave Rockdale another frightened glance.

"Now take good care of yourself, mister. And thanks for answering my questions."

As he turned to head down the aisle, I heard him murmur: "Let's go, Charlie."

After the two boys were gone, Rockdale stepped in front of me. "I'm glad you could attend my sermon, young man," he said. "I don't believe we've had the pleasure of an introduction. I am Reverend Lee Edwards Rockdale," he pronounced, and held out his hand.

I squeezed the knife against the handle of my crutch until my fingers hurt.

Rockdale stood in front of me, giving my face that same confused recognition. Then he shrugged his shoulders and grunted at my lack of response. As I watched him take the steps out into the aisle and disappear through the chapel door, I raised the knife to my hand, folded it, and put it away.

When Sitloe and I entered their room, each of the twelve-year-olds

seemed locked in his own solitude. Mike sat pensively in the chair beside his bed, slowly unbuttoning his shirt. He gave a slight smile of recognition as we passed. Twelve-year-old Charlie Sullivan stood alone and stared out the window. The big kid with a limp sat on his bed, sullen.

We passed through the tunnel in silence.

In his office, Sitloe sat and drank coffee for a few minutes. Slowly, he seemed to return to his previous well-groomed, flesh-covered self — more a dude than haggard sentinel of a time tunnel. When he appeared fully recovered, I spoke.

"I could ask a hundred questions about your so-called tour, Sitloe."

"My answers wouldn't explain," he responded.


"I wish I could give you an apology."

"No apology necessary," he said.

"Someday I'll be able to say that same thing," I said and smiled.

As I headed for the door, I heard his voice behind me: "Good luck, Charles."

I turned and nodded, then headed for the stairs.

The same rat-like dog snapped at my crutches on my way back to the station. When the gray mist finally released me, the train was already loading. I squeezed the handles to my crutches and rushed forward. The train started pulling out just as I pushed myself aboard. 

Invent convincingly, say some. Write about what you know, say others. But yes, there is personal experience behind this, the author's first SF story sale.

For the past eight years he has worked with alcoholics in the skid row and Uptown areas of Chicago. And he has been writing; we hope to see more of his work.

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Keith Parkinson

Keith Parkinson has been working as a staff artist for TSR, Inc., since 1983. For TSR, Inc., he prepares both black-and-white illustrations and color paintings. Because of the variety of products produced by his employer, he feels he has had a good opportunity to try his talents with a variety of subjects — military, science-fiction, and fantasy art.

Before working for TSR, Inc., Keith graduated from Kendall School of Design, where he specialized in illustration and commercial art. Upon graduation, he began his career as a free-lance artist in Chicago, then worked as an illustrator for Advertising Posters, a firm which specialized in artwork for pinball and video games.

This past year, he and his wife Mary have started their own art print and poster business, which he claims has become very successful and which has provided him with an excellent education about the business aspect of producing and selling art.



"Lord Soth's Charge," 1986



Keith Parkinson

"The Bounty Hunter," 1985



For *Amazing® Stories*, Keith has painted the Spetember 1984, May 1985, and November 1986 magazine covers. His artwork also appeared in the *Amazing Stories* 1986 calendar and in *The Art of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® Fantasy Game* collection, published by TSR, Inc., in 1985.

When not drawing or painting, Keith enjoys playing drums, listening to rock,

jazz, and bluegrass, and collecting lead miniatures and medieval weapons.

He and his wife Mary have a two-year-old son named Nicholas and a dog called Sluggo.

Those who are interested in finding out more about Keith's artwork can contact him at TSR, Inc. Write to: Keith Parkinson, c/o TSR, Inc., P.O. Box 756, Lake Geneva WI 53147.



"Valsea," 1986

"The Sentries," 1985



LOTION SICKNESS

by Bradley Stites
art: George Barr



Inspiration struck Bradley Stites as he was contemplating the label of a tube of Chapstick. Here is the result, his first story sale.

The writer paced to and fro before his computer, his brow furrowed in concentration. "I have it," he exclaimed gleefully, "the perfect story. Take this down."

The boy sat on his grandfather's knee in the old forcefield porchswing. "Tell me about the old days in the Galactic Patrol," he demanded.

"Well, did I ever tell you about the time I brought to justice the most despicable terrorist in the Galaxy?" Without waiting for an answer he continued, "Yasir the Fat had taken refuge on Taduneen, the desert planet. The place was impregnable and he had stocked it with everything he would need, or so he thought. But there was one thing he forgot; on the driest planet in the Galaxy he forgot the hand lotion. Within thirty days half his men were out of action with rough, red hands (except the Theologians, of course, whose hands are supposed to be rough and red; their hands turned smooth and blue). In desperation he hired a lotion smuggler to smuggle a hundred cases of lotion to Taduneen, but unbeknownst to him the smuggler was, in actual fact, a Patrol agent."

"Was it you, Grandpa?"

"Yes, Billy, it was. I knew this was the opening we had been waiting for, but how to take advantage of it? We thought about poison, but their medical facilities were sufficient to repair any chemical damage. Then I had it: only the sector hospital could repair radiation damage, so I spiked the lotion with a radioactive isotope."

"You mean . . ." said the boy, his voice filled with awe.

"Yes, Billy, I used an atomic balm."



"It's just not good enough, not for their centennial issue. I'll never get it right." He sat with his head in his hands, the embodiment of despair.

"Erase it."

"But sir . . ." pleaded the computer.

"Just erase it."

"Yes, sir."

Just then the door dilated, and in trundled a robocop with four flat tires. "You're under arrest," it said.

"On what charge?" demanded the writer.

"I tried to warn you," interjected the computer.

"Did you, this very day, write a short humorous story, a pun, a takeoff, a spoof, a parody?"

"Yes, what of it?"

"And did you then, just moments ago, order your computer to erase that story?"

"Yes, so what?"

"Surely," said the robot, "you've heard of the law of conservation of parody."





THIRD TIME LUCKY
by T. S. Huff
art: Doug Chaffee



The author lives with three very large cats in Toronto, where she works in the SF bookstore, Bakka. She spent a year studying forestry and three years on active service with the Canadian Naval Reserve, going on from there to obtain a degree in Radio and Television Arts.

This is her first sale to Amazing®.

The lizard had no idea it was being observed as it lay on top of the low coral wall, its mouth slightly open, its eyes unfocused golden jewels. Its only concern was with the warmth of the spring sun — not that the spring sun was much different from the winter sun.

"The real difference," Magdelene explained every spring to a variety of sweating guests, "is that it goes from being hot to being damned hot."

"How can you stand it?" one visitor had panted, languidly fanning himself with a palm leaf.

Magdelene's grey eyes had crinkled at the corners. "I like it hot." And she'd licked her lips.

The visitor, a handsome young nobleman who'd been sent south by his father until a small social infraction blew over, spent the rest of his life wondering if he'd misunderstood.

The lizard liked it hot as well.

Silk, Magdelene's cat, did not. She was expecting her first litter of kittens and between the extra weight and the heat she was miserable. She did, however, like lizards.

The lizard never knew what hit him. One moment he was peacefully enjoying the sun, the next he was dangling upside down between uncomfortably sharp teeth being carried into the garden where he was suddenly and painfully dropped. He was stunned for a moment, then scuttled as fast as he could for the safety that beckoned from under a broken piece of tile.

He didn't make it.

Twice more he was lifted, carried, and dropped. Finally he turned, raised his head, and hissed at his tormentor.

Which was quite enough for Silk. She lunged with dainty precision, bit the lizard's head off, then made short work of the rest of it.

"Are you sure you should be eating lizards in your condition?" Magdelene asked. The crunching of tiny bones had distracted her attention from her book.

Silk merely licked her lips disdainfully and stalked away, her distended belly swaying from side to side.

Magdelene laughed and returned to the story. It was a boring tale of two men adventuring in the land of the Djinn, but the friend who had brought it to her had gone to a great deal of trouble and books were rare — even with

that printing device they had come up with in the east — so she read it.

"Mistress, will you be eating today in the garden?"

"Please, Kali. It'll be happening soon; I want to enjoy the peace while I can."

"Happening again, Mistress?"

"Some people never learn, Kali."

"One can hope, Mistress," Kali sniffed and went back in the house to prepare lunch.

"One always hopes," Magdelene sighed, "but it doesn't seem to do much good."

She had lived in the turquoise house on the hill for as long as anyone in the fishing village that held her closest neighbours could remember. Great-grandmothers told little children how, when they were young, their great-grandmothers had told them that she had always been there. She had been there so long, in fact, that the villagers took her presence for granted and treated her much the same way as they treated the wind and the coral reef and the sea: with a friendly respect. It had taken them longer to accept Kali and the visible difference of red eyes and ivory horns, but that too had come in time. It had been years since it was considered unusual to see the demon housekeeper in the marketplace arguing over the price of fish. It was, however, still unusual to see her lose the argument.

Occasionally it was useful to have Magdelene for a neighbour.

"Carlos, there's a dragon in the harbor."

The village headman sighed and looked at the three heaps of kindling that had been fishing boats a very short time before. It had been a miracle that all six fishermen had survived. "Yes, M'lady, I know."

"I guess," Magdelene mused, squinting into the wind, her skirt and the two scarves she had wrapped around her breasts snapping and dancing about her, "I should go out and talk to him."

"I'll ready my boat." The headman turned to go but Magdelene held up her hand.

"Don't bother," she said. "Boats are tippy, unstable little things. I'll walk."

And she did. She got wet to about the knees — the swells made for uneven footing — but while the villagers watched in awe, (she'd never done *that* before) she walked out until she stood, bobbing gently up and down with the waves, about five body-lengths from the dragon.

"Well?" she asked.

"Gertz?" replied the huge silver sea-dragon, extraordinarily puzzled. This was outside his experience as well. He turned his head so he could fix her in one opalescent eye.

Magdelene put her hands on her hips.

"Go on," she said firmly. "Shoo!"

The dragon, recognizing the voice of authority, however casual, suddenly decided there was much better fishing further south, and left.

The villagers cheered as Magdelene stepped back into the sand. She grinned and curtsied, not gracefully but enthusiastically, then waved a hand at the wreckage. Wood, rope, canvas, and the few bits of metal received in trade for fish, shuddered, stirred, then danced themselves back into fishing boats.

Everyone stared in silent surprise. This was more than they'd dared hope for.

"We don't know how to thank you," the headman began, but his wife interrupted.

"Just say it, for Netos' sake," she muttered, knowing her husband's tendency to orate at the slightest provocation. "The Lady knows what she's done, she doesn't need you telling her."

Carlos sighed. "Thank you."

Magdelene twinkled at him. "You're welcome." Then she went home to browbeat Kali into baking something sweet for supper. She hadn't got half-way up the hill before the boats were putting out to replace the morning's lost catch.

Two days later the soldiers came.

"It is happening, Mistress."

"Yes, Kali, I know."

"What would you have me do?"

"I think," Magdelene shaded her eyes with her hand, "you should make lunch for six. We'll eat in the garden."

The Captain had been sent by his King to bring back the most powerful wizard in the world. What he and the four soldiers he'd brought with him were supposed to do if the wizard refused to cooperate was beyond him. Die, he suspected. The wizard had been ridiculously easy to find, legends — and the memory of some of them caused him to shift uneasily on his saddle — had led him right to her. He wasn't sure what he'd expected but it wasn't a forty-year-old woman with laughing eyes and a sunburned nose who was barely dressed.

"I'm looking," he said stiffly, stopping his small troop at the gate in the coral wall, "for Magdelene, the Wizard."

"You're looking at her." Magdelene liked large, well-muscled men with grizzled beards — even if they were wearing too much clothing — so she gave the Captain her best smile.

The Captain showed no visible reaction but behind him, young Colin smiled back. The most powerful wizard in the world reminded him of his Aunt Maya.

"I am here to take you to Bokta . . ."

"Where in the Goddess's creation is that?"

"North," he said flatly; worship of the Goddess had been outlawed in Bokta for several dozen years. "Very far north."

"Why does he always go north?" Magdelene asked Silk, who had shown up to see what was going on. "What's wrong with east, or west, or even further south?"

Silk neither knew nor cared; and as she didn't much like horses, she padded off to find some shade.

Magdelene looked up to find the Captain glaring at her and was instantly, although not very sincerely, contrite. "Oh, I'm sorry. You were saying?"

"I am here to take you to Bokta so you may prove yourself to be the most powerful wizard in the world. My King does not believe you are."

"Really? And who told him I wasn't?"

A small smile cracked the Captain's beard. "I believe it was his wizard."

"I'll bet," said Magdelene dryly. "And if I don't come?"

"Then I'm to tell you that the wizard will destroy twenty people daily from the time I return without you until you appear."

Magdelene's eyes went hard. "Will he?"

"Yes."

"That son of a bitch!" She considered that for a moment and grinned ruefully at her choice of phrase. "We can leave tomorrow. I'd travel faster on my own but we'd best follow procedure."

She stepped back and the five men rode into the yard. Suddenly there was no gate in the corral wall.

"Oh, put that away," she chided a nervous soldier, who clutched his sword in an undeniably threatening manner. "If those great big horses of yours can't jump a three-foot wall, even in this heat, you're in trouble. Besides, you couldn't kill me if you wanted to. I've been dead, and it isn't all it's cracked up to be."

The sword remained pointed at her throat.

"Garan!" snapped the Captain.

"But sir . . ."

"Put it away!"

"Yes, sir."

The Captain swung off his horse. "Then we are your prisoners."

"Don't be ridiculous, you're my guests. Unsaddle your horses and turn them loose over there. They'll be well taken care of." She turned and headed for the garden. "Then you can join me for lunch. I hope you like shrimp." She paused and faced them again, noting with amusement that they were looking slightly stunned, "And please don't draw on my housekeeper, her feelings are easily hurt."

A small problem arose the next morning.

"You have no horse?" the Captain asked incredulously.

Magdelene shook her head. "I can't ride. No sense of rhythm." She

slapped her hands in front of her to illustrate the point. "I go one way, the horse goes another and we meet in the middle. Incredibly uncomfortable way to travel."

As children in Bokta rode before they walked, it hadn't occurred to the Captain that the wizard would not have a horse. Or that she'd be unwilling to get one.

"Never mind," she said comfortingly, "we'll stop by the village on our way and borrow Haylio's donkey and cart."

"Donkey and cart?" repeated the Captain weakly.

"He's not very fast but I can sit in a cart with the best of folk." She waved a hand and the gate reappeared in the wall.

"Mistress —" Kali stood in the garden. "When will you return?"

"How long will it take us to get to this Bokta place?" Magdelene queried the Captain who, in company with his men, was eyeing Kali nervously. Garan had his hand on his sword.

"Uh, about three months."

"Then expect me back in about three months plus a day. After all," she added for her escorts' benefit, "I don't intend to take the scenic route back. And you," she wagged a finger at Silk who was lying at Kali's feet. "You take care of yourself, and no more lizards."

Silk inspected a perfectly groomed silver paw and refused to answer.

It was a strange cavalcade that moved north along the coast road: five great warhorses carrying overdressed and sweaty soldiers, bracketting a medium-sized donkey pulling a two-wheeled cart and the most powerful wizard in the world.

Magdelene sang loudly and tunelessly as they travelled, her songs usually the type gently bred females were not supposed to know.

"Madam!" The Captain had stood it as long as he was able.

A bawdy lyric, in an impossible key, faded to silence. "Something troubling you?"

"It's that song . . ."

"Oh? Am I corrupting your men?"

"No, but you're scaring the horses."

For a moment the Captain anticipated being turned into something unpleasant, then Magdelene threw back her head and laughed long and hard.

"Point taken," she gasped when the laughter finally let her talk. "I've no music at all and I know it. Do you sing, Captain?"

"No."

She grinned up at him. "Pity. I'm very," she paused and her smile grew thoughtful as she remembered, "amiable to men who make music."

On his way back to the front of the line the Captain almost succeeded in not wondering just how amiable this wizard could be.

The soldiers treated Magdelene with a mixture of fear and respect, fear winning most often, for their King's wizard had taught them to dread the breed; all save Colin who treated her much the same as he treated his Aunt Maya. Magdelene, who had never been anyone's aunt, slipped happily into the role and Colin became the only one of the fair-skinned northerners to stop burning and peeling and burning again.

"Well, I don't care what you say," growled Garan. "Ain't nobody's aunt can grab a fistful of fire, then sit there tossing it from hand to hand."

"I don't think she was aware she was doing it."

"And that makes it better? Hummph."

They reached Denada in three and a half weeks. Even forced to the donkey's pace, that was two days faster than it had taken going the other way.

The Captain sighed in relief; he'd about had it with the perpetual heat of the southlands. Even the rain was warm. He spurred his horse towards the city gate.

"Uh, Sir!"

"Now what?" He wheeled around, narrowly missed running down a farmer with a basket of yams on his head, and was soundly cursed. When he reached the cart, Magdelene had removed her small bundle of belongings and was kissing the soft grey muzzle of the donkey.

"What are you doing?"

She grinned up at him. "What does it look like? I'm kissing the donkey."

Colin snickered but managed to school his expression before the Captain could look his way.

The Captain sighed. "Metros give me strength," he prayed. "Why are you kissing the donkey?"

"Because I'm sending him home." She flicked the animal between his eyes with the first two fingers of her left hand.

Half a startled bray hung on the air, but the donkey and the cart were gone.

"Can your Aunt Maya do that?" hissed Garan.

Colin had to admit she couldn't.

"Why not send us to Bokta that way," demanded the Captain, walking his horse through the space where the donkey had been, making sure it had truly vanished, "and avoid all this damned travelling."

"I know where I've been," Magdelene replied gravely, "but even I don't know where I'm going to be until I get there." She shouldered her bag and headed for the gate. The Captain and his men could only follow.

The five northern soldiers on their massive war horses made little stir as they moved the width of the city, from the gate to the harbor. After all, they had been there less than two months before and Denada, a cosmopolitan city with traders arriving daily from exotic places, saved its wonder for the

truly unusual. Only a few street whores took any notice of the men, and no one at all noticed the most powerful wizard in the world.

Denada's harbor was huge: twenty ships could tie up, and there was room for another twelve to ride at anchor. Miraculously, the *Raven*, the ship that had carried the soldiers across the inland sea, was still docked and appeared to have just finished loading.

"Two months!" screamed her master, bounding down the gangway. "Two months I sit here since you leave. First, I must clean smell of abominable animals out of my forward hold though still it smells like a stable then what happens but my steersman — may his liver be eaten by cockroaches — sets sail with a hangover we come up bang on coral and rip off half of keel. It is a miracle — may all the gods in heaven be blessed and I don't doubt they are — that we make it back for repairs. Now at last we are ready to sail." He pounded the Captain's shoulder enthusiastically. "So, what can I do for you?"

"I need passage north for myself, my men and our horses. And for this lady here."

"Aiee, again with the horses!" He didn't give Magdelene, who was dropping stale journey bread into the water to feed the fish, a second glance. "Still, already I have a hold that smells like a stable. Fourteen gold pieces."

"All right, I . . ."

"Two," said Magdelene, her eyes glinting dangerously as she dusted crumbs off her hands.

The ship's master stared accusingly at the Captain. "I thought you said she was a lady? Fourteen I say and fourteen it is."

After a spirited discussion, they settled on eight. The Captain paid up, and Magdelene deftly lifted four gold pieces from his pouch.

"Hey!"

"You're still up two," she said sweetly. "While you load the horses, I'm going shopping."

"Don't tell me," muttered Garan, stopping Colin before he could speak. "Your Aunt Maya loves to shop."

Hours passed, the ship was ready to sail on the evening tide and Magdelene had still not returned. Both worried and annoyed, the Captain walked to the end of the docks to look for her. He was considering a trip into the city when she came barreling around a corner, a grimy urchin heavily laden with packages in tow, and crashed into his arms.

"Here, take these." She shoved the parcels at him and tossed the boy a silver piece. "Thanks for the help, kid, now beat it before the mob gets here."

"Where have you been?" demanded the Captain as they trotted towards the ship. "We're ready to leave. Why are we running and . . ." He stopped. "Mob? What mob?"

Magdelene got him moving again. "I cured a blind beggar. It drew a bit of a crowd. Good thing the kid knew a short cut."

They sprinted up the gangway just as the leading edge of the mob appeared at the end of the docks. A cry went up as Magdelene was spotted.

"Why didn't you do something a little less spectacular," muttered the Captain, tossing the packages over the rail, then vaulting it himself. "Like raising the dead."

"I did that the last time." She accepted his helping hand, having somehow managed to become tangled in a stray line. "This time I was trying to keep a low profile."

"You've been here before then."

"Twice."

"Well, maybe next time you can pass through without starting a riot." He shouted to the ship's master to cast off but it was unnecessary. The instant Magdelene's foot touched the deck, ropes untied themselves and the *Raven* slipped its mooring just ahead of the first hysterical Denadan.

"Why," asked the Captain, using the toe of his boot on a package in danger of going overboard, "does the most powerful wizard in the world have to run from a crowd of shopkeepers and beggars?"

Magdelene collapsed on a bale of rope. "I'll let you in on a secret," she panted. "I'm also the laziest wizard in the world. Running was definitely the least complicated thing to do."

The trip across the inland sea had never been done faster. The *Raven* seemed to barely touch the waves and the wind never left her sails.

"I don't like boats," Magdelene explained when the Captain voiced his suspicions about the wind. "They make me sick. It's worse than being pregnant."

He stared at her in surprise. He'd never thought of her having a life like other women.

"You had children?"

"Have," she corrected, and it wasn't just the sea that chased the laughter from her eyes. "One. A son. Goddess knows why I ever let his father talk me into it."

"He could make music," the Captain suggested.

Some of the laughter returned. "He could at that."

The ship rolled, and the most powerful wizard in the world turned slightly green.

"Oh, lizard piss!" she muttered and headed for the rail.

The *Raven* docked in Finera in eighteen days. The previous record was twenty-seven.

"Anytime you want to travel the seas, Lady Wizard, you are most welcome to sail with me."

Magdelene smiled stiffly at the ship's master, "Next time I travel, I'll walk." She gripped Colin's arm tightly as he helped her down the gangway.

"Sometimes I think he situates himself purposefully so that I have to travel by sea."

Colin looked puzzled.

"Never mind, dear. Just get me somewhere that isn't moving."

"Take her to the Laughing Boar," bellowed the Captain over the squeals of the horse being lifted from the hold. "We'll spend the night."

The Laughing Boar was the largest inn in Finera and a favorite with the caravan masters who came into the city to trade with ships from the south. As they crossed the common room, Magdelene counted fifteen different dialects; one of which, she was surprised to note, she didn't know. Her room was large and cheerful and so, she observed with satisfaction, was the bed.

"This ought to make him sit up and take notice." She winked at her reflection, now clad in a dangerously low cut green silk gown, and went looking for the Captain.

Later that night he sat on the edge of her bed, suddenly unsure.

"What's wrong?" she asked, gently tweaking a wirey curl.

He caught her hand. "Did you use your magic to bring me here?"

She smiled and there was nothing, and everything, magic in the smile. "Only the magic that women have been using on men since the Goddess created the world."

"Oh." He considered that for a moment. "That's all right then." And he lowered himself to her lips.

Next morning, as he left Magdelene's room, the Captain bumped into Colin in the corridor. The young man executed a parade-ground perfect salute and marched briskly off down the hall, his face a study in suppressed laughter.

"Smart-assed kid," muttered the Captain, straightened his tunic, and stomped off to find breakfast.

"Will we have to camp in this?" Magdelene asked anxiously, watching water stream off the shield she had raised over the entire group. Even Garan was forced to agree there were certain advantages in travelling with a wizard.

"Not for a while," Colin reassured her. "We follow the Great North Road over half the way, and it seems to be lined with inns."

Magdelene eyed the broad back of the Captain. "Good."

"I'd like to see you claim resemblance to your Aunt Maya now." Garan wiped foam off his mouth onto his sleeve. "She's used her blasted magic to bewitch the Captain."

"That's all you know," Colin chuckled, finishing his own ale. "My family lives in the capital and the Captain has bedded Aunt Maya."

When they reached the border of Bokta, a full division of the King's

Guard awaited them, darkly impressive in their black and silver armour.

"This is the best you could do?" sneered the Guard Captain, staring disdainfully down his narrow nose at Magdelene in her pony cart. "The King and his Wizard are not going to be pleased."

It had been a long trip and Magdelene was not in the best of moods. "How would you like to spend the rest of your life as a tree frog?" she asked conversationally.

The Guard Captain ignored her. "Can't you keep her quiet?" he drawled, ennui dripping from the words.

It was difficult to say who was more surprised, the division of King's Guard or the tree frog clinging to the saddle of the Guard Captain's horse.

"Magdelene," sighed the Captain, "change him back."

"He's a pompous ass," Magdelene protested sulkily.

"Granted, but he's also the King's favorite nephew. Please."

"Oh, all right." She waved her hand. The Guard Captain cheeped once, found himself back in his own body, and fainted. It was a rather subdued trip into the Capital.

The King's Wizard stirred the entrails of the goat with the tip of his bloody knife. She was here, in the Palace, and when he defeated her he would be the most powerful wizard in the world! Power. He could feel it burning through him, lighting fires of destruction that he would release to obliterate this woman, this Magdelene.

He wiped the knife on a skin taken whole off a stillborn babe, twitched his robes into place, and left his sanctum. Behind him, blood began to drip off the table and form a pool on the carpet.

The King was waiting in the corridor, nervously pacing up and down. He stopped when the Wizard emerged, and his two men-at-arms thankfully fell into place behind him.

"She's in the Palace. We must hurry or we won't be in the throne room when she arrives."

The Wizard merely nodded curtly. His measured stride didn't change.

"You are sure you can defeat her?" The King, left standing, scrambled to catch up.

"I have studied for over a hundred years. I command the demons of the Netherworld. I control the elements. I can easily defeat one ancient woman."

Magdelene's actual appearance came as a bit of a shock to both men. The crystal had only ever shown her location, never the wizard herself. This was the most powerful wizard in the world? This laughing woman who wasn't even wearing wizardly robes? The King almost chuckled as he took his seat.

Magdelene approached the throne with the Captain, bowed when he did, and clicked her tongue when she looked up at the King's Wizard. Thick

grey hair sprang from a widow's peak and curled on his shoulders, his eyes were sunken black pits, his nails were claws on the end of long and skinny fingers, and his stooped body was covered in a black robe so closely embroidered with cabalistic symbols that from a distance it looked more gold than black.

"If he'd just once realize that self-control comes first," she hissed to the Captain as a herald announced them.

The whispers of the court fell silent as the King's Wizard stepped forward. "I have summoned you to prove yourself," he declared in ponderous tones, blue fire crackling eerily about him.

The Captain shifted his weight so that his cloak fell free of his sword. He had always hated this wizard, this scrawny grey scarecrow of a man, and had it not been for the innocent lives that would have been forfeit he would have never brought Magdelene here to him. At least not after he'd got to know her.

Magdelene successfully fought the urge to giggle. "Interesting outfit, Tristan. Demon-made?"

"My name is Polsarr," snarled the wizard, his lips pulled back over startlingly white teeth.

"Your name," said Magdelene mildly, "is Tristan. I should know, I gave it to you. And now," she turned to the King, "I'd like to be shown to my room, it's been a long trip."

"You are not going anywhere, woman!" bellowed Polsarr. "Until I banish you into darkness!"

"Oh? And would you have everyone say that you defeated the most powerful wizard in the world only because she was exhausted and irritable from four days of bumping over incredibly bad roads?"

The King tugged on Polsarr's sleeve. "We don't want that! There must be no doubt when you win."

Polsarr glowered and muttered but finally had to agree the King was right. "Enjoy your rest," he snarled. "It will be your last." He stalked from the room.

"If he really wants to prove his power," Magdelene muttered to the King, "he should do something about those roads."

The King ignored that. "Captain, take her to the south tower in the east wing. And Captain, you and your men will guard this wizard one more night."

The Captain bowed and backed away. Magdelene gave the King her second-best smile and followed.

At the tower — which was as far away from the rest of the Palace as it was possible to get and still be in the Palace — the Captain dismissed his men.

"Be back at dawn," he told them. "Even if the King's Wizard decides to attack tonight, there's nothing you could do."

Colin raised an eyebrow at the phrasing, but he went with the rest.

The tower was deserted and, judging by the unbroken layer of dust, hadn't been used in years. Magdelene waved a hand at her bag and it trailed them up the stairs.

"The man's as big an ass as the King's nephew."

There was no need to ask who she meant.

"He's not much like you."

"Thank you. He's not much like his father either. That man didn't have an ambitious bone in his body." She sighed. "Maybe I should've encouraged the kid's musical talents."

The Captain threw open a door leading to an old-fashioned bedchamber.

"If I remember correctly, this is the only furnished room in the tower."

Magdelene stepped inside, the bag settling to the floor at her feet. "It's not that bad and the bed looks solid enough for one night at least." She grinned over her shoulder at the Captain, only to find him hesitating in the doorway. "What's wrong?"

"I'll stand guard in the hall. You'll need your strength for tomorrow."

"And I want your strength tonight," she told him gently, drawing him into the room and shutting the door.

Some hours later the Captain untangled himself from her embrace and rolled over on his back. "Is there anything," he asked, trying to get his breath back, "that you don't do well?"

Magdelene ran her fingers through the matted hair on his chest. "I'm a lousy mother," she admitted.

Everyone with a plausible excuse crowded into the throne room the next morning. People were packed so tightly against the walls they had to cooperate with their neighbours in order to breathe. Even the Queen, who hated public functions and wanted only to be left alone, was there. The King was almost quivering with excitement, anticipating when he would control the most powerful wizard in the world. Polsarr stood alone in the centre of the room.

When Magdelene entered, the room released a collective sigh. She had not escaped in the night.

Leaving the Captain and his men by the door, Magdelene walked forward until she stood only three body-lengths from her son.

"Morning, Tristan. Sleep well?"

Polsarr ignored the question. He drew himself up to his full height and declared, "Already I have defeated seven lesser mages."

"Seven," said Magdelene. "Imagine that."

"I banished even the mighty Joshuae to the Netherworld!" He saw what he thought was worry in Magdelene's eyes and chuckled.

Magdelene wasn't worried. She was annoyed. "You banished Joshuae to the Netherworld? That was remarkably rude; the man is your name-father."

"I HAVE NO NAME-FATHER!"

His outraged volume was impressive.

"Well, you don't now, that's for sure. I only hope he finds his way back."

"I WAS BORN IN THE BELLY OF THE MOUNTAIN AND SPEWED FORTH WITH FIRE AND MOLTEN ROCK!"

Magdelene sighed. "And the time before this you were ripped from the loins of the North Wind. The time before that," her brow wrinkled, "I don't remember the time before that but it was equally ridiculous I'm sure. Now can we get on with this?"

Polsarr shrieked with wordless rage and blue lightning leapt from his fingertips.

Magdelene stood unconcerned and the lightning missed.

A fireball grew in Polsarr's hand. When it reached the size of a wagon wheel he threw it. And then another. And then another.

Magdelene disappeared within the fire. The flames burnt viciously for a moment, then suddenly died down. Although the floor was blackened and warped, Magdelene wasn't even scorched.

Polsarr screamed a hideous incantation, spittle flying from his lips to sizzle on the floor. There was a blinding red flash between the wizards . . . and then a demon.

The demon was three times the size of a man, with green scaled skin and burning red eyes. Six-inch tusks drew its mouth back into a snarl and poisons dripped from the scimitar-shaped talons that curved out from both hands and feet. It raised heavily muscled arms, screamed, and lurched towards Magdelene.

Magdelene looked it right in the eye.

The demon stopped screaming.

She folded her arms across her chest and her foot began to tap.

The demon paused and reconsidered. Suddenly recognition dawned. It gave a startled shriek and vanished.

Polsarr began to gather darkness about him but Magdelene raised her hand.

"Enough," she sighed, and snapped her fingers.

When the smoke cleared, the most powerful wizard in the world cradled a baby in her arms. Polsarr's robe lay empty on the floor, and the wizard was nowhere to be seen.

"Here, hold this." She handed the baby to the King. "I want to say goodbye to some people." She walked to the door where the Captain and his men still stood. The silence was overwhelming as the audience tried very hard not to attract the Wizard's attention.

"Colin."

The young man stepped forward, for the first time a little afraid.

"This is for you." She wrestled a silver ring with three blue stones off her finger. "There aren't many wizards left in the world, but should you run foul of one this will protect you." Then she grinned and everything was all

right. "Only from wizards though; it won't raise a finger against outraged fathers." She pulled a string of coral beads out of the air and dropped them on his palm. "These are for your Aunt Maya." Reaching up, she pulled his head down until she could whisper in his ear. "Tell her I said . . ." Magdelene paused, glanced at the Captain, and snickered in a very unwizardlike way. "Never mind, if we're as much alike as you seem to think, she'll come up with it on her own." A kiss on the forehead and then she released him. "Come and visit me some time."

"I will."

She moved over to the Captain and took both his hands in hers. "It won't be very safe here for you now. You were responsible for me, and I defeated the King's wizard."

They both turned to look at the King who was holding the baby as if he'd rather be holding the demon.


The Captain smiled down at her. "I was thinking of leaving the King's service anyway."

"That might be a good idea. You can always come and stay with me; young Tristan is going to need a father figure." She gurgled with laughter at the look of terror on his face, kissed him hard enough to carry the feel of his lips away with her, and went to collect her son.

"You really should keep a better eye on him," she said to the Queen, with a nod at the King who was rubbing at the damp spot on his knee.

And then she vanished.

"Not again, Mistress," sighed Kali as Magdelene handed her the baby.

"Sure looks that way." Magdelene sighed as well, then grinned at a suddenly inspired thought. "See if you can find him a lute!" she called after the demon and went to look for Silk and her kittens. 

YECCH!

Mean and brilliant, vampire Clyde
invented the drink for Jekyll-Hyde,
brought the Frankenstein monster back to life,
gave Jack the Ripper that long sharp knife.
What he's doing now is even worse:
writing T.V. ads — and all in verse.

— Morris Liebson

CINEMASAUROS REX

by Baird Searles

FILM REVIEWS

Dinosaurs, bless their tiny little pea-brains, were the first “real” movie monsters, which, given the pacific, slow-moving nature of many of them, is rather a libel on the species. What *is* a monster, really? There are human monsters, certainly, but that’s a different matter. *Real* monsters are implicitly large (*monster* has taken the other meaning of oversized, as in “monster sale”), unintelligent, and mean.

Moviemakers, almost from the beginning, sensed that monsters would be solid BO (that’s box office [receipts], not lack of hygiene). In the fantasy voyages that made up so many of the primitive, very early short films (mostly from France and mostly made by the early cinematic genius, George Melies), our intrepid explorers were always running into animated, papier-mâché things in the Arctic or on the Moon or Mars.

The premiere screen dinosaur, contrariwise, was a gentle creature named Gertie, who stole the hearts of 1909 audiences by weeping copious tears. She was the star of what is considered the first major animated cartoon, and was drawn by Winsor McKay (who also did the classic *Little Nemo*).

But tear-jerking dinosaurs were less thrilling than monstrous ones. As special effects improved, moviemakers discovered very early that dinosaurs were as photogenic as bathing beauties and sweater girls (and just as artificial), and they and their spawn have been rearing and roaring from the screen ever since (dinosaurs, that is, not

bathing beauties).

The problem in building a drama around a dinosaur, however, is that scientifically it and humankind did not exist on this planet at the same time. A film having nothing *but* dinosaurs as characters has problems — not much dialogue and rather primitive plot-structure. Therefore, achieving human/dinosaur interaction needs a science-fiction or fantasy device such as time travel, or at the least some leftover part of the world where the dinosaur was still alive and kicking.

The ultimate in the silent-screen dinosaur was reached in *The Lost World* (1925) from A. Conan Doyle’s rip-roaring novel about a lost plateau in South America, so cut off from the rest of the world that dinosaurs of all kinds still roamed it. There is also an ape-man or two to spice things up, not to be confused with burly Wallace Beery as Doyle’s irascible Professor Challenger who leads the expedition which finds the lost plateau. After close encounters with dinosaurs of various kinds, the members of the expedition get away, taking with them a live brontosaurus. This mettlesome beast opened up a whole new area of the cinema by escaping in London and threatening to flatten the metropolis. How many monsters will follow in his hoofprints! He then makes a spectacular escape by falling through Tower Bridge and swimming off down the Thames.

(There was a remake of *The Lost World* in 1960. Claude Rains is Profes-

sor Challenger, and the dinosaurs are magnified lizards rather than the models of the silent version. Jill St. John is their major target. This could be because of her pink pedal pushers, obviously just the thing for South American jungle wear. Perhaps dinosaurs react to pink the way bulls react to red.)

Gorillas were big in silent movies and early talkies, but apparently not big enough, and given the successful technical effects of *The Lost World*, the inevitable conclusion was reached that a dinosaur-sized gorilla would be socko. The result was the immortal *King Kong* (1933), who wrestled dinosaurs before breakfast in his native jungle and managed to put some large dents in New York City before being unfairly ambushed on top of the (then) new and thrilling Empire State Building. Kong was indeed a smash, and the monster movie became a staple of film production.

However, there were only so many lost worlds that could be found (particularly with the globe growing smaller and more known by the day), so the problem remained: how to get humans (particularly toothsome female humans) and monsters together? *One Million B.C.* (1940) solved it simply, by saying to hell with science and mixing them up in a sort of never-never period of history.

The results have a certain naive charm, as we follow the adventures of Tumak of the Rock People, a singularly hairy and ill-mannered tribe. Tumak is tossed out of the group after having a slight dustup with his dad about leadership. On his own, he has a few meetings with the indigenous dinosaur population, and then winds up with the Shell People, who are a good deal more couth than the old folks at home. This, however, is hardly

the main attraction. *That* is the lovely Loana, who teaches Tumak some manners. He resolves to take her home to Mother; on the way, they inadvertently get involved in a slight disagreement between two dinosaurs, the special-effects high point of the film. These are no clay models, but a live iguana and an infant alligator having at each other, processed to giant size with the human actors cowering in the foreground.

This footage was hugely effective. In fact, it was so effective that you got to see it over and over again in any number of low budget films for the next twenty years.

Supporting the iguana and the alligator were Victor Mature (laboring under the publicity label "the beautiful hunk of man") as Tumak and Carole Landis as Loana, who proved that the Shell People were highly advanced in cosmetology as well as the social graces, not to mention permanent waving.

In the 1940s, dinosaurs were relegated to juvenile matinee productions, but as with all other kinds of science-fiction film, the Atomic Age opened infinite possibilities for monsters.

Ironically (but perhaps inevitably), it was the Japanese who first realized the full potential of Atomic Age monsters. The result was *Godzilla, King of the Monsters* (1956) — Kong and dinosaur combined, with extra added features, such as radioactivity and the ability to breathe fire.

Godzilla is a "prehistoric beast," revived by atomic testing. He is also cleverly given a personality, as well as a name — this was not just another anonymous dinosaur. These elements, added to the Japanese flair for special effects, made Godzilla a household word. Any number of sequels and imitations followed. In this first one,

Tokyo gets demolished. This was to become a regular event, as more and more monsters were unleashed. A whole generation grew up believing Tokyo was really a pile of rubble.

In the U.S., in the meantime, atomic radiation was spawning an alarming number of giant thingies. Particularly popular were large, economy-sized insects, probably because of the instinctive human dislike for crawling things.

Them! (1954) is a particularly good example, a smartly constructed thriller which begins with mysterious deaths in an arid southwest area that involve large thefts of sugar and the presence of formic acid. This means giant, mutated ants, of course, as scientist Edmund Gwenn quickly figures out (and yes, he has a gorgeous daughter, surprise, surprise). The climax involves a colony which has established itself in the Los Angeles drainage system. (There are neat touches such as the bewildered humans who see "Them" on their mating flight, and the ship at sea which is suddenly infested.) The oversized ants are hair-raising, helped by a jarring, whining "vocal" on the sound track which is as startling as the visuals.

Any number of giant six and eight-legged creatures marched after *Them!* into the theaters. Most were more funny than fearsome, such as the giant grasshoppers that ate Chicago, but a few managed to work up some thrills.

Tarantula (1955), for instance, was pretty silly, but nervous-making, too — spiders in close-up are even more frightening than most crawling things, and tarantulas are probably the most scary of the spiders. A tarantula that is one hundred feet high and tosses cars around is bound to make some sort of impression.

Dinosaurs weren't extinct on the

screen, despite the Atomic Age competition. There was, for instance, *Dinosaur* (1960), which despite effects that ranged from ludicrous to barely adequate, and a script that seemed made up as it went along, is hugely enjoyable. A brontosaurus, a tyrannosaurus, and a cave man (what *kind* of cave man? — just ordinary generic cave man — you want paleontology with your popcorn?) are resuscitated on a small Caribbean island, and proceed to scare the pants off the inhabitants. This is justified in the case of T. Rex, but the brontosaurus is another Gertie and the cave man is simply confused by modern living. At least one of the jokes is memorable, when the primitive man peers into the lighted window of a house and comes face to face with a woman in hair curlers peering out.

The English, with their traditional sympathy toward dumb animals, inevitably came up with a variant on the sympathetic monster theme. *Gorgo* (1961) is the giant thing from the sea that is captured off the coast of Ireland and brought to London to be put on exhibit. But, as the joke goes, you should see his mother. *Gorgo* is indeed just a pup, and when his Mum comes looking for him — splat! goes London. (Could they be Irish monsters?)

But the Japanese even topped monster motherhood in the lovable creature race.

Godzilla's friends and relations had continued to stream from the land of the rising sun, most of them scaly and breathing fire. But what should suddenly emerge, for no coherent reason, but a giant moth! With wings as large as city blocks, and a good deal more beautiful. It seems that on a lost island in the Pacific, *Mothra* (1962) is worshipped as a god by a race of six-inch-high humans. When an exquisite pair

of twin girls is kidnapped by wicked exploiters, it's a giant caterpillar to the rescue. It spins a cocoon on the highest tower in Tokyo, from which Mothra emerges, to menace the Japanese capitol yet again with tidal waves and windstorms (not to mention the peril to woolen kimonos). This utter nonsense was presented with such disarming straightforwardness that it was almost irresistible.

The others weren't quite so charming, though just about as off-the-wall. And it got to the point where one needed a Ph.D. to tell them apart. Honestly, now, without looking, give the difference between Godzilla, Ghidrah, Gamera, Guiron, Gigantis, and Gorath. It is never really spelled out how we know the names of these various monsters, but whoever christens them obviously is stuck on one particular letter — could it all be a subliminal *homage* to Gertie? It's a wonder we never got one called Gidget. And how did they miss Gethsemane?

An exception was the first successor to Godzilla, one *Rodan*. Rodan had most of Godzilla's extras, but also had one large advantage over its predecessor. It could fly. In fact, it was a large sort of flying lizard with more than a passing resemblance to a pterodactyl; the wings, however, were voluminous and raised a lot of wind which, given the 250-foot wingspan, made Rodan a real menace to anything not solidly fastened down. Despite this, Rodan never quite made it in the popularity scale (could it be because he didn't begin with *g*?). The ads for *Rodan* trumpeted: "More startling than Jules Verne!" True or not, it was an odd comparison — M. Verne would probably have been the most startled of all.

Then back in the groove with *Gigantis*. *Gigantis* looks very much

like Godzilla. In point of fact, *Gigantis* is Godzilla, but the movie couldn't be called *The Return of Godzilla* and Godzilla couldn't be called Godzilla because of various rights problems as to which movie company owned what. Oh, well, a Godzilla by any other name would smell . . . (The trade magazine *Variety* remarked about the dubbing: "The use of the term *banana oil* as a term of derision, for instance, does not have exactly the audience effect intended.")

Gorath isn't all that easy to identify, either. There seems to be some confusion as to whether Gorath is an invading planet or the monster awakened by the resulting earthquakes. (The dubbed translation from the Japanese leaves a lot of latitude for interpretation.) Confusion is compounded by the fact that in the American version, the monster was cut. This may be just as well — America of 1964 probably wasn't ready for a ten-ton walrus. (Well, it came from the Polar regions. Waddya want — a ten-ton reindeer?) *Gorath* was distinguished in one respect; one review remarked that "the story itself is possibly too scientific for popular reception." This may be the first and last time such a judgment was passed on a Japanese monster movie.

Onward and upward to *Ghidrah*. Really upward, since Ghidrah is produced from a meteor. Ghidrah has three heads, one more unpleasant than the next. United in battle against Ghidrah is the unlikely trio of Godzilla, Rodan, and Mothra, one for each head.

We were then introduced to *Gappa*, otherwise known as the *Monster From a Prehistoric Planet*, or, sometimes, "The Triphibian Monster." He is kidnapped barely out of the egg from his tropic island to become Exhibit A at a Japanese amusement park, but the

kidnappers had not seen *Gorgo*. Sure enough, here come Ma and Pa Gappa. Zap! — no amusement park. Squoosh! — a geisha party is stepped on. Splat! — there goes Kawasaki City. It's a real hymn to parental devotion.

Have you had it with the Big G's? Don't give up. There's still *Gammera*. *Gammera* (or *Gamera*, depending on which sequel you're seeing) is a giant, sabre-toothed turtle. *Gammera* breathes fire. *Gammera* flies by revolving his shell, rapidly. There is never an explanation as to why *Gammera* is not violently sick after every flight.

And last, and perhaps least, there's *Mechagodzilla*. You guessed it — it's (gasp!) a robot *Godzilla*. This is just cheating — no self-respecting monster is made of metal.

Alas for fleeting fame; we must pass over with a mere mention Gaigan, Angorus (who was really a pussy cat), Megalon, Ebirah (a giant shrimp, something of a contradiction in terms), Hedora, Jiger (a female monster, for a change), and Minya, *Godzilla's* son (mother unidentified).

Since monsters were *in*, it seemed about time to remake *One Million B.C.*, and for once, a remake topped its original. It was called *One Million Years B.C.* (1967). (Why the film-makers thought putting the word *years* in the title would help matters is a mystery — perhaps they envisioned the public asking *One Million What? B.C.* of the earlier title.) This movie presented us with the same thoroughly unscientific milieu of coexistent dinosaurs and humans. But these were no ordinary dinosaurs, and these were far from your usual scruffy cave people! Special-effects master Ray Harryhausen was responsible for the former; the latter are led by the magnificently beautiful Raquel Welch as Loana of the Shell People, equally matched on

the male side by John Richardson, all blond beard (well barbered), hairy chest (unbarbered), and muscles, as Tumak of the Rock People.

The most effective scene is that in which Loana is carried off by a larger-than-life pterodactyl to its nest as a snack for the young ones (robins bring back worms, pterodactyls bring back Raquel Welch). However, there is one hell of a volcanic eruption, and a dinosaur battle which tops the earlier iguana and alligator match.

While *One Million Years B.C.* is not exactly a class act, it is probably the most enjoyable of all the dinosaur movies, and is the favorite bad movie of a lot of people (compulsive re-watching might have something to do with Welch and Richardson, of course). A good deal of craft went into its making, as witness the score, which alternates one of those good, epic orchestral themes with the rhythmic, percussive sounds of rocks struck together. And there are moments of true fantasy, as when Loana and Tumak venture in a cave that is obviously a sacred place of a more primitive species. There is no confrontation; the two escape unseen. But one is left with a sense of mystery and magic.

There wasn't much mystery or magic about *The Valley of Gwangi* (1969), but it had special effects that were just about as good (again, dinosaurs by Harryhausen), not to mention being wonderfully silly. Here, it's the Wild West of the turn of the century, and a lost valley full of monster reptiles. So it's cowboys and eohippi, and a roped tyrannosaurus, taken to the great outside world for exhibit. By cracky, wouldn't you know it'd go and escape, and have to be rounded up all over again?

Something of a low in the boobs-and-brontosaurus genre was hit with

an epic called *When Dinosaurs Ruled the Earth* (1971). Obviously an attempt to imitate *One Million Years B.C.*, which was a good bad movie, this one was a bad bad movie. It, too, has some Rock People and Shell People. Among its other delights (?) are a lot of fuzzy lights which an off-screen voice claims to be the moon splitting from the sun (well, that's what it says), and a heroine who takes refuge from a nasty beastie in the broken egg shell of a brontosaurus. Along comes Mumsey Dino, and golly, gosh, she adopts the poor, wee thing.

The works of that master alumnus of *Amazing Stories*, Edgar Rice Burroughs, had been on-screen since 1917, but they'd been mostly confined to the Tarzan movies. Burroughs had been fond of dinosaurs (as plot elements, that is); in fact, one Tarzan book that cried for filming was *Tarzan, the Terrible*, in which the ape man discovered a lost world just crawling with saurians right smack in the heart of Africa. But giant snakes and an oversized spider were about all the monsters that the movie Tarzan would run into (if you don't count the Amazons).

One of his series had been devoted to Caprona, a lost world. This lost world isn't just a plateau or a blank space on the map. This is a whole continent (in the Antarctic), edged with formidable cliffs, warmed by interior hot springs, and inhabited by the usual leftover life forms. The movie of the first Caprona novel, *The Land That Time Forgot* (1975), wastes a little too much time getting us to Caprona; there's a good deal of hanky-panky aboard a German WW I submarine captured by shipwrecked English seamen. But once the sub works its suspenseful way through an underwater passage beneath the cliffs and comes to rest in an inland sea, things

really pick up. Your first clue to this fact is when a very large head on a very long neck emerges from the water and gobbles up a sailor standing on the deck of the sub.

Another film about Burroughs's Caprona, *The People That Time Forgot* (1977), follows an expedition sent out to find two of the first movie's characters who had missed the boat (literally) at the climax and stayed on. This one reveals Caprona's real mystery: its human inhabitants progress from apelike primitivism to true humanity in the course of a lifetime. This peculiar manifestation adds a touch of variety to the now-familiar dinosaurs.

Less successful was the movie of another of Burroughs's works about an epic lost world, *Pellucidar*. Now this one is not just a plateau, or even a continent. It indeed is a world, or at least the inside of one. Burroughs's *Pellucidar* novels are less well known than the Tarzan series or even the Barsoom books, but are favorites of Burroughs *cognoscenti*. *Pellucidar* encompasses the interior surface of the supposedly hollow Earth. The theory is that during successive geologic ages, every sort of animal life wandered into *Pellucidar* and survived. And to boot, the reptiles there developed an intelligent (albeit cold-blooded) race called the Mahars, which dominate the interior world and its various primitive human species.

Putting *Pellucidar* on film had its problems. A major one is that the horizon of *Pellucidar* curves up, (think about it). Another is *intelligent* dinosaurs with their own culture. When the first book in the series, *At the Earth's Core*, was finally brought to the screen in 1976, the first problem was blithely ignored — *Pellucidar* was demoted to a series of huge caverns.

The second was not solved very satisfactorily — the Mahars looked like something created by Jim Hensen on a bad day. Nevertheless, there is some of the old Burroughsian excitement as hero David Innes and his eccentric inventor pal, Abner Perry, burrow through the Earth's crust in Perry's digging machine and end up in Pellucidar, battling dinosaurs and rescuing fair cave maidens.

But alas, though the fickle public has loved dinosaurs and their kin since movies began, the inevitable was to happen. The *coup de grace* was probably given by the remake of *King Kong* in 1976. The picture was as elephantine as Kong himself, and perhaps no movie remake had ever caused so much controversy as to old version vs. new version. Somehow a modern, wide-screen version in color inexplicably lost a quality which a small antique movie in black-and-white had. Certainly, the World Trade Center was nowhere as decorative or as satisfying as the Empire State Building (perhaps the difference is captured in the *bon mot* that the World Trade Center buildings look like the box in which the Empire State Building came).

One improvement was noted by an astute few: the heroine in the new version was not just a pretty blonde with good lungs. This one showed a remarkable presence and a good deal of personality. She was, of course, a newcomer named Jessica Lange, who did not disappear into the oblivion to which most heroines threatened by monsters vanish.

The new Kong, as it turned out, was the last major monster in the classical mode to hit the screen. It would seem that in recent years monsters and interest in monsters have diminished

considerably. Some recent attempts to put some life back into the genre, such as cuddly baby dinosaurs *à la* E. T. and a *Godzilla redux*, have been utter failures.

Why? Well, the reason could well be that monsters have become characters. Sure, King Kong had something in the way of a rudimentary personality, but it was just enough to add a little poignancy to his end. But it certainly didn't detract from his destructive potential. As for all those miscellaneous dinosaurs, they would much rather squash you than stand around making friends. Even the Mahars, intelligent though they may have been, were less likely to start a discussion of cultural trends in present-day Pellucidar than to serve up any stray human as *haute cuisine Pellucidarienne*.

But *Godzilla* and Co. started getting cute, and waving at the audience. Who can buy a monster like that? And then all those alien critters from outer space that *looked* like monsters turned out to just be good ol' boys having a drink at the local cantina. A swell example is that big, nasty thing in a tank in *Dune*. Up to a decade ago, anything *that* big and ugly in a movie would have eventually escaped from his tank, run amok, and smashed up the Padisha Empire. But no. It's just another character, engaged in the future equivalent of labor relations.

Yes, it's a bad period for movie monsters. Rampaging around and knocking down cities just isn't good enough for today's audiences. "Dead as the dinosaurs" is not just a cliché; the dinosaurs and their spawn are becoming extinct for the second time around (except, of course, for TV reruns).

GODZILLA'S RAP

Say, my name's Godzilla, I'm the reptile killer
That was born in a nuclear test;
I came out of the Pacific and was so horrific
That all the newspapers called me the best.

I'm about half-a-mile high and a quarter-mile wide
And the bombs bounce off of my scales;
I'm enormous, green, and I'm awful mean,
And I eat trains right off of the rails.

I'm the baddest of the creatures in the matinee features,
Kicking sand in King Kong's face;
I made old Rhodan dig a hole in the sand
For his final resting place.

Now, here comes Gamera — I don't give a damera,
I'll kick his turtle booty;
With a boop-boop-a-doop, I'll turn him into soup
And then I'll feed him to Godzuki.

Godzuki's my son, and we have a lotta fun
Tearing off Mothra's wings,
And when we get real bored with Megalon's roar,
We smack him on the head 'til it rings.

Nobody was meaner than that monster named Ghidrah
When he came down out of outer spaces,
But when he challenged us to a monster bust,
Then we break-danced on all of his faces.

Old Perry Mason, he got complacent
In the Japanese Court of Appeals;
He becomes Ironside and he runs and hides,
But I get me a meal on wheels.

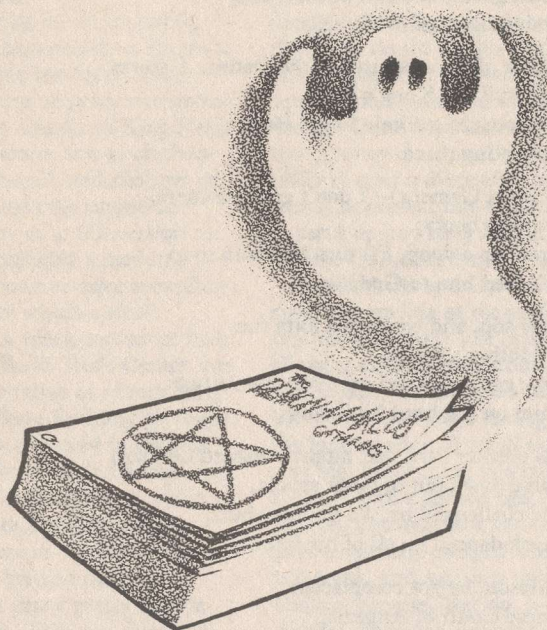
After my attacks, I like to relax
By snapping high-tension lines;
Then I take a little stroll through old Tokyo
And I leave origami behind.

I said my name's Godzilla, I'm the King of Killers,
The baddest anybody ever knew;
I done stomped Japan down into the sand
And now I'm coming hard after you!

AND VISIONS OF SUGAR PLUMS . . .

by Sharon N. Farber

art: George Barr



Sharon Farber's pet trilobite Rover has had a bad case of the sulks since we ventured to doubt his existence. He just sits there like a stone. . . . But we should say something about the author. She is undergoing post-graduate medical training (in neurology) as we write this. "My hobby," she tells us, "is neglecting my vegetable garden until it resembles something out of a fifties monster film, and I'd be foolish to get anywhere near it with a weeding tool. . . ."

Special sale — we're overstocked! Rings of power, rings of gas, fairy rings, rings of bright water, rings of the Nibelung! And one ring to bind them — You can't do anything without this one!

"Let me slip into something more comfortable," she whispered, kissing him lightly on his left cheek, and swept away.

Brice leaned back into the fur-covered couch, and grinned. He couldn't believe his luck. Just an hour ago he'd been tipping back boilermakers at The Phenomenon, contemplating a lonely night of maybe watching *Miracle on 34th Street* or the latest version of *A Christmas Carol*. Then he'd seen her.

"Hiya babe, buy ya a drink?" he'd asked.

She'd bared her teeth as if to snarl, then transformed the expression into a smile. "Do you know you're a hereditary werewolf?" she had asked him.

"Huh?"

"Your eyebrows. They meet over your nose. And your hands . . ."

"Werewolf, yeah," he'd replied. "And baby, you make me wanna howl."

Dine with gods and heroes. Buy a supper for two in Valhalla. Enjoy gourmet barbecued pork and heavenly mead in an atmosphere that is literally Out Of This World.

"Hey, Magda! Great wine!" he yelled, refilling the cut crystal glass. There was a slight bitter aftertaste, but the overall effect was one of warm euphoria. The black cat lazing by the fire stared at him impassively.

Her voice came from behind the door. "What?"

"Love the wine." It gleamed deep purple in the firelight.

"It's Amontillado. Don't drink too much. You'll get wall-eyed."

"Not me, I can hold it." He poured another glass, putting back the decanter. It had been resting on a gaudy catalog.

"*The Demon-Marcus Catalog*? Oh yeah, I hearda that. Texas."

He opened it at random, to a page of exorcise equipment, then flipped to a picture of ungainly hiking boots. "Ten league boots. These boots are for walking!" The price was in tiny figures that seemed to writhe in the flickering light; all Brice could tell was that the boots were very expensive.

"Well? How do you like it?" Magda had slipped back into the room. She was wearing something long and black and slinky. He pulled her onto his lap.

"Watch out, you'll spill the wine."

His lips met hers.

Waite deck chairs. For when you want to tarry at tarot.

"Mommy!" A child began howling somewhere distant.

"Oh, damn," she said, wrenching free. "I'll just be a minute."

He sighed, reopening the catalog. "'Unicorn flakes. Your kids'll love them.'"

Designer genies. Imps in bottles and cans. Buy a six-pack, and save.

He was leering over pictures of models showing off designer versions of the Emperor's new clothes, when she returned.

"He's excited," she said. "Christmas and all."

"I'm excited too," said Brice, executing a judo move that deposited her on the couch, and him atop her.

Your portrait by Pickman. Limited offer.

"Waah! Mommy! There's a ghost in the closet!"

"Ignore it," she yelled, disengaging her mouth from Brice's. They heard the child's wailing, and then a sound of rattling chains.

"Hell," she muttered. "I thought the exterminator'd got rid of them — I'll be right back."

He leafed through the selection of Hummel voodoo figurines and Royal Dalton milk-glass Figurines of the Beast. The cat looked amused.

For the kids: a Gilbert Alchemy Set. It's never too early to begin acquiring Forbidden Knowledge.

"I think I've got him settled down," she said, settling down on Brice's lap. He moved into a more comfortable position, knocking something off the coffee table.

"Don't worry. It's just my pet philosopher's stone," she whispered.

For attractive durability, try our indoor-outdoor magic carpets. They'll remain as stainless as virgin parchment!

She had dipped her finger into the wine and was drawing playful five-pointed stars on his face.

Show your love. Send a singing pentagram.

"Mommy! Who's there?"

She smacked her fist into the other palm, counting to ten, then said sweetly, "No one's here, darling."

Brice muttered curses, and poured another glass of wine. He gestured at her. She shook her head, saying "I never drink wine."

Something for your mummy. Tanna Leaf Tea.

"Someone is out there. I can hear 'im."

"Don't come out," she cried. "It's — it's Santa Claus!"

"Ho ho ho," yelled Brice.

The excited young voice grew higher. "Did he bring it? Huh? Did he bring it?" Magda began whispering in a rhythmic foreign language.

Brice downed the wine, feeling a momentary twinge of nausea, and then abrupt vertigo. Magda, the cat, the fire, the room, all were spinning. He closed his eyes, but the bright arabesques of light continued. Every nerve was tingling. He fell to the ground.

"Is it here yet? Is it here?"

Magda gazed down at Brice, and put a sympathetic hand on his head. The black cat leapt to its feet, arched its back, and hissed at him.

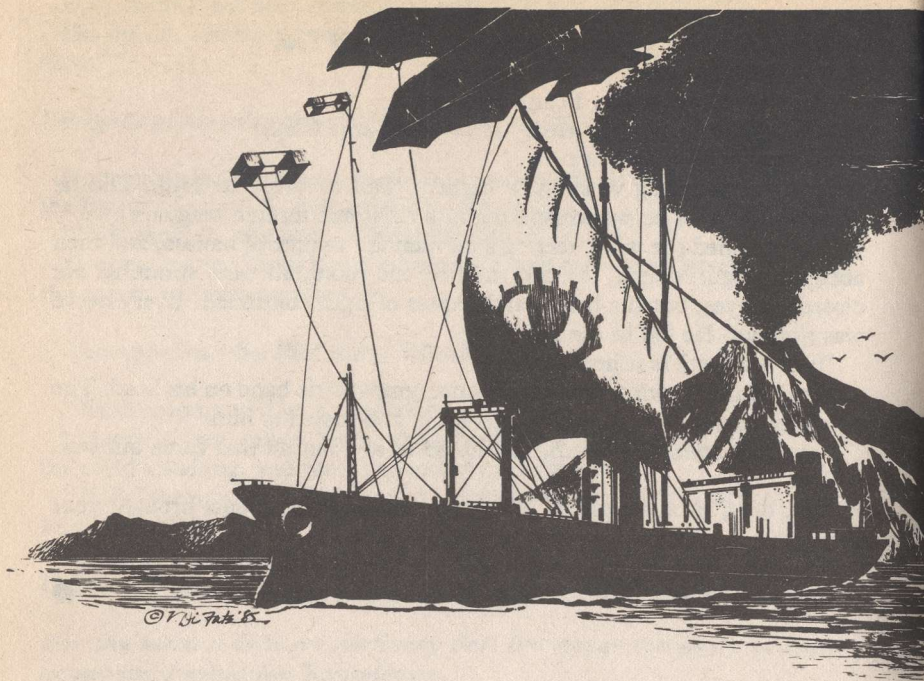
I must've drunk too much, he wanted to say, but all that came out was, "Woof."

"Yes, dear," Magda called. "You can come out now. Santa brought your puppy."

Changeling fence. For security in an urban setting.



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TREMAREST
by Keith Roberts
art: Vincent Di Fate



Keith Roberts is one of the most distinguished British science-fiction writers, author of the classic Pavane and numerous others. His most recent book is Kiteworld, a cycle of stories (two of which appeared in Amazing®) set in a post-catastrophe future in which a dedicated corps of Kitemen keep watch aloft against the demons which, so the Church Variant avers, lurk just beyond the fringes of the still-civilized Realm. The present story takes place at the remote edge of the Kiteworld milieu, perhaps a short while after the final story in the book.

1

Addi was bustling round the hut, wielding a massive besom. The sun was barely up; long shadows of the palm grove in which the building stood lay across the paved way that led down to the village street of Ta'an. The hut was in a prime position. Her father, who had worked long and hard, had bought the plot from Dagan the Headman for a mighty fee; first choice of a whole year's catch. It had been a hard time for them all; Chulith with no fish to trade, Talla growing fast, making demands; *Sarani*, new toys, combs to grace her hair. Addi would have scolded the child for her importunings; but her father, always the gentlest of men, upbraided her. "She is young, my daughter," he said. "The time of understanding has not come."

"Then let it arrive swiftly," snapped Addi; but he shook his head. "It comes too soon for us all," he said. "Let her be awhile." He made her combs, from the shells of the great sea beasts that came ashore in the Time of Breeding; and a wonderful toy, a little *Mij* who climbed a stick at the pulling of a string. Meanwhile he built the house; painfully, log by log and plank by plank. And her mother wove the sweet-smelling grass mats that would cover the floors. Later, the dye-vats bubbled; she stained them with the great bright swirling patterns that hitherto only the richest Tremarestians had owned. The whole village came for the thatching; and at last they could move their possessions from the narrow, dark old hut in which Addi and her sister had been born, into the fine new mansion. The villagers returned for the houseblessing, bearing crock after crock of the sweet palm wine; crept in looking round themselves with awe. Even Dagan seemed impressed, while Chrois Godspeaker became very quiet. Addi had smiled. Her mother had made the priceless dyes herself, from rockpool creatures, the rank foreshore weeds. She had helped her gather them, at night when the windows of houses no longer looked toward the sea. The secret she hugged to her heart, to her firm brown bosom.

She rolled aside the last of the mats, wielded the broom again. Her parents had not been granted long in which to enjoy their fine new home. Since their loss — her father in a fishing accident, her mother in the fever epi-

demic that had swept all the islands last Fog Time — it had seemed imperative to complete the housework early each day. It was a ritual, and hallowed; for to Addi as to most Tremarestians there were degrees of death. Their souls had risen with their other parts from the great *ghat* on the foreshore; but their ghosts remained, clinging to the rafters of the steep-pitched roof, watching her every move. Were they to see the hut dishevelled, its long rooms uncared for, they would flee in disgust; and then they would be truly gone.

Their deaths, coming so hard upon each other — for the sun had scarcely made three travellings between — had hit her hard. She watched dully as the smoke rose in its columns; when all was consumed, and the last embers fallen in, she ran back to the hut. She broke the kitchen pots; for it was not right their spirits should remain behind. She smeared herself with mud and other substances; then she flung herself to the floor. She beat with her fists and sobbed, calling on Ka'Alen; but it seemed he did not choose to hear. Four days she lay; then Chrois came to the *stoep*. Her clear, deep voice rang through the hut. "Addi," she said, "come to me."

She crept out, filthy and dishevelled, pressed her forehead to the God-speaker's ankles; but Chrois raised her, gripping her arms powerfully. "Ka'Alen is displeased," she said. "Your wailing disturbs his ears. He has taken your *Mimpan* to live with him by the shore where the Pink Fish spawn, where there is neither rain nor fog and where they will have full bel-lies. You are ungrateful, child. Come." She led her through the grove of palms, along a winding track to where a stream splashed and tinkled between boulders. The stream had its source on the flanks of the distant Fire Mountain, the grey cone that sometimes glowed at night and in which Sina-ken and certain other Demons lived, bound by Ka'Alen to while their days in Hell. Chrois stripped the cloth from her and made her bathe, lave her hair; afterwards she produced a new *Saran*, tied it about her hips with her own hands. "Go to the village," she said. "Bring back fresh pots. Two certain ghosts are also angry; they wail and pull their hair. For your sister is now your charge. Where is the food you have made her? Where is the bed you have woven? Go, quickly; for now you are mother and father too." So she ran, hurrying down the path, her black hair flying. She bargained with Dal'hroth, the storekeeper, against more of the bright-stained mats; and he, because of her sadness, heard her words. After which she tried to hide her grief; to push it down inside her, to where the *Mimpan* also lived, within her heart. In which she must have succeeded, to the God's satisfaction at least; for in that same season he sent the Mariner.

She brushed the little pile of dust onto the *stoep*, from there down into the street. No need to disperse it farther; the Morning Rain would come soon, flushing it away. She propped the besom in the porch, stood staring thoughtfully. Soon the shadows of the palms would reduce themselves, becoming black blobs around each trunk; then they would begin to extend

the other way, till they stretched directly toward Fire Mountain. Next day, and the day after, the silent, tireless cycle would be repeated. It was a miracle, one of the many Ka'Alen sent; a clock by which he marked the months and years. She hitched at the gaily-printed cloth scrap round her loins, and walked back into the hut.

The small girl scampered up the steps. "Addi," she called. "Addi . . ." Cupped in her hands was a chubby, mouselike creature, big-eyed and furry-tailed; a Kal-Kal. The palm grove abounded with them; they were frequently amazingly tame. "Ha t'es 'Chukti,'" she said. "'Chukti, Chukti, Chukti . . .'"

Addi's eyes dilated. Her sister's *Saran* was tied so negligently her chiefest charm was clearly visible; while there were scarlet flowers wound into her hair. "Zan Saran," said the older girl, pointing. "Zan Saran . . . An' Blazdi . . ." She snatched at the flowers. Talla wailed; the Kal-Kal took the opportunity to jump from her hands, scuttle away nimbly through the door. "Tuf," said Addi scoldingly. She hastily induced respectability, tied the garment firmly round her sister's waist. Talla pouted. "Hae da t'in," she said.

"Duzzi-duzzi-duzzi," snapped Addi. She boxed her ears firmly; only she didn't in fact touch her. Instead her hand fanned the air in front of Talla's face. "Hae da t'in," she said scornfully. With Addi it wasn't a case of do as I do; it was a case of do as I tell you. Anyway the other knew perfectly well that for her it was the Waiting Time, the time in which the God demands abstinence. "Ka'Alen Din," she said.

"Ka'Alen, tuf," said her sister dismissively. She drew herself up. "Da colla Sinaken . . ."

"Duz-duz," shouted Addi again. This time her hand whistled dangerously close to the small girl's nose. She took her arm. "Fraggen," she said. She pointed. "Deete . . ."

"D'adi pralon," said her sister plaintively.

Addi clapped her hands, made shooing motions. She had all day and every day to play.

Talla skipped down the steps, and turned. "No Saran," she shouted. "Wee-wee cover belong me . . ." She ducked, prudently. A scrubbing-brush flew past her ear. She fled. She'd known that if anything was calculated to rouse her sister's ire it was the use of pidgin. "Miji-Kant," she called it. The *Miji* were the little grasping animals that haunted the palm groves, the thicker forest beyond; their chattering and scolding was one of the night noises of the island.

Addi retrieved the missile, grumbling. She went back to the kitchen. "Datzen," she muttered. "?Ken dennen? Who'd have kids?" She shook her head.

Out of sight of the house, Talla pushed the *Saran* defiantly back down. She pouted again. It was Addi's fault Chukti had escaped; though she supposed it didn't really matter. You could always catch Kal-Kals. She put her

hands on her hips, glared up at the nearest of the palms. The great round fruit, the *Fraggen*, hung in big clusters, all round the top of the trunk. She kicked the bole with her bare foot. Nothing happened. But then it hardly ever did. And even if she had dislodged some, Addi would almost certainly have sent her back for more. Despite their fibrous husks the nuts bruised easily; then they'd only keep a matter of hours. She sighed, ducked under a small shelter thatched with the great stiff fronds. She backed out with a satchel on her shoulder and began to climb. The thick, nobbly trunk provided easy hand and foot holds; and in any case she could run up a tree nearly as fast as the *Miji*. She reached the cluster of fruit, filled the little sack. The nuts looked rough and unappetising, but the pink flesh inside was delicious. She'd pound some up with goat's milk, scatter a handful of cereal on top; it was her favourite breakfast. In fact it was a staple for most of the islands; for the *Fraggen* grew right through the year.

The tree swayed slightly in a puff of breeze, first harbinger of the Morning Rain. She climbed higher, to where she could see between the fronds. To the west, above the beach and the scattered clusterings of huts, dark clouds were growing toward the sun. The Rain was heavy, at this season; it never lasted long though.

She stared, shading her eyes. A long way out, but coming in steady, was a ship. She watched till she was sure. Finally there was no doubt. Her birth signs were curious; the Sea Star in the House of Sky Woman. Which meant her sight was the keenest in the village; she made out quite easily the tall building in the middle of the deck, the great black gantry in the bows. She scurried earthwards, dropping down the trunk in a series of heart-stopping leaps. She ran back to the hut. "*Addi*," she shouted, "*Vind. Kiteship ha'vinds!*"

Addi all but dropped a crock. "*?Kiteship?*" she said. "*Dan . . .*"

"*Dis, dis*," cried her sister. She pulled her hand. "*Deete . . .*" Addi ran with her, her annoyance quite forgotten.

The rain struck as they neared the end of the village street. They saw the storm-edge, a dark grey curtain hissing across the sea; then instantly the things about them, huts and trees, the many other hurrying figures, were obscured, reduced also to dim grey shadows. Addi flung her hair back, laughing; for the deluge was warm. She swung Talla into the stern of the first of the great canoes, waded hip-deep with the rest, her shoulder to the curving, stitched planks. She swung aboard herself, grabbed a paddle; and the chanting began. Ahead of her the line of brown backs, gleaming with the wet, swinging rhythmically to the drum-sound; beside her the great outrigger, lashed to its curved supports, creaming through the disturbed sea. In the bows the bailers worked steadily, flinging out the rainwater with their big shells; it still flopped and surged in the canoe's bottom, higher than her ankles. That was unimportant, though; the oiled palm wood of which the craft were made was buoyant as cork, they would still float gunnels under.

She glanced quickly to either side. The line of canoes raced for the buoys to which the ship would moor. She saw they had edged fractionally ahead. The crew raised a cheer; to her right *Seasnake*, Dagan's own canoe, put in a spurt, surged into the lead. She saw the nodding palm-fronds at her prow, the raised platform amidships on which the favoured of the visitors would be ferried ashore. The rest of the craft were shadows in the still-tumbling rain. She laughed again, with pleasure and excitement, and heard Talla call, her voice as thin as a bird. "*Mariner, ha t'es. Mariner . . .*"

She peered. The edge of the raincloud was clearing, but the ship ahead was still vague. She wondered how the Small One could possibly know. Yet she was never wrong. She felt her heart begin to pound, with excitement and anticipation.

This western coast shoaled gently, although to the east and north the island was steep-to. The buoys were a long way out; it made a tiring row in the big canoes. She was fit enough, and lithe; she could climb for the *Fraggen* as easily as her sister. She was still glad enough though when the order was given, the paddles raised dripping in salute. The rain cleared, as quickly as it had begun; the clouds drew their grey shawls inland, and suddenly it seemed the Kiteship was close. Steam jetted from her upper works; a second later her deep voice boomed across the water. She was answered instantly, by the blowing-shells from each canoe.

Addi stared, awed as ever, at the great black hull, streaked a little here and there with rust; the hawsepipes like deep navels, each surrounded by a raised ring of iron. At the complex Tower above them, the central wheel-house with its dull amber paint, the complication of rigging and spars. On bow and stern were the strange marks she knew was language. She couldn't read them, but she had learned to recognize the shapes. KITE-STRENGTH. So Talla, as ever, had been right.

The paddles flashed again. The canoe edged clear, circling with the rest as the Kiteship sidled to her moorings, rolling a little in the afterswell. She saw they'd reefed for the squall; men were aloft already, edging along the footropes, drawing in the bundles of soaking canvas, furling the sails under the great yards. The upper tops'ls came down at the run; and a jib fluttered to the deck. More crewmembers ran forward instantly. Hawasers were passed at bow and stern, cables secured; winches clattered, drawing the steel ropes in. A gangway was lowered, with a clank and rattle; the bright herd of canoes clustered round it. Headropes were attached; and the first of the Tremarestians scrambled up. They carried gifts of flowers and fruit, the bright skins of birds; they were much sought-after on the distant Mainland. The Mariner's land, that Addi had never seen.

By the time she swung aboard, the weather deck was already a scene of confusion. Everywhere, folk chattered and embraced, for *Kitestrength* had been visiting the island now for many years; there wasn't a man of the crew who didn't have friends ashore. Mainland gifts were being passed; necklaces

and strings of beads, armlets of some strange bright bendy substance. Addi owned some herself, though she didn't greatly favour them; but her sister's collection was spectacular.

She searched, worriedly. No sign of the Mariner. Dagan, she knew, would be on the bridge, greeting the ship's own Headman. And receiving his special gifts; crate after crate of the fiery spirit for which the Mainland was noted. She'd tried it odd times, at the great Dances on Holy Days; she didn't care for it much, it always made her cough. Dagan liked it though; and of course his friendship was the most important to maintain.

Perhaps the Mariner was with him. She paused by the spidery metal ladder, put a foot uncertainly on the lowest rung. But of course she wasn't allowed up there, she knew it well enough. She turned away, pushed through the crowd again. "Na'ath?" she called. "Na'ath?"

Her shoulders were caught. She stared up, startled; at his handsome face, the thick, luxurious moustache, the strange light eyes of greeny-brown. His uniform was white, whiter than beach-sand in the sun; it made his skin, pale though it was, look brown by contrast. She clung to him, crooning and kissing. "Na'ath," she whispered. "Na'ath . . ."

He hugged her back. "Nath," he said. "You'll get it right one day." He pushed her away, laughing. "Steady on," he said, "you're soaking me." And indeed there were damp patches where her cloth had pressed him.

She pulled his head down, happily. She whispered, "Soak you more, soon-soon." He was faintly startled. He knew she'd been taking lessons; but her Realmtalk had still come on by leaps and bounds.

She stroked the great tabs on his shoulders, the tabs with their bright gold markings; and he laughed again. "Second Engineer now," he said. "Second Engineer, *Kitestrength*; and don't you forget it, Missy. . . ." He reached into his pocket. "Here," he said. "Something for you . . ."

She gasped. On his last visit she'd given him a shark's tooth; jagged and brutal, a trophy from one of the great fish that sometimes plagued the Islands, the only beasts against which the Tremarestians made deliberate war. She saw it had been carved into the form of the creature itself; curved and leaping, its jaws gaping to attack. She held it in her palm, eyes wide; closed her fingers on it, gripped. The spirit of the enemy was captured magically, turned upon itself; its teeth, its very strength and terror, had been made smooth and safe. She could swim now unconcerned, for the Shark God would not send his creatures. He would see, and understand she had no fear. "You?" she said wonderingly. "You make?"

He nodded. He said, "There's a lot of spare time, on the Easthold Station." He held her shoulders again. It still seemed he couldn't quite believe her. "Addi," he said. "Addi of Tremarest."

She clung to him once more. This time she pushed back. "Make wet," she said. "Make wet . . ." She knuckled at her cheek.

He said. "Here . . ." He slipped the leather thong over her head, lifted the

tumbling mass of hair. The necklet dropped into place; the little creature nestled snugly between her breasts. She looked down, and smiled with joy. "Thank you," she said.

He took her hand. "Come on," he said. "We're going on Dagan's boat, he says we can. It's almost ready, look." He picked up a little grip; but she instantly patted his wrist. "Dan," she said. She waved her hand at it. "Dan . . ."

He smiled. He knew what she meant. All would be provided ashore: food and clothes, shelter, entertainment. A guest must come empty-handed; it was the first rule of hospitality. He shook his head. "I'm not wearing a *Saran* the entire time," he said, "whatever you might think. And I can't live in a dress uniform . . ." She still looked troubled; and he grinned. "All right," he said. "I'll take it back below. I shan't be long." She tightened her grip at once. "Dan," she said. "Bring . . ." She wasn't going to be parted again now. Not even for a minute. She hurried along the deck; but at the gangway she pulled back. "Davd," she said. She stared round. "Talla?"

The voice came from high overhead. She glared up, at the maintruck. "*Sinaki*," she yelled. She stamped her foot. "*Vind-zu. Deete . . .*"

"*Hat vinds*," said the little girl casually. She descended the shrouds in much the same way she had descended the palm trunk. Nath groaned and covered his eyes.

She thumped to the deck, ran to him. "*Hola, Mariner*," she said. She turned her face up. He bent to kiss her, and was startled again. Her lips were frank, and sweet. He straightened, put an arm round her shoulders. He gave her a little hug. "My word," he said. "How you've grown . . ."

The great canoe paddled to the shore more cautiously. It carried a heavy toplod; Dagan with his two chief wives, both flower-garlanded — though the garlands were more than a little draggled now — Nath and Addi, Talla; Heldon the Shipchief, Yarman the Mate — whatever that might mean — and sundry others. Yarman had his arms round the waists of two brown girls, and seemed already more than a little drunk. Addi frowned slightly, but made no comment. After all, he was a guest; and guests are sacred at all times. She glanced back instead. The Kiteship was already small with distance. She tightened her grip on the Mariner's hand again. "Soon I come," she said. "Not go away."

He frowned. "Come?" he said.

She pushed herself against him. "Come to ship," she said. "Sail to your land. Then I your woman."

Momentarily, his face seemed to cloud. Then he nodded. "Perhaps, Addi," he said. "Perhaps, one day . . ."

The land was close. Orders were called; at the last instant the paddles were raised. The prow took the land; the canoe swished gently onto the beach. A part of his mind admired the seamanship.

Bearers were waiting, burly men whose duty it would be to carry the visi-

tors pickaback through the surf. He frowned again, submitted to the indignity. Once more, protocol was all-important; it was vital that no drop of sea-water touch a visitor's clothes. Addi grinned, balanced the grip on her shoulder and jumped over the side. She waded ahead to the beach.

The yellow bird hopped cautiously, following the trail of split black seeds. It led to a curious little structure; hatbox-shaped, and four handspans across. (Five of Talla's.) It was woven of fine twigs; another twig supported it at an angle, one side of its rim a few inches above the grass. From the prop a fine line of woven fibre led to a mound of bushes. In the bushes, Talla held her breath. The seeds, bright red inside, were from the *Tikkan*. No yellow bird could resist them; they were their favourite food. This was good *Tikkan* country, although only a hundred paces or so from the edge of the palm plantation. Most of the thickets were farther inland, edging the high jungle; but the little birds flocked here also — the supply seemed inexhaustible.

Talla rested her chin on her fist, cautiously. The flowers that hazed the bushes were scarlet as well; their scent filled the air, heady and powerful. The twigs too, if crushed, gave off a smell like the spices Addi used to make the God's great drink on Holy Days. Talla grimaced, eyes still fixed on the bird. She remembered the drink only too well. Fruit went into it, the heads of certain flowers; and bottle after bottle of the rich palm wine. The fermentation was fierce; so fierce that even on a hot day the great bowls in which it was made would steam as if they had a fire beneath. That was the God's own breath of course, warming the offering to his liking. The end result was forbidden to the likes of her; she'd nonetheless taken a ladle one day, and sampled some. She licked her lips, surprised. It was really very good. She drained the ladle, and refilled it. This she did several times; after which the oddest things started to happen. The floor of the house, which she'd always regarded as innately stable, began to heave about; it was like standing in a canoe when a heavy swell was running. She ran for the door, alarmed; but for some reason she missed the opening altogether, collided with the frame. After which she fell down the verandah steps, and was very sick. Things spun and flashed for a considerable time; when vision partially returned her sister was standing over her. She'd gulped, tried to focus and given up the attempt. "*H-Holla, Addi,*" she said.

She thought she'd never seen the older girl so cross, though at the time she couldn't understand why. It was the nearest she'd ever come to a beating; which would have been a serious matter, a very serious matter indeed. In Tremarest, no human being laid hands on another in rage; certainly it hadn't happened in living memory, though there had been stories from some of the outer Islands. It was the God's strictest prohibition. If punishment was necessary, the right belonged to Ka'Alen: He of the Fishes, who once made all the world. And he only would administer it, in his own way

and in his own good time. It had still been a close-run thing, though; since then she'd left the palm liquor strictly alone.

The yellow bird had reached the rim of the trap. He hesitated, seemed for a moment about to hop underneath; then an unpecked seed caught his eye. He turned back, and Talla cursed under her breath. He twitched his wings and her heart came into her mouth. She'd thought for a moment he was going to fly away after all. It was all right, though. He saw the pile of seeds heaped enticingly beneath the wickerwork, hopped forward; and she pulled the string. The trap fell with a plop; and she whooped, startling a further flock of the birds from a bush a few paces away. But that didn't matter, they'd soon be back. She picked up a little square cage, likewise made of woven twigs, and hurried forward. She captured the bird, working her arm carefully under the trap, and popped him in. She hurried down the hill, released him into the big cage at the back of the hut. She stood back admiringly. The thing was filling nicely now; and she'd only been hunting three days. She put her head on one side. Sometimes she felt vaguely sorry for the birds. Many would die on the long voyage back, she knew that well enough; those that survived would be put into other cages, and stay there all their lives. She was sure they would be happier on Tremarest, where they could fly about. But they brought good prices, or so Addi claimed. Which in turn meant trade goods. They could be exchanged for the many items they needed, but couldn't easily produce for themselves; seed corn, potatoes, all the rest. She frowned. She'd even heard a market had started up in Kal-Kals, but she'd refused to oblige the Mainlanders in that. The little creatures ambled the paths of the plantation; if you saw one, as often as not it would just sit and wash its whiskers; all you had to do was pick it up. That wasn't hunting, there was no skill involved at all; those who wanted them could get them for themselves.

The frown deepened. She'd never been wholly sure about the trade goods, useful though they undoubtedly were. The bangles for instance. She collected them — she liked the pretty colours — but she seldom wore them. They looked wrong somehow, against her skin. Though Addi's Magic Shark was different. But then of course, the Mariner had made it. She wondered if he would make one for her as well.

She trudged back up the hill. Some Mainland goods she definitely disapproved of. The tight blue trousers for instance that many Tremarestians wore, both men and women. She'd thought them quite shocking at first, thought she supposed you could get used to anything. Once, at Addi's coaxing, she'd even tried to force her own legs into a pair; but she instantly pushed them off with loathing. She couldn't stand the sensation of the cloth gripping her skin. The *Saran*, after all, was cool and dainty; particularly if you had a pretty figure. She looked down at herself. She was coming on quite nicely, she'd decided; she'd be prettier than Addi one day. She pushed the little cloth fractionally lower.

Addi even had a garment that she wore across her chest. Who she'd traded it from she had no idea, she was sure it couldn't have been the Mariner. Her eyes popped open really wide when she first saw it. "*?Qua't'la?*" she'd asked, horrified; and Addi had pushed her shoulders back and taken a deep breath. "A bra," she said condescendingly. "They're all the rage on the Mainland."

She didn't catch the words; but she understood their import well enough. "*Duzzi-duzzi*," she said insolently. She reached forward, squeezed one of her sister's hidden nipples. "Titty-basket belong you," she said. Addi picked a pot up, and she fled. Smackings might well be forbidden; but missiles avoided the prohibition. Addi chased her to the far edge of the palm grove before giving up in disgust. She returned to the hut, puffing a little and still annoyed. She brooded awhile; then she snatched the alien garment off, threw it angrily into the corner. She kept it; but she never wore it again.

Talla reset the trap, sprinkled more bait. Then she stiffened fractionally. Two figures were climbing the path she had just left. The Mariner, and her sister. Like Addi, Na'ath wore the *Saran*. They were arm in arm, laughing. They stopped to embrace; and the Mariner touched Addi in a certain way. She gasped at that and began to move against him. He took her hand; they hurried away with fresh urgency, over the brow of the little rise and through the bushes beyond.

When Talla chose, she could move as quietly as the shyest woodland creature. She followed at a distance, ducking low each time it seemed they might look back. They vanished from sight finally among the scarlet-flowered bushes; but that presented no difficulty. Her ears were as sharp as her eyes; she could follow easily enough by the faint sounds of cracking twigs, even the swishing of their feet in the long, rank grass. The sounds were succeeded by others.

There was a final stand of *Tikkan*. She dropped to her stomach, wriggled forward. She parted the branches cautiously. There was a little hollow, set round with the brilliant-flowered shrubs. In it, Addi lay on her back. Her legs were round the Mariner, the ankles locked; her nails dug at his shoulders, and she was giving little gasping cries. Talla's scowl returned. She watched the rhythmic movement for a while; finally the Mariner gave a great shudder. Addi cried out a final time; and he pulled away, rolled onto his back. They both lay panting.

Talla wriggled away. She walked back down the hill, her face still set. Addi should have been at home, making more of the great grass rugs they always clamoured for. Instead she was playing; while she — Talla — had to sit all day catching silly yellow birds. And her Initiated too.

She pulled her knees up, hooked her arms round them and rested her chin. She was remembering the Initiation. The Opening, some folk called it. She'd rapidly found out why. She'd been worried for a time; but Addi had tossed her head. "You'll be all right," she'd said. "It doesn't hurt at all, you

listen to too many stories. Chrois is very good; I should know, she Initiated me." So she went to the Godspeaker's hut; and Chrois gave her a strange drink that made her head spin and yet drove sleep away. She sat all night, working on her gently from time to time, letting her rest between. At intervals she told stories of the Gods and Goddesses: Sky Woman and her Daughter, whose tears are the gentle rain of Cropspringing; Ka'Alen and the Shark King, the banishment of Sinaken. There was blood of course, finally; but by then she'd all but forgotten her fear. Chrois wiped her gently, and smiled. "Da'zal," she said. "It is finished. You are a woman now; the God has seen, and is pleased." She led her to a bed in the corner of the hut, the hut where in spite of the warmth a fire still burned. "Sleep now, Little One," she said; and magically, she did. She hurried to Da'and next day to tell him of her new status; Da'and, her special playmate since before she could remember. But he was nowhere to be found.

Understanding dawned slowly. He too was to be Initiated, in the special manner of a boy; and when the Godspeaker's palm was wet, and he had understood, he would go to the Men's Side. For three seasons she would neither see nor speak with him; this was the abstinence the God demanded. Knowledge first, then self-denial. She hunched her shoulders. It was so unfair. She understood the Pleasuring of course, Chrois had shown her that too; not that she hadn't really known before. It was good at times; but the other must be better. Else why would they all do it? She moved her position, restlessly. One season had passed already; but the two remaining stretched endless. The Time of Fog, the Time of the Little Winds; the swarming of the Pink Fish, that filled the sea for miles around the Island. The adults, Addi among them, would launch every canoe the village owned; all would be needed to tow the vast net into its curve. She would watch as ever from the beach; see the sea boil as the trap finally closed, the boys and older women hauled at the great rough ropes, drawing the thing inexorably to the beach. The doomed creatures would leap then, desperate; and tridents would flash from canoe after canoe, the sea turn red a mile out from the shore. It was an exciting time, the most exciting time of the year. But still so far away; and after it, another. Meanwhile, Addi . . .

She snatched at the twine. The trap dropped with a click; a yellow bird, about to enter, fluttered with alarm and flew away. Talla stood up. She felt a sudden startling gust of rage. She started to run back down the path, not troubling to hide at all. A voice called behind her; but she merely speeded her pace. Her ears were burning; and there was a curious singing in them. She had no name for the emotion; but the Mariner would have understood readily enough. He would have called it jealousy.

The *Miji* were chattering, in the plantation and the hunting grounds beyond. He lay on his back and listened to them, and to the bubbling cry of a night bird. Finally he rolled over, pushed himself onto his elbow. Addi

watched up at him. The moon, swinging through Heaven — his Heaven — had laid a slab of silver on the bed. It showed her clear; the great long-lashed eyes, the perfect cheekbones, strong modelling of shoulders and neck. He smiled, for sheer pleasure of her. A coil of black hair lay across one breast; he traced its outline, circled the nipple gently with his fingertip. She wriggled luxuriously. "Chrois say, girl who sleep in moon go mad," she whispered.

He teased her. "Girl no sleep in moon," he said. "Moon round. Girl slip off."

She hit his shoulder with her knuckles. It stung. "No laugh," she said. "Speak good Realmtalk."

"You speak beautifully," he said. "You'll never know how beautifully."

She looked thoughtful. She said, "Realm women pretty?"

"Some," he said. "Some are very lovely. There's none like you though."

She returned to her former theme. "Addi come to Realm," she said.

He smiled. "You wouldn't like it," he said. "It isn't warm, like Tremarest. You'd get goosebumps."

She looked puzzled.

He said, "You'd be cold. You'd have to wear a lot more clothes."

"Addi have clothes," she said indignantly. "Addi have . . ." She rubbed her thigh. "Blue cloth, for leg."

"Trews," he said. "Slacks."

"Not slack," she said. "Very tight . . ."

He chuckled. "I bet you look terrific," he said. "But you always look terrific." He cupped her breast, leaned to kiss her cheek.

She moved her head on the pillow, almost with irritation. She said, "Na'ath have woman?"

He parried the question. "Addi have man?"

"Of course," she said. "When Na'ath not here. Plenty men."

He said, "I can imagine." He became thoughtful. He hadn't believed it at first, though he'd been told often enough; but he'd found it was true. Love was free in the Islands; but to a Tremarestian, love was play. Men fished the sea, planted and reaped the crops; they had nothing to do with the making of a child. That was the God's work. But until a girl chose her Lifepartner, Ka'Alen remained aloof. It was only after the Naming — a secret ceremony known only among women — that the Great One noticed her. Then his spirit entered quickly, and she conceived. He remembered the first time he'd gone with Addi; three seasons ago now, when her folk were still alive. He'd attempted a standard precaution; but she'd taken the thing from his hand, thrown it contemptuously across the room. He'd tried to explain to her, in halting Tremarestian mixed with pidgin, something of what he saw as the facts of life; but she'd merely chuckled, and squeezed him intimately. "If baby come this," she'd said, "how I not big?" To which of course there was no answer. No answer at all.

It seemed she'd read his thoughts. She said, "Tomorrow, I think I Name

you.”

He sensed danger. “No, Addi,” he said. “Do not Name me yet.”

Her mood changed instantly. She said, “You not want me.”

He said, “You know that isn’t true.” He nuzzled at her; but she pushed him away. She said, “There is woman.”

Again he parried the accusation. He said, “There are men.”

There was a woman of course. He saw her in his mind’s eye, as vividly as if she’d been standing in the room. Kari, fair and slight; Kari whom he’d courted desperately, whom he’d loved with all his heart. Kari who cleaned his house and washed his clothes and cooked his meals and waited patiently, through voyage after voyage, tour after tour. She’d been loyal and steadfast, uncomplaining; a Mariner’s wife, a wife to make any man proud. He could never let her down; and yet . . . “The moon is large, in Tremarest,” he said. “The air is warm, the sea falls gently on its coasts. Tremarest is in my heart. Addi is in my heart. She will live there for ever. No ghost will drive her out.” He was struck by an inspiration. “I speak before the *Mimpan*,” he said. “It is they with whom I keep faith.”

To his surprise she began to cry. He held her till she was done, gently rubbing the satin curve of her back. Finally the snufflings ceased. She snuggled against him, face pressed to his shoulder. She said, “Tell about Realm.”

He’d told her often enough; but he was still glad of the change of subject. “Well,” he said, “it’s big. Fifty Tremarests it could hold, and still find room for more. There are mountains, and rich farmland. Great harbours where the Kiteships go. That’s what I’m doing, when I’m not in Tremarest. Helping fly the Kites.”

“What is Kite?”

He’d been through that before as well. He’d tried to describe the Cody strings; but it had been useless. How explain to this child of nature the complexities of Pilots, Lifters, Mancarriers? She’d grasped they flew in air, but that was all. She’d said, “Then they are birds.”

“No. Not birds.”

“But only birds fly in air. . . .”

He said, “The Kites are a sort of bird. A special sort.”

“Why you make fly?”

“To frighten the Demons.”

“Demons not fly.”

He’d said, “Ours do. . . .”

He fell quiet again. He’d never made his mind up about the Kitefaith. Easier to believe in the Demons of Tremarest; the rumblings that were their voices, trapped in earth, the rock that was their red-hot, angry puking. He’d seen the mountain explode just once, on his second trip; it was a memory that had stayed with him. He half-shrugged. He’d long ago stopped troubling his head with theology. Something had made the Badlands glow blue, something had wasted all the world; all except the Realm, and this far-flung

scatter of Islands. He supposed "Demons" was as good a word as the next. He was an engineer, and nothing more; the rest was for the priests.

He stroked her hair and frowned. If the worst came to pass, there'd be fire in the Realm as well; and that soon. For years beyond counting, the Church Variant had retained control; and it kept a tight rein. When the Vars had sprung into being, no man could tell; in the aftermath of the Great Destruction, presumably. They it were who had devised the Codys, and the Corps that ministered to them. The great Kites flew round all the coasts of the Realm; they flew above cities and towns, the rich, rolling acres of the Middle Lands. Under each String a Manlifter, its basket suspended beneath; in each basket an Observer, helmeted and goggled, prayerbook in hand and a pistol. For years enough the people had been content, stared fearfully at the skies on those rare days when the Kites were grounded; but now new forces were abroad. The Middle Church, mild but powerful, challenged Var authority with ever-increasing strength; in every town and village their buildings — for the most part plain, whitewashed barns — faced the needle-spired edifices of the Variants. No punishment, in their Doctrine; any more than there was punishment on Tremarest. And increasingly the people drew to them. A land that had been ruled by fear was ceasing to be afraid.

He supposed all times and conditions called forth an answer. And so the new sect had appeared. The Ultras. He curled his lip. They dressed in scarlet robes, strapped automatic weapons to their waists. He'd sailed with them often enough; in his opinion they were lunatics to a man. Nominally, they were Vars; but he felt in his bones the Church was finding it increasingly difficult to control them. Their power was growing too, by leaps and bounds. The Southguard was their stronghold; the Southguard, in which lay *Kitestrength's* home port. Their great depot was only a few miles along the coast; the depot where they kept their Hunter Trucks and Battle Wagons. One day, given half the chance, the murderous vehicles would spread across the land like insane hornets. Then, if not before, the Kiteworld would burn; and what afterwards?

He set his mouth. What if they came to the Islands? What would their effect be, on the gentle, peaceful folk of Tremarest? He shuddered to imagine.

The vision faded. He came round with a start. Addi was cool against him; her hair still smelled of the flowers she'd worn all day. She said reproachfully, "Mariner go long way."

"Yes," he said. "I'm sorry." He kissed her forehead, and she rolled onto her back. She said, "Mariner come home." She held her arms out; and he felt a surge of feeling such as even he had never known.

She slept afterwards; as contented, trusting, as a child. He lay awake for a time, watching her; the hair spread on the pillow, the peaceful rise and fall of her breasts. Finally his lids grew heavy too.

The rectangle of silver moved from floor to wall, faded as the moon sank.

The scolding of the *Miji* ceased by slow degrees, was replaced by the solitary piping of a bird. A pre-dawn breeze rose, rustled the great fronds of the palms.

He opened his eyes. The sky was brightening; but it was not day as yet. He felt beside him, realized the bed was empty. He was startled for a moment; then he remembered. Three days before, she'd cut grass for more of the bright-dyed mats that sold so well in the Realm. Deep in the hills, where it grew its best and longest. She'd promised to fetch it early; she'd be tying it in bundles, loading it onto the back of the donkey they used for transport. Soon, she would return. He wondered how she'd avoid the Morning Rain.

He lay back, eyes half-closed. He was remembering his first trip to the Islands. He'd been a raw Third then; raw at least as far as the Kiteships were concerned. Yarman, the Mate, had needled him incessantly all the way out. "Be all right there, boy," he'd said. "Put some lead in yer pencil they will, them there Tremarities. Always does ter me. Not as I needs it o'course. Look as if you could use some, though . . ."

He'd choked back an angry remark. After all he'd been married to Kari three years and more; he wasn't exactly a tyro in such matters. He'd still bitten his tongue. Yarman was an old hand; and there were ways and means enough to get back at a junior officer, he'd already found that out. But the other had already seen the look he'd shot at him. Bully and thug he might well be; but he was nobody's fool. So he'd gone on and on, till Nath got sick of hearing him. He'd descended to lurid details; but in the event none of it prepared him for the reality. For the herd of bright canoes that rushed to meet the Kiteship, for the chattering and laughter, the excitement; for the bare brown flashing girls. He realized he'd entered another world. They were like creatures from a dream; he thought he'd never seen anything more beautiful.

Even in that company, Addi stood alone. There was a quietness to her, almost a shyness he thought, that somehow marked her out. That and her loveliness, that to his mind eclipsed all the rest. She stood before him demurely, tracing patterns on the steel deck with her toe; and his heart had begun to pound. She was very young then, he guessed a bare sixteen; but she glanced at him sidelong, and he saw her eyes were wise. She handed him, suddenly, a woven fibre bag containing strange round fruits. He realized she had chosen him; and things had tended momentarily to spin. After that he'd gone with her time and again, till finally guilt faded. It seemed from that first moment a feeling had existed between them. An empathy stronger than anything he had known; even stronger, he sometimes thought, than with Kari. He'd tried to analyse it, on the long journeys to and from the Realm, on month-long Watchings in the Easthold; decided eventually it could only be defined by the simplest yet least satisfactory of phrases. They were in love. Meanwhile of course she had grown into a woman; and so the oscilla-

tion had begun. Addi and Kari, Tremarest and the Realm. It was a situation he knew himself unable to resolve. Kari existed, Addi existed; but in different worlds. He needed both. He stalked the engineroom gantry, glared at the gauges, watched the great gleaming conrods turn beneath his feet. In the end he thrust the whole thing from him. *Kitestrength* sailed to the Islands, again and again; and he was content. The present was all that mattered; the future must take care of itself.

Another shock awaited him. He thought, sleepily, of his first meeting with Talla. That had been on his formal visit to the big hut; prior to that, for a season, they'd used a little cane shack, one of many scattered in the hills that he'd realized belatedly were purpose-built. He'd sensed at once that he was an honoured guest. Fresh grass mats had been spread, crocks of wine brought in. There were bowls of fruit, plates of dried, salted fish, others heaped with cubes of a delicately-spiced meat he couldn't place. It had been very sedate, at least until Talla ran in. She'd stopped at sight of him; and for his part he'd stared in disbelief. She was slim and straight, as nut-brown as the rest. Her hair though, the great wavy mane of it, was bronze; far paler than her skin. And her tilted eyes were gold. He wouldn't have believed such a thing possible; not at least till he had seen it for himself. He wondered how it could have come about. Some throwback, some mutation of the genes; but Addi didn't enlighten him. Nor had she since. "*Dasti*," she had said. "*Dasti vey . . .*" and he had understood just enough Tremarestian to realize she was telling him she truly was her sister. For answer, Talla had stuck her tongue out. A squalling row ensued. She was ejected finally for her pains, struggling and kicking; and he'd decided there and then that if Addi was the most beautiful girl he'd ever seen, Talla was the most startling.

He had been dozing. He came round with a jolt. The sun was up, streaming full into the room; and Talla was standing by the bed. She wore an old ragged singlet. It barely reached her waist. The rest of her was bare.

He sat up, alarmed. Said the first thing that came into his head. "Scruffy," he said. "Big holes in vest. Two holes."

She smiled slowly. She pointed to her groin. She said, "Three."

He came off the bed as if propelled by a charge of explosive. He grabbed hastily for a *Saran*. "*Talla, dan*," he said. "*Sinaki . . . Ka'Alen Din . . .*"

She spat. "*Ka'Alen, tuf*," she said. She displayed herself, using her fingers; and embarrassment turned to anger. "*Ka'Alen din*," he said. He swung his hand, palm flat. The slap sounded like a pistol shot.

She staggered back. Her face was a picture of shocked disbelief. She put a hand slowly to her glowing cheek. Then her eyes blazed. "*Aiiieee*," she said. "*Aiiieee . . .*" She turned on her heel, and bolted.

He realized what he'd done. "Talla," he shouted. "Talla, no . . ." He flung himself from the house; but by the time he reached the plantation edge she was already tiny with distance. "Talla," he called desperately. "Talla, come back . . ." It was useless though; she had vanished.

The rain came. This time it brought lightning, and thunder. The vivid purple flickerings danced, it seemed, from hill to hill. Between the bolts the land was shadowed, grey. His voice was all but lost in the roar and hiss. The clouds passed eventually. In their wake the woods, the high jungle beyond, began to steam. The vapour hung above the tilted plains of grass, made a waist-high mist.

He returned an hour later. He'd searched the hunting ground, the arm of woodland beyond, calling all the way; but to no avail. He emerged finally in a bush-strewn meadow. Beyond, distant but ominous, the Fire Mountain loomed, topped by its plume of smoke. He called again, a last hopeless time; but nothing stirred. He trudged the way he had come, plodded into the hut. Addi wasn't back. The silence reproached him.

He pulled off the wet *Saran*, let it fall. Sat on the edge of the bed and put his face in his hands. He'd learned a lot about the Tremarestian faith; he knew he'd done a terrible thing. Broken Ka'Alen's first taboo, here under the eyes of ghosts. Now he must leave. Addi was ended for him, Tremarest. He'd known the future would resolve itself. But in his wildest dreams he hadn't imagined it would be like this.

He couldn't sit still. He changed into his seagoing things, the dress uniform of which she'd been so proud. He slung the rest into the grip, looked round. He wished to leave nothing behind; nothing to remind her of his presence, hurt her afresh. He crossed the *stoep*, walked down to the village without looking back. He strode along the little street, ignoring the salutations he received, the puzzled glances that were cast. He reached the beach, walked again to where a stand of tall palms grew close to the water's edge. He sat in their shade and stared over the sea. He made out the Kiteship, vague in sun-haze, tiny with distance. At sixteen hundred each day the leavemen came ashore; he could go back with the picket boat. He sat indifferently, flicking pebbles at the water, and thought about nothing at all.

She came at midday. He saw her a long way off, treading the white sand. She reached him finally and squatted down. She didn't speak.

He glanced at her. He saw by her face that she knew what had happened. "Addi," he said, "I'm sorry."

She didn't answer directly. Instead she brooded, pushing her toes in and out of the sand. She said, "Why you here?"

He swallowed. "The boat comes in a little while," he said. "I go back to my ship."

She turned her face away. She said, "Then you punish both of us."

"Addi," he said desperately, "I don't want to go. I love you more than the world. But I broke the God's taboo. Can't you understand?"

She didn't answer for a moment. He sensed she was struggling for words. She traced a little pattern with her finger; finally she looked at him. He saw there were tears in her eyes again. "Nath," she said — it was the first time she'd ever got his name right — "the God say . . . no . . ." She made an

expressive little gesture, beating her hand up and down in a spanking motion. "This . . . good," she said. "But sometime . . . if you no . . . punish . . . Then me?"

"You?" he said. "But you can't. You know that."

"The God very strong," she said. "But also very . . . wise. He know, it better . . . for Talla. So he look other way. Now, she keep own word to him."

He hadn't looked at it like that. He said, "But . . . the *Mimpan* . . ."

She smiled, a little sadly. "Parent know," she said, "is good. They know sometime" — the gesture came in useful again — "we . . . smack . . . for love." She flung her arms round him, pressed her face to his shoulder. "Come home, Na'ath," she said.

His thoughts were whirling. "Addi," he said, "where is she?"

She sat back, brushed at her cheek. "Go to hills," she said. "Make cage, catch more yellow bird."

"But she can't stay there," he said. "She's got no clothes, no shelter, no food . . ."

"Has clothes," she said calmly. She'd found her of course. But then, she'd known where to look. "Make shelter," she said. "Easy." She wagged her hands. "Plenty *Fraggen*. And good water. She not starve."

He said, "But she's on her own."

She shook her head serenely. "Not alone," she said. "The God has heard. He sits above her, in a tree."

He marvelled, for the first time, at the simplicity of Faith.

She fingered the little grip, touched his arm beguilingly. "Come?" she said. "Come now?"

He shook his head. "I can't," he said. "She won't come back. Not if I'm there."

"She come," she said. "Two, three day." She groped for words again. "First must . . ." She touched her forehead. "Work in head."

He said automatically, "Think."

"Yes," she said. "Must think." She scrambled to her feet, smiled and held her hand out.

He hesitated a moment longer. Then he rose in turn, and followed her. He felt as if an entire world had been lifted from his shoulders.

She prepared a meal; the pink flesh of the palm-nuts, but served in a way he hadn't seen. She stirred in fruit and a handful of small green berries, sprinkled the top with the bright flowers of the *Tikkan*. He bit into one of the berries cautiously and made a face. The flavour was sharp, astringent.

She waved her hand, smiling. She spooned the *Fraggen*-pulp, dropped a berry on top, held it out to him. He tried again. The combination of sweet and sour was delicious. He ate steadily; later she fetched his pipe and lucifers, a cup of palm wine. He sat on the *stoep*, watched the yellow birds flit like sparks along the village street.

She showed him how to weave the round grass mats, working outward from the centre, passing a stout bamboo needle through and back. He tried to imitate. He was clumsy at first; but he found his fingers rapidly acquired skill. As they worked she told him more of the *Kra'an*, the solitary communion with the God that all Tremarestians indulged in from time to time. Though this would be Talla's first. "Chrois make her woman . . . here," she said. "Now she be woman . . . here." She touched her forehead again, and smiled at him. "You make woman," she said.

He shook his head. "I don't think so, Addi," he said. "I think she was woman already."

They worked on past nightfall, by the soft light of palm-oil lamps. Finally he looked up. She sat cross-legged, bent over the task. Her heavy hair fell forward; the wooden needle flickered deftly, jerking through and back. As it moved the shark charm swung, touched each nipple in turn.

She became aware of his glance. She straightened, and watched back. He flung the mat down. "I think," he said, "we've done enough for one day." He held his arms out; and she relaxed against him, with a little gasp.

Next morning she donned a pair of the tight-fitting blue trews, he supposed for his delectation. She worked for a while; then she unclipped the waistband, eased the fastener down a little. "Tummy get fat," she said apologetically. She looked up, under her brows; and the work was interrupted.

By evening they'd manufactured quite a pile of mats. He was surprised how easy the job became, once you got the hang of it. He found it soothing too; his mind was more at rest than it had been in years. He smiled inwardly at what Kari would have said could she see him sitting tatting. She'd always complained about what she termed his lack of domesticity; it had taken Tremarest, it seemed, to cure that. That was true to the character of the Island, though. It solved some problems, posed others in their stead.

This time it was the girl who called a halt. "Big feast," she said. "Start soon. Get ready . . ."

It was the first he'd heard of it. To his surprise, she fetched his uniform. "Feast for all sailor," she said. "Special."

"Did you fix it up?"

She shook her head. "Dagan," she said. "Many trade goods. Dagan very pleased."

The function was staged on a plateau outside the village, fringed with palms and overlooking the sea. He stared. There'd been a celebration when *Kitestrength* arrived; but nothing to compare with this. To one side a long charcoal-filled pit glowed red; over it pigs roasted whole on spits, each turned by a patient Tremarestian child. A little dais had been built; on it sat the ship's officers, all as resplendent as he. Heldon, the First Engineer, a scattering of others. He guessed the duty watch would be cursing long and loud.

Yarman provided the only discordant element. He was lolling in his seat,

already obviously much the worse for wear. Whenever he showed signs of tumbling from the rostrum, an anxious Tremarestian would hurry forward, prop him upright again. He took his place, and Addi squatted at his feet. She was wearing the full *Saran* of a matron: gathered discreetly above the breasts, reaching to the knee. He realized she had her own brand of tact. She laid her head back against his legs; and he reached to grip her shoulder. He felt her tense at the touch.

Girls were dancing already. Some of the rituals were explicit, to say the least. Others circulated among the crowd — it seemed the entire population of the village was in attendance — with platters of baked fish, jars of the smooth palm wine. The only things he declined were the *Ziz-Ziz*: a species of large grasshopper, oven-cooked and coated with spices and honey. Addi, though, grabbed a handful, ate them with relish.

The wine was stronger than the Island wines he'd drunk before. His head began to spin almost at once. Later his memories became vague. He remembered taking her hand, joining a swaying, chanting line of revellers; later, the long walk back to the hut. The cool night air sobered him a little; and he had time for remorse. For a while he'd forgotten the child up in the hills.

By the third morning Talla still wasn't back. Her sister was not concerned. "Long time, talk to God," she said. "Come soon." She hauled out the dyepots from the thatched lean-to behind the house. Some of their contents had partially coagulated; she'd already told him she was still using her mother's stock; soon she would have to make more. She lit the primitive clay oven — primitive in appearance at least, he'd already tasted some of its results — set them to simmer and melt. Later she piddled carefully into a brightly-decorated crock. He was taken aback for a moment; then he understood. Urine was the mordant.

She set to with a crude, long-handled brush, daubing the swirling patterns. He carried each mat out as she finished, spread them on the roadway below the *stoep*. They made a bright carpet, stretching half the length of the hut. She played a funny game with herself, hopping between them on one leg; then she prepared him a meal.

Talla came as the shadows of the palms were stretching toward Fire Mountain. She walked into the big room quietly, stood and stared. He put his pipe down slowly, not knowing what to say. She ran forward then, dropped to her knees and pressed her forehead against his legs. He raised her gently. "It's all right, Talla," he said. "There's no need for that."

She stared again. Then she hurried out. She returned with her arms loaded with trade goods; bangles and necklaces, anklets and arm-rings. She proffered them; and he stared at Addi, wholly baffled. She nodded, gave a little jerk of her head. He took the offerings, and the child trotted back for more. Then came her clothes: shawls and *Sarani*, little pairs of sandals, wood-soled, their tops of woven grass. Even a pair of trows that he was sure she had never worn. Lastly she brought her toys: nutshell boats with palm-

husk sails, jointed wooden animals, a little *Mij* that climbed a stick. She sat on her heels finally; and he once more glanced at Addi for instruction. Another flick of the head; and he began, solemnly, handing the things back. They were restored to their cupboard; and Talla kissed him carefully on the cheek. He gripped her shoulders; and she jumped away. Unexpectedly, she whooped. She ran from the hut, slim legs twinkling, paused on the *stoep* to yell again.

He followed, stared. She pelted to the plantation, kicked violently at the first of the palms. For once, *Fraggen*-nuts rained down. She kicked the second, and the third. Swung round a fourth, and vanished in the direction of the hunting ground. He let her go; it was only afterwards the explanation of the ceremony dawned. She had given him all her possessions, placed them in his care; so symbolically, she had given herself. Addi confirmed it, smiling. "Yes," she said. "She make you her Father."

So now he had a child on Tremarest. It was a further complication to his already complicated life.

It was the last week of *Kitestrength's* stay. He'd been rostered for ship-board duty; he traded with the Third, a morose, gangling youth who for reasons of his own had decided he disliked both the Island and its inhabitants. It still cost him half his return voyage pay. Kari would be furious; but he put it from his mind. He'd have the rest of the trip to think up a cast-iron reason for the income loss. He shrugged. It was of no importance; whatever he said, he wouldn't be believed. He sat on the *stoep* and smoked; from time to time he smiled. He could imagine the scene on board readily enough; the decks piled with goods, more arriving by the minute from the fleet of canoes that plied forward and back. Shells and Island plants, their rootballs wrapped in fibrous palm-husks; bolts of gaily-printed cloth, baskets of dried fruit and fish. Belay pins of turned hardwood, their heads intricately carved; the *Sinak'Tul*, the strange substance from the slopes of Fire Mountain. Demon Vomit, they called it; it solidified into a porous stone, light enough to float on water. It was much in demand in the Realm; it was said women used it, to smooth and beautify their skins. And the bulk cargo of course, where the real profitability lay: seed corn, potatoes, coil on coil of the tough, fibrous rope in which the Islands specialized. The Mates would be hurrying from place to place, swearing blue fire by this time; but it would be the Second who had the clipboard; Yarman's literacy was not of the highest order. He'd be scratching his head and fuming, trying to make sense of the babble of Tremarestian; for the Islanders, though they had no use of currency, were instinctive businessmen and drove a keen, hard bargain. Each item must be tagged with its supplier's name and its agreed value; in bangles and tobacco, liquor, stout blue cloth. And woe betide any that went astray; for although they kept no written records, the memory of the Tremarestians was formidable. The Riggingmaster — Church regulations laid down that *Kitestrength*

carried a Riggingmaster, though on this trip she would not stream — would be cursing as well, clearing the Kitehold to receive the cargo. She was not a trading vessel of course, had never been designed as such; but the Church, anxious as ever that full use be made of men and *matériel*, would allow no Kiteship to lie idle between tours. Not that he cavilled at that; it had brought him to Tremarest. He laid his head back, against Addi's knees; and she ran her fingers gently through his hair.

Talla was now his constant companion. He walked with her, a part of each day at least. She showed him where the *Kal-Kal* had their burrows, and where she came for the grasshoppers on which, to his faint horror, Addi seemed to dote. Once she took a covered crock, walked to the stream that curved behind the hunting ground. It ran cool and swift between high, rocky banks, overhung with bushes and slim trees. She divested herself of her *Saran* without concern — there was no shame in a father seeing his daughter unclad — and stepped into the water. She waded thigh-deep, pausing from time to time to rootle at the side of the brook with a stick; he followed, carrying the crock, marvelling afresh at her grace and litheness. She prodded again; a flurry of movement, and she grabbed in triumph. She threw a little crustacean up to him; much like the lobsters he bargained for in the Southguard but of a bright, almost metallic green. "*Dakra*," she said. "Very good." She moved on again. She caught a dozen in all before pronouncing herself satisfied. They had them for supper that night. As she had promised, they were delicious.

After the meal she came to him, stood staring thoughtfully. Then she took his hand, placed it to her cheek, pushed it quickly away. She smiled; and this time he understood. She had put the clock back; she had negated the punishment, and with it shame. Later she kissed him. The sweetness and urgency were back. He held her, savouring the moment, eased her gently from him. He smiled in turn; because Time was still unwound.

There was only one awkward incident. She'd taken him into the hills; she showed him her *Kra'an* place proudly, the shelter she had built, the stream in which she had fished and bathed, the hunting ground where she had trapped more yellow birds. Later they walked on, to where a spur of land gave them an awesome view of Fire Mountain. The Demons were unusually active; the rumbling of their discourse carried clearly, seeming almost to shake the ground. She would have turned back; but he moved on again, drawn by something unusual.

Beyond the spur was a deep, grass-lined valley. Its farther slope had been terraced, set with little bushes. Girls and women were working the plantation, nipping off the tender topmost leaves, dropping them into panniers each carried at her hip. He turned to Talla, would have asked a question; but he had already been seen. A man was hurrying up the slope toward him, waving his arms and shouting. He carried a great Staff of Office, not unlike the staff Dagan sometimes bore on ceremonial days, and was evidently

annoyed. Talla stiffened. He'd expected one of those torrents of invective in which she seemed to specialize; instead she tugged his hand. "*Ho'orm*," she said. "*Ho'orm*. Not good Mariner see." The tugging became more urgent; and he gave in, fled with her. She didn't stop till they reached the shelter of the woodland they had left. He pulled up then, sweating. "What was it, Talla?" he said. "What's so special about it? I only saw some people picking leaves." But she shook her head. Her Realmtalk, though improving, wasn't equal to the task. "*Ho'orm*," was all she would say; by which he took her to mean it was a holy place.

He asked Addi about it later, and she smiled. She explained the process of growing and preparing what she called "*T'ee*"; how the dried and crumbled leaves were infused with boiling water to make a delicious beverage. ("Water with smoke on it" was what she said, but he understood her meaning well enough.) And how the drink was the sole province of Headmen and Godspeakers. She grinned suddenly, accessing the Realmtalk perfectly; he'd heard her do it the odd time before, when not under stress. "We don't grow enough for export," she said. "That's what it comes down to."

The days declined, and sailing time was close. He found himself willing the hours to slow, the clock hands to turn backward as they had turned for Talla. He crammed each waking minute with awareness, hoarding memories as a miser might hoard coin. Talla in the stream, climbing the tall palms for *Fraggen*; Addi dressing, undressing, combing her hair. Flash of a bracelet on her wrist, flash of her eyes; the shapes her hands made, brown and deft, elegant as butterflies. It was no use though; inexorably, the last morning came. His uniform was laid out, his grip already packed; Addi had done it, weeping quietly, the night before. He rose, looked through the window. Unexpectedly, the sky was weeping too: grey veils of misty, drifting rain. "A proper Leavingday," said Addi of Tremarest.

He held her, kissed her with all the passion he could summon. She responded; then stiffened, and pushed away. "No," she said. "All finish, Na'ath. You go now."

He shook his head. "I'll hide in the hills," he said. "They won't come looking for me. Then we shall be together." He tried to take her in his arms again; but she eeled out of reach. She stood back turned to him, fists clenched. "Mariner go," she said. "Other woman need."

He opened his mouth, and closed it. He walked through silently, began to dress.

Bearers arrived, to collect the great cage of birds. He walked through the village with it, saw it stored precariously on one of the boats; the boats the fishermen used, broad-bottomed, high in prow and stern. Reminiscent, almost certainly, of the reed craft from which they had sprung. He wondered why he should have had such a thought at such a time; he decided to the last his mind was shying from the truth, refusing to accept the brutal fact of parting.

The rain had eased; but the morning was still overcast. *Kitestrength* was invisible, lost in a greyish haze. He saw the picket boat was waiting, by the little floating jetty they had rigged from fuel drums and bamboo; so at least he would go aboard dryfooted. He glanced at his wrist. Eleven hundred; and the boat would leave at midday. So there was still a little time.

He turned. They were standing behind him. Addi carried the grip and a cage in which hopped a glossy black bird. Talla held out a comb. It was beautifully carved; he saw the incised figure of Ka'Alen, with his great fish tail. "For woman," she said.

He swallowed. He realized she was giving him a treasure. But a guest may not refuse his Going-gift. He stooped to peck her cheek; and she pressed a small cylindrical package into his hands. Fragrant, wrapped in palm-husk that she had decorated with zigzag patterns of bright crimson dye. "T'ee," she whispered.

He said, "Where on earth did you get that?" but she merely shrugged. "Way and means," she said.

"You naughty girl," he said. "You nicked it."

She looked virtuous.

He turned to Addi. She too had another gift: a slim neckchain, with the tiny figure of a dancer. She was very explicit. It too was holy; rare product of the Island goldsmiths, neither for export nor sale. She slipped it over his head, tucked the dally into his shirt. "Not let woman see," she said. "She plenty mad else."

He said, "She won't."

They saw the gifts stowed in the boat; and he took her hand. "No go yet," he said. "Walk small-small." For a moment he was afraid she would refuse; then she shrugged. They strolled along the beach, away from the din and confusion of the Leavetaking; Talla ran ahead, spurning the sand with her feet, throwing up little plumes of whiteness, dashing into the water and back. But he found he had little to say. For her part she only spoke once. She said, "Woman hair black?"

"No," he said, "yellow. Paler than Talla's."

"She lucky," she said. "Pale hair for sun. Addi belong to night."

"No, Addi," he said, "you're wrong. You don't belong to the night."

They turned back, finally. Talla walked with them, gripping his other hand. Suddenly she seemed subdued. In sight of the boat he stopped. He bent to taste her lips a final time, turned to Addi. She clung to him. "No see again," she said. "No come back."

He rubbed her, gently. "To leave is to begin to return," he said, quoting an Island proverb. "I shall see you again, Addi. I don't know when or how, but I shall come back."

She said, "The God hears, and laughs." She turned away. She said, "Goodbye, Na'ath."

He couldn't trust himself to answer. He walked to the boat. Neither did

they stay to see him leave. He last glimpsed them walking away along the winding village street. They were hand in hand.

A long swell was running, although there was no breeze. Must have been a big blow somewhere, probably round the outer Islands; Barassan, Hy Antiel. Weather could be tricky down there, this time of year. This was a hurricane belt; some seasons the storms followed so close they seemed to be treading on each other's skirts. He hoped this wouldn't be such a time; for *Kitestrength* was heading south.

He fingered the amulet under his shirt. Once it had been Kari; then Kari and Addi combined; now Talla had been added to the score. So the world expanded, became stealthily more complex. He shrugged. The voyage was halfway done. Brief stopovers, a couple of days at most; the outer Islands produced little of interest to the Realm. The Kiteship would swing back then, in a great curve that took her past the eastern coast of Tremarest, set course for home. If the Southguard was any longer home for him.

The big ship had slipped bow cables. The tide was turning her, pointing her toward the cluster of islets that guarded the approach to Ta'an. The nearest — "*Tap'Indis*" the locals called it, "Seal Island" in Realmtalk — showed dimly through the haze, a low humped shape. An awkward channel, at the best of times; today, The Master Heldon would need all his skill.

The leaveboat swung under the Kiteship's stern, passing the last of the shorebound canoes. Smiles were exchanged and waves, but nothing more. It was in sharp contrast to the arrival; but it suited his mood.

One of the deckhands wielded a hook. He scrambled up the iron steps of the companion ladder. Steam jutted from a donkey engine; the boom of the derrick began to swing, preparatory to lifting the boat aboard. He didn't wait; he hurried down to his cabin, deposited the cage. The bird cocked its head, gave a little trilling whistle. He strode back, climbed the spidery iron ladder to the bridge. Heldon acknowledged his salute. He said, "Had a good leave, No. 2?"

"Excellent, sir," he said. He hesitated. He said, "Thank you."

The other glanced sidelong. He knew what he meant. He could have forbidden the trading of shifts readily enough; but he was a good skipper, lenient where possible with his men. "Best get below then," he said. "I want to raise Barassan by twenty four hundred."

He said, "Aye aye." He swung back down the ladder, returned to his cabin. He changed quickly. Touched the figurine again, tucked it back under his shirt. As he did so the engines woke up, settled to their steady pounding. *Kitestrength* was under way. He opened the door; and her huge voice sounded, slow and deep. Then again and again, startling the white birds that roosted on the sea, sending them whirling and calling like a cloud of paper scraps. He paused. He'd wondered if the sound would reach the mainland. Travel up the straggling street of Ta'an, travel to a certain long, low hut . . .

He brushed irritably at his cheek, and squared his shoulders. Time moved on for him, as it moved for all men; already, Tremarest was in the past. He was a seaman now; an engineer, with a job to do.

The Chief was on the gantry. He glanced at him sardonically. He asked the same question as Heldon, and he nodded. He said, "So-so."

"Some people have all the luck," said the other. "Wish I was your age again . . ." He wiped his hands on a piece of oily rag. He said, "Your engines, Mister."

He said, "Aye aye, Chief." He checked the great bank of gauges. Pressure a little under max, but building steadily. He glanced down. The oilers were working already, each man stripped to the waist, each with a bright kerchief knotted round his neck; warmth gusted from where the great silver cranks turned slow, each rising, glinting, dropping to its pit. There was something almost comforting in the sight. *Kitestrength* was a live thing again; an entity, purposeful. A ship, going to sea. He glanced back at the gauges, and the telegraph rang for Half Ahead. He swung the big brass handle to acknowledge, glanced at his chronometer. "Thirteen hundred plus ten," he said. "Mark . . ." The Third made an entry in the log.

It was a long shift. He got to his cabin eventually, sat on the bunk. He eased his shoes off, stared vaguely at the bulkhead. Fuel was running short in the Realm, desperately short; the wells off North Cape were drying one by one, the test borings in the Southguard had so far yielded no results. In the normal course of things they'd have sailed to Barassan, made it a two-day trip. He'd known, though, perfectly well what was in Heldon's mind. Between the Islands, the sea could turn treacherous with startling speed; he'd had no intention of being caught in open water if it could possibly be avoided. He'd outrun the weather, by a narrow margin; but even here, at anchor in the one harbour the island possessed — a narrow, landlocked bay — he could feel its effects. *Kitestrength* rolled and creaked, protesting.

The bird fluttered briefly. He glanced across at it. He said, "I hope you don't get seasick." He got up, rummaged in his locker, found a length of light cord. He cleated the wooden cage securely to the bulkhead, topped up the water pot, filled a small round tray with the *Tikkan* seeds they'd given him. The bird glanced brightly at them both, and puffed its feathers. It emitted a startlingly realistic imitation of the siren. It was followed by the ringing of the engineroom telegraph.

"Oh, no," he said. "If you think you're going to make that row all night, you've got another think coming." He took his jacket off, turned to hang it up; and a voice spoke behind him. "*Addi love Mariner,*" it said.

His back froze; his scalp hair tingled. He stared at the bird in shocked disbelief; and it cocked its head. "*Addi love Mariner,*" it said. "*Mariner love Addi . . .*"

"That's enough," he said. "Just pack it in." He flung a cloth over the cage; and Addi's lovely, husky voice came again. "*Mariner come home,*" she said.

He felt he needed a drink. He rummaged in the locker, found one of his few remaining bottles of Southguard hooch. He filled a glass, stared at it for a moment. He drained it with a quick swallow, and poured another.

2

Addi sat in the hut and brooded, making no words. Talla watched her for a while, sucking her thumb, swinging her legs thoughtfully from the edge of the bunk. On the second day her sister didn't rise from her bed. Nor the third. On the fourth Talla climbed for *Fraggen*, made the scented dish that had been the Mariner's favourite. She took a bowl to Addi but she shook her head, turned her face to the wall. Talla walked back to the great main room and ate the food herself. She set the bowl down, looked round her. Dust would blow in constantly from the paved pathway outside; she wondered how it managed to climb the *stoep*, but it always seemed to do it. Also the place was untidy, clothes — hers and Addi's — scattered about. She glanced up guiltily to the rafters, where the *Mimpan* hung invisible. She rose, carried the bowl through to the kitchen and fetched a besom. She rolled the carpets back and swept through. Later she tidied the room, disposing the clothes — the shoes and shawls, discarded *Sarani* — neatly on the shelves. As she finished, a grumble of thunder warned her of the onset of the rain.

She stood on the *stoep*, watching the downpour, seeing how the spots bounced knee-high from the paving. They struck the yielding tips of the palm fronds with which the hut was roofed, making the ragged overhang of thatch shake and ripple. A few found their way through; they dropped onto her shoulders, ran cool across her back and chest. When the rain ceased she walked down to the village, zigzagging to find the deepest puddles. She stepped carefully, watching the mud squidge up between her toes. She saw how the grass and pavings steamed, making a low mist where before had been a mist of rain. She reached the beach, crossed the sand to sit at the water's edge. She stared at the great blue shield of the sea. She too felt an unfocused sense of loss.

She stiffened fractionally. Far out, so far that she doubted other eyes would have discerned it at all, flitted a ghostly shape. A Dragonfly. She watched it carefully. She saw quite clearly the slim, elegant body, the silver glitter of the stiffly-outstretched wings. For a time she thought it might come closer. It hovered and swooped, seeming to examine something on the surface of the water. Finally it turned, vanished in the bright haze that banded the horizon. It didn't come back.

She rose, returned to the hut. She rummaged in her room, produced a small, delicately-constructed bow. She strung it, took down a sheaf of needle-slim arrows. She walked to the hunting ground, chose a spot for herself between two bushes. She nocked an arrow, laid the bow across her knees. She straightened her back, and became still.

As ever, the yellow birds sang and darted round the low mounds of shrubs. Finally a flock came close. She raised the bow, with stealthy, all but imperceptible movements. She sighted, loosed. A bird fluttered briefly, fell. A spot of blood landed on the grass, bright as the stone in the Love Ring Addi would give when she chose her Lifepartner. The rest of the flock took wing.

She had brought a digging-stick, shaped at one end into a flat, slightly-scooped blade. She cut a little square from the grass, delved a shallow pit. She spread the bird's wings, and glanced at the sun. She oriented the offering north, and slightly west. She filled in the little grave, replaced the turf and trod it down carefully. She watched the spirit of the yellow bird rise over the jungle trees, set course straight and true for Kiterealm. She nodded, satisfied. Now, the Mariner would return.

She told nobody what she had done. There was no need; the ghost knew its charge.

Addi rose on the fifth day and bathed, though she still took no food. She sat till evening in the little grove of palms where she had once talked with the Mariner. Sometimes the air spoke to her; but mostly the place was quiet. She watched the land-crabs threaten each other and posture, fiddle in the tilth with their clumsy yet curiously nimble claws, apply the titbits they found to their complex, nibbling mouths. Their stalk-eyes seemed to stare; but she doubted they were seeing her. She shrugged. She didn't care for the creatures overmuch; their jerky, nervous movements, unpredictable sideways rushes. Today, though, she seemed indifferent. She tried to think herself into their minds, but it was impossible. They were born, they grew and mated; they ate food and they died, their lives untroubled by awareness. She wondered, for the first time ever, if Ka'Alen had been right to shower his gifts on men. Once, she would have answered an unquestioning yes; now, when her loins ached with loneliness, she began to doubt. She rubbed herself, whimpering. "*Na'ath*," she whispered. "*Na'ath . . .*"

The sun was setting when she rose. She wandered the beach in the brief twilight, turned toward the village. Night had fallen by the time she reached the Men's Place; the stars hung low and lustrous in the sky. She ducked through the doorway of the long hut, where the boys and young men temporarily without partners waited hopefully, lying on their bunks, sucking the heady palm spirit from the little jars with their covers of woven grass. The room was hazed with smoke; and all eyes turned as she entered. She took many men that night, as many as could be counted on the fingers of two hands; and all later agreed the same thing. That although the experience was rewarding, and she often cried aloud with pleasure, her spirit was in another place.

She finally selected as Bedpartner a slim, golden-skinned youth called Tazik, son of the storekeeper who had once sold her food on the promise of woven mats. Why she chose him she was unsure; save that when the others crowded round he had hung back, and seemed alarmed. He was Uniniti-

ated, or so the rumour went; he had been ailing when his time had come, and had taken some seasons to reach his proper strength. He moved into the long hut warily, carrying his bundle of belongings, disposed them in the places indicated. She sat on the bed edge and regarded him. "Remove your *Saran*," she said.

He did as he was told, blushing furiously.

"*Bis shl'aa*," she said.

He looked baffled. "But I am naked," he said.

She knelt before him, did something that made him yelp. "*Ans, Zu bis shl'aa*," she said. "*Anzend shl'aa*." She pulled him to her, and set him to work contemptuously.

Talla didn't care much for the new arrangement. Not that Tazik was anything but courteous and quiet and took especial care of her, bringing her new *Sarani*, bangles to add to her hoard. She fingered the bright armlets thoughtfully, spread them on the grass mat in her room. She arranged them into patterns; stars and cross shapes, circles. It still seemed wrong that he, or anybody, should sit in the Mariner's place. She took to spending more time at the hunting ground, or up in the wooded, rolling hills.

Ships visited the Island; trading vessels, both large and small, the great boats with the gantries on their bows. But none were *Kitestrength*. Time after time the canoes were launched, the drums and chanting began, the blowing of the signal shells. At first Addi ran down with the rest, as laughing and excited as any villager; then it seemed the unhappiness returned. The sirens called, great iron voices from the sea; but she would walk inland, sit by the stream in which Chrois made her clean herself, or among the high woods. At first Tazik, concerned, would try to follow her; but he soon learned that at such times she desired no company.

The Morning Rains ceased; Chrois counted the ritual five days, removing the great white pebbles one by one from the *stoep* of her hut. When the last vanished the villagers went to it with a will, yoking the oxen to the heavy wooden ploughs, hoeing patiently the rich land of the valleys. Women and children followed, sowing grain broadcast from the baskets at their hips. Each pannier was supported from the opposite shoulder by a broad, woven strap; in time, Talla knew, their bodies would be deformed by the weight, so that in later years they would walk with difficulty. She watched derisively, lying on her stomach on the cropped grass of a hillside. "*Bendi Chl'athi*," she said; a remark that, perhaps fortunately, was overheard by no translator. She reaffirmed her decision that she would never become Lifepartner to a farmer.

The crops sprang green and tall, the best that had been seen for several seasons. Their owners gloated, secretly; though of course no farmer would ever admit in public that he expected to do well. The heavy, waving ears fattened, began to be touched with gold; then came disaster. Unprecedentedly, the Rains returned; and with them a tearing wind. Roofs were blown from

the village huts, the *stoep* stripped entirely from the Place of Council. The rain poured all night; next morning the farmers groaned in dismay. The crops lay tousled, flattened; no more than ankle high, and soiled with earth.

The villagers turned out in force, to salvage what they could. But the wet corn rotted as fast as it was piled into the storage huts. The huts themselves became foul, growing a thick black slime that smelled most evilly. Chrois examined them grim-faced, Dagan and several Elders in attendance; but the answer was already plain. Torches were brought, the storingplaces cleaned with fire. Next year, fresh huts must be built. Dagan, walking alone back to the village, shook his head. Many now would be regretting the sack on sack of grain *Kitestrength* had borne away. The Tremarestians had learned, too late, a truth he had realized seasons before, but that they had failed to heed; that the real wealth was taken by the Realm, and payment made in trash. One could not eat bangles and pretty beads.

Fish swam in the sea, the palm plantations were rich; they would not starve. But a limited diet soon palls.

Addi had not left the hut. Talla brought her the news, knelt at her side. She sat rocking on the edge of the bed, arms round her knees, eyes staring at nothing. Finally she shrugged. "Why should we use long faces?" she said. "We are not farmers."

"You use long face all-time," said Talla bluntly. "Soon it go long-long. Then it not come back. Even when Mariner here."

Addi's eyes filled instantly. "He not come back. Spirit tell me."

Talla shook her head. "My sister wrong," she said. "Spirit tell me. . . ." She stopped. She'd almost spoken of the yellow bird; but that would be unwise. Magic must be secret to be strong. "He come," she said. "The God send him."

Addi bared her teeth. "*Ka'Alen, tuf,*" she said. "*Ka'Alen d'yen. Sinaken . . .*"

Talla was appalled. She'd said the words herself, once; but somehow, coming from another, they were shocking. *Ka'Alen* was good, she knew that now; he'd sent the Mariner. Also to speak the Demon's name is to call him, bring him roaring and bursting from the ground. She hugged her sister, pressed her face to her shoulder. "*Ka'Alen, dis,*" she said. "*Dis, Addi, dis . . .*"

The other hugged her back. A moment of silent communion; then the older girl pushed away. She walked from the hut, not looking behind her, trudged in the direction of the *Fraggen* grove.

Talla watched her thoughtfully. Addi was fasting again, she hadn't eaten for days; at this rate she'd soon become a ghost herself. She rubbed her lip. Something to tempt her, something wholly new . . .

She made her mind up. She hurried to the back of the hut, the little thatched storeroom where they kept things like the dye pots, things not very often used. She ferreted in the half-dark, working largely by touch, finally dragged out a small earthenware pot. An iron chain was fixed to it, terminating in a long metal spike. She carried it to the kitchen, baited it with a hand-

ful of sugar lumps, dropping them one by one into the thin neck. She took the mallet they used to crack the palm-nuts, headed toward the hills. Beyond was the high jungle where the *Miji* had their home, sleeping by day in the tall leaf-canopy, coming down by night to play and squabble, raid the village fields.

It was a long walk. The sun was overhead by the time she reached the hunting ground, and she was feeling hot and tired. She entered a little clearing finally, stood and stared round. The great trees rose to either side; but at this hottest part of the day the voices of birds and animals were muted. Ahead of her an outcrop of rock burst through the leaf mould that covered the forest floor. She inspected it thoughtfully. This, almost certainly, was the place. She hammered the spike into a fissure of the worn grey stone, tugged experimentally. She nodded, satisfied. Nothing would shift that; certainly not a *Mij*. She rubbed the crotch with leaf mould to take away the man-scent, stood back again. She'd seen her father use the trick just once; seasons back, when she had been a tiny child. She hadn't believed it would work; but work it had. She hoped the miracle would be repeated.

She returned the way she had come. Next morning she rose before the sun. She made the long journey back, again with the *Budgee* swinging in her hand. She heard the chattering of the little creature before she stepped into the clearing. The *Mij*s screamed at sight of her, pulled away till the chain was taut. She saw its wrist was raw and bloody, where it had tugged desperately to be free. All it had to do was open its hand, release the lump of sugar it had grabbed; but apparently they never did. She frowned, hesitating. The huge eyes stared in the little furry face, wild with terror; and it had begun to tremble.

She set her lips, and swung the mallet. The pot smashed; the *Mij* fled three-legged, the injured paw pressed tight against its chest. It was still clutching the sugar.

She trudged to the village, wondering. It seemed the God had reached to touch her arm. She knew, with curious certainty, that had she killed the *Mij*, Addi would have died as well.

The Fog came. It lingered far longer than usual; half a season, it seemed to Talla. When the skies cleared, it was almost time for the spawning run of the great pink fish. The long nets were hauled from their place of storage, unrolled along the beach; and Dagan called all available labour to the task of preparation. Meshes were repaired, new sections woven to replace those parts that had rotted, floats and sinker fastenings checked. The great head-rope itself was several seasons old; Chrois ordered a new one prepared and reeved. No chances could be taken; for on that one rope depended the success of the entire enterprise. Lookouts, posted on points of vantage, waited anxiously for the appearance of the shoals. But they waited in vain. One was sighted, finally; the plunging backs, heading along the coast. It was small, whereas in previous years the sea had boiled as far as the eye could reach.

The net was run out regardless; but the fish turned unaccountably, and the majority avoided the trap. The villagers, for once, found the net easy to haul; but when they examined the catch they shook their heads in dismay. The fingers of four hands, if that; there would be no smoked fish to trade either.

Dagan summoned a Council of the Elders. Runners were despatched, to the scattered Island villages; but they came back empty-handed. All Tremarest had fared as badly as Ta'an or worse. The villagers scowled and muttered, blaming all manner of Gods; but the Headman stayed aloof. The blame lay on shortsightedness and greed; and therefore, ultimately, on the Kiterealm, for teaching the ways of Trade.

In the event, the matter was of little import; for no ships came. No ships at all. Instead, the sky itself gave signs. The villagers, scowling in alarm, watched the massed circlings of the Dragonflies. Day after day the creatures came close to the shore; closer than any could recall, even the oldest Councillor. From them came a puttering and chirring — the sound that was their strange, monotonous speech. Talla watched with the rest, Tazik at her side; only Addi remained at home, sitting brooding in the hut. The hut of which she had once been so proud, but in which she now did no work at all. Indeed it seemed days and nights had become alike to her, the sunlight no more welcome than the fog and rain. Once she had spoken of such a thing to the Mariner; Talla, biting her lip and frowning, saw that her words were becoming true.

The season wore on. The people planted their grain. This time the rains did not return. But after last year's disaster seed corn was in desperately short supply, so the crop was by no means good. It would serve, though. There would be bread again.

Chrois painted the God-Eye on her forehead, walked through the village. The people steered well clear of her, biting their knuckles in awe. She walked the beach, looked at the empty sea and sky. She returned to her hut, sat a day and night in meditation. Then she fetched a brazier, a small iron basket standing on tripod legs. She lit it, fed it with charcoal till it glowed a cheerful red. She sprinkled certain seeds into a bowl, placed it above the heat. She sat cross-legged, bowed her head over the fumes. The hut whirled and spun. She inhaled again, more deeply; her surroundings flickered and went away.

The visions began. She saw a great land torn against itself, warring and divided. She saw women, and children too, spitted on spikes, slashed by cruel swords. She saw the bands of soldiers roam at will, burning and looting. Priests led them; some were robed in black, others in red. The flames grew. Villages were consumed, whole towns, Godhouses with their ornate, sharp-tipped spires. They crashed to ruin, one after the next; and the flames spread again, to castles and great buildings, ships at sea. Finally the Kites themselves took fire; the Kites that crowded the Realm, filled the air above

like endless bright confetti. They fell, trailing beards of brightness; and the Speaker woke with a cry. She stripped her robe, tore her breasts with a pointed stick, went into the street to let the people see. She walked to the Council Hut, beat the great gong summoning a parley; and everywhere folk flocked to hear.

Night had fallen once more; and still the debate ground on. Addi sat huddled on the *stoep*, a shawl round her shoulders, her back to the thin wattle wall. The voices reached her clearly enough; she saw for herself the burning ships, the burning women and men. She rocked, dry-eyed and vacant; later she returned to the hut. She looked at Tazik, and he understood. He packed his belongings silently, went back to the Men's Side.

She lay sleepless till first light. She rose then, smeared her cheeks and front with dirt. She took a machete and a little hatchet, walked toward the woodland. She selected her *Kra'an*-place finally, on the slope that overlooked the brook in which she had once bathed. She cut four long, straight poles, drove them deep into the ground. She made a roof ridge, notching the saplings, lashing them each to each. For rope she used the tough lianas that depended from the taller trees. She built a further framework, four hand-spans from the ground. Land crabs were a plague on Tremarest; even in her present dulled state she disliked the thought of contact. It was for that same reason that huts were built on stilts. She wove more lianas to make a hammock, heaped it with dried grass. By that time dusk had fallen. She drank a little water, built herself a fire. She lay on her side, and closed her eyes. Light rain began to fall, pattering on the little palm-frond thatch. She went to sleep.

She woke to darkness, listened to the sounds of movement all about. The slithering and stealthy rustling. She moved her head. The fire was low; but the embers still gave light to see. The first of the creatures streamed into sight, moved down toward the brook. Twenty feet and more in length, a rope of glistening muscle. Another followed, and another: the great worms of Tremarest, famous through the Islands. What had called them from their burrows, no man could tell; where they headed to so urgently was likewise a mystery. The long bodies pulsed, stretching and contracting; she watched indifferently till the flattened tail of the last drew itself from sight beneath the bushes of the lower slope. She lay back then, and once more closed her eyes. It was fitting, after all; her brain too was inhabited by worms. The blackness claimed her once more.

The Fog Time came again. The village lay silent, shrouded; trees dripped moisture, and the deep eaves of the palm thatch. Folk went about with bright shawls on their shoulders; in time the fabric too became beaded with damp. Talla moved quietly through the house, sweeping and tidying, preparing food that her sister seldom touched. Fasting and grief had finally marked Addi; her cheeks had lost their fullness, dark hollows showed

beneath her eyes. Talla stared at her, then down at herself. As if in mockery, her breasts had begun to form. She went to the Godspeaker's hut, sat patient on the *stoep* till Chrois deigned to notice her. Three times she passed her, eyes staring straight ahead, going to the village and back; but she held her ground. It was the way, with holy folk.

It was midday before the priestess addressed her; the silver vagueness that at other times would have been the sun stood directly above the hut. She swallowed, answered as clearly and carefully as she could; truth to tell, she was more than a little afraid of the tall, gaunt woman, with her snaky eyes and straggling, greasy hair. Chrois heard her through; then she nodded. "Come," she said. "The God bids you welcome."

Talla gulped again. She didn't care much for the hut either, the dark, windowless shrine in which the effigy of Ka'Alen sat: black-skinned, his fish-eyes glinting in the light of little lamps. Also braziers burned, heating metal trays of incense, so the place was hazed day and night with a thin, scented smoke. She coughed a little, felt her head begin to spin. She wiped her eyes, and told the tale again; but the seer's words brought little comfort. "Your sister's soul is chained," she said. "The Kiteship took away with it more than wheat. One day you will understand how these things come to be." She brought her food, and a cup of the magic T'ee; aromatic, dark and bitter. "Your concern does you honour," she said. "The Great One is much pleased. I will see Addi; also I will speak with the God on her behalf." She held the girl's chin, stared into the frightened bronze eyes. "Stand tall," she said, "and walk with pride. For you too are his chosen."

Talla said bitterly, "She will die."

"Perhaps," said Chrois. "But if these things are ordained, then they will be."

She came to the hut that evening, walked to Addi's bedchamber. Talla sat with her back to the wall, as her sister had sat outside the Council hut, and listened to the rise and fall of the Godspeaker's voice. When she looked in later the older girl was sleeping. She blew the palm oil lamp out, went to her own couch.

She sat up. The dawn was still blue. She listened intently, frowning; and the sound came again. Small with distance, but unmistakable. Her heart began to pound. So the God had answered after all. She ran to Addi's room, shook her by the shoulders. And again. "*Kitestrength*," she said urgently. "*Kitestrength* come . . ."

Awareness returned to her sister's eyes. "*What?*" she said. "*What?*" Then she heard it too; the great deep siren sounding, far across the sea.

She scrambled from the bed, ran through the hut. But at the door she stopped, clinging to the frame and panting. The giddiness passed; she began to run again, toward the village. Talla grabbed a *Saran*, knotted it hastily. She snatched up a couple of shawls and followed.

Ta'an was astir already, buzzing. Folk stood in their hut doorways won-

deringly, gathered in little gesticulating groups. "*Kitestrength*," shouted Talla, whose ears had never yet let her down. "*Kitestrength* . . ." The word spread like magic.

The great canoes were launched, into the fog that lay in moving coils across the sea. On the high prow of each a torch blazed, flickering. Talla, standing in the bows of *Seasnake*, saw the pinpoints move to either side: the line of them, orange eyes peering through the murk. Behind her the paddles flashed, the drum beat its steady rhythm. The siren called again, close and huge; and Addi laughed, tears streaming down her face. "*Na'ath*," she whispered. "*Na'ath* . . ." Her sister adjusted the bright shawl round her shoulders, reached to grip her hand.

She materialized from the void. Seen through the mist, she looked even vaster than before. The creeping tendrils thinned; and one by one the packed canoes fell silent. The villagers stared blank-faced; at the holes torn in her high iron sides, the deck rails smashed and buckled, the shattered windows of the once-smart bridge. The great mainmast had gone, sheared off raggedly above the lower crosstrees; from the stump, rope and steel rigging hung in a tangled skein.

Dagan was the first to recover. He gestured, curtly; and the drumbeat began again. The proas circled as of old, away from the Kiteship as she groped painfully toward her anchorage. The hawsers were carried to the buoys; steam jetted; finally, the rattle of the descending gangway told them they could approach. The canoes clustered cautiously round its foot; the villagers climbed to the deck. Once there they stared again in silence. The deck itself was buckled, thick diamond-patterned plates standing on edge; the rigging lay in ankle-trapping coils, and here and there were great smudges of dried blood. "*Kitestrength*?" whispered Talla. She felt her own eyes begin to sting. This wasn't the proud ship she had known; this was her broken ghost.

A Realm man met them; tall and haggard-faced, his fair hair drawn back curiously. Like the tails of ponies, one above the other. One arm was bandaged, slung across his chest; she saw the dressing was marked with blood from wrist to elbow. "Addi?" he said. "Addi of Tremarest?" But her sister had already pushed past. "*Na'ath*?" she cried in terror. "*Na'ath*?"

He emerged from the companionway. He too looked tired, unutterably tired; and his uniform, once white, was smudged with dirt and oil. "*Na'ath*," she said. She ran to him; then she stopped in her tracks. A girl had appeared beside him. She was blonde and slim, her eyes as pale as Addi's were dark. She stared a moment; then she reached slowly to take the Mariner's hand.

He swallowed, seeming lost for words. He lowered his eyes. He said. "The Realm burns, Addi."

"I burn also," she said. She tore off the shawl and *Saran*, stared a final time; then she ran to the rail, plunged into the sea. She surfaced a canoe-

length out, began to swim strongly away from the coast.

3

The long hut was hazed with smoke, and humid from the many folk who had crammed themselves inside: the entire Council of Elders, plus as many of the villagers as had been able to push their way through the doors. The palm-frond fans, wafting gently in the roof, did little to alleviate conditions, and tempers were becoming correspondingly heated. Lamps had been lit, against the gathering dusk; moths boomed and flitted round the yellow flames. Children circled through the crowd, bearing crocks of the sweet palm wine; but the beverage was proving of little benefit.

To one end, on the Headman's platform, Dagan sat in his great Chair of Office. His attendants flanked him; two burly men in brightly-printed *Sarani*, each bearing the *Narda*, the great war-club of the Islands with its terrible cutting edge, unused now for generations. Chrois Godspeaker was to his right; on his other side sat Talla, the only other woman in the hut. Her face was painted black, in sign of grief; her restless golden eyes seemed the more startling by contrast. Before them squatted the Kiteworld refugees. The Mariner, haggard-faced, still in the remnants of his uniform; Raoul Josen, with his curiously-dressed pale hair; and a dozen more. All looked drawn, and several were wounded; for they had run a desperate gauntlet. The Red Men — Ultras they called them, though no Tremarestian could get his tongue round the word — had blockaded the Southguard; *Kitestrength*, unarmed, had had to pass beneath their guns. Many of the refugees had died, Yarman among them. The bodies had been brought ashore, each stitched into a dark-stained canvas bag; the burning-ghats still smoked. Though The Master Heldon had at least lived to bring his ship to safety; Ka'Alen claimed him as he was carried through the surf. Raoul Josen it had been who closed the eyes in the wasted face; he'd stepped back then, looked down and shaken his head. "Honour him," he said simply, "for we owe him our lives."

It was Dal'hroth, the storekeeper, who had the floor. "And I say this," he shouted. "These Realmfolk, whom we see sitting among us, have brought us naught but ill." He turned to glare at the crowd. "Once we were content," he said. "We grew our crops, and raised our children in peace. Then the Kiteships came; they took our produce, leaving us with hungry bellies. Why then should we give them aid and succour, a portion of our lands?"

"They did not take," said Tazik pointedly. "They bought. You sold." The shopkeeper turned furiously on his son; and uproar broke out at once. Dagan beat on the dais with his staff; peace was restored, by degrees.

"It seems to me," said an elderly, wizened Councillor, "that there is truth in what Dal'hroth says. Once, we were rich in wheat. Yet for a season we lived on *Fraggen*, what catches we could take from the sea."

"And it seems to me," said Dagan wearily, "that all in this place are but children. All save Tazik, who though young is wise beyond his years." He rose. "For many seasons now you have been told," he said, "by your God-speaker and by me, that there would come a time of want. Have you heeded? Have our words entered your hearts? Yet now you blame these folk, who are already tired with war. Once, they were honoured guests; what, now, stays your hands from greeting? Is it because they bring no baubles? No pretty beads, to hang about your necks? Is Tremarest —" he heard the uproar rising, beat it down "— is Tremarest grown poor and small, Ka'Alen's bounty thin?" He shook his head. "For a little wheat," he said. "For a little wheat, you cry and make long faces." He snatched disgustedly at a bracelet on his wrist, flung it down the hut. "There, scuttle for it," he said. "Scuttle, like the babes you have become. Once, you were men; but I see no men here now." He sat back with a thump, laid the staff across his knees. "Call another to lead you," he said. "For Dagan has seen enough."

Dal'hroth, though rattled, wouldn't relinquish his bone. "Where then is Addi?" he said. "Addi the beautiful, who would have Named my son? These people bring a plague. Already, one is taken from us; how many more will follow?"

Dagan shrugged. "Speak to my successor," he said. "He who takes the Staff will answer; I have no more words."

Uproar again. He waited, calmly, till it died down. The shouts of "Dagan . . ." faded; and he smiled, a little sadly. "So," he said, "you will have no other than me. Then hear me. Addi went to the God of her own accord. We mourn her, as the strangers mourn." He nodded toward the Mariner. "But none could stay her hand. Her life was her own; if she gave it to Ka'Alen, it was hers to give." He stared at the storekeeper. "You saw no daughter, Dal'hroth," he said. "You saw a great hut, and coloured cloth as dowry. Many bolts of cloth, that you could trade." He turned, abruptly. "What says the Bereaved?"

Talla spoke dully, in the Kiterealm tongue; for his benefit or the Mariner's, he couldn't tell. "Addi no Name Tazik," she said. "Tazik know, and Dal'hroth. Dal'hroth have worms in mouth." The storekeeper rose, furious; but a dozen voices shouted him down. He subsided, flushed; and Dagan leaned to the priestess. He muttered, rapidly; and she nodded. He turned back. He said, "Let the Kiteworld speak."

Nath brought his mind from distance, with an effort. The sea still moved in his brain; the sea he'd quartered wearily, two days and more, searching islet after islet in the coiling fog. And calling, always calling; but there had been no answer. The waves lapped and splashed, sucking back across the sand, the rock; but Addi had gone. Gone in that instant, the moment it had taken him to run for the companion, cast off the fishing boat. Tazik had come with him, Tazik who had also suffered loss. Other boats were searching too, he realized it dimly; the orange pinpoints spread across the sea,

sometimes close, sometimes blending with the void. *Kitestrength's* siren sounded, far into the night; but it was useless. They rowed back finally, the last of all the fleet, walked through the village to the Hut; and the angry debate had begun. The refugees sat silent, puzzled, turning their heads forward and back, trying to make sense of the clatter of Tremarestian as the arguments and accusations were hurled.

He shook his head. "I will not speak for myself," he said. "I speak only for my friends. For Kari, and for these here; Bentik and Carle and Hanting, all the rest. For Raoul, my Lifebrother." He swallowed. "If there is land to till, then they will till it," he said. "If there is sea to fish, then they will cast their nets. They want nothing from you: save peace, and room to build their dwellings. For my own part, if sacrifice is called for it will be made." He rubbed his face, wearily. "My heart is cut," he said. "As is yours. The world grows dark; it will be a little thing. Speak the word, Chief, and I too will give myself to the sea."

Dagan frowned. He knew something of a mariner's horror of drowning, realized what it had cost the other to make the offer. He spoke again, finally, to the priestess; then he shook his head. "No," he said. "The God seeks no more blood. Your own woman needs you, Nath Ostman. Live for her." He pounded the dais. "I have heard your words," he said. "The words of all here present. Your voices are in my heart. And this is my judgement. Land will be given, on the far side of Ta'an, for the strangers to make huts. They will fish and till the fields. Their children will learn our words; and we will learn theirs. By this means, all Gods will be appeased." He rose to his full height, pounded the dais again. "It is over," he said formally. "The Council is ended."

He sent for the Mariner later on that night. Nath walked from the communal hut in which for the last few days the Kiterealm folk had had uneasy lodgings. He shook the Chief's bead curtain, waited to be admitted. He was shown to a luxurious chamber, luxurious at least by Island standards. Dagan lolled at ease on a richly-decorated couch. A girl attended him, the youngest of his wives. She smiled and bowed, slipped quietly from the room.

The Headman handed him a small, pot-bellied vessel in a cover of woven grass. Tubes projected from the stopper; he sucked at the longer, swallowed the harsh cane spirit. Dagan shook his head. He said, "The talking is not done. You will not build your woman's hut."

He drank again. Air gurgled softly into the pot. "I must," he said. "No others will aid her."

The big man smiled. "There will be many hands," he said. "When they see your folk begin to struggle, making long faces."

He set the pot down. "Chief," he said, "sell me a boat. We have goods to pay, all we could bring with us. No baubles, but the strong blue cloth. Sails from our locker room, to fit your big canoes. We have no use for them."

The Headman considered. Finally he said, "Why do you desire a boat?"

You have a boat already; greater than all of ours, tied into many bundles."

Nath looked at the grass mat on which he squatted, the mat with its zigzag patternings of red and blue. "Our boat needs food," he said. "That food is almost gone. Also, my friends will be busy. They must make roofs, to go above their heads."

"And what would you do? With this boat that you would buy?"

The Mariner continued to stare at his feet. His silence was eloquent.

Dagan rubbed his lip. "She is gone, Nath Ostman," he said. "Gone to be with the God, and live where there is no rain. Can you not believe?"

The Mariner raised his eyes. "I must know," he said. He touched his temple. "I must know inside my head."

"You would search the entire world?"

The other nodded. He said, "If need be."

"So," said the Chief. He rose, stood looking down. "There is much virtue in you, Nath Ostman," he said. "But Tremarest sells no boats. The tides of the coast are cruel; you would not return. Chrois has spoken with the God; there must be no more blood." He banged a little gong; and instantly the room began to fill. Nath stared round, baffled, at the young men in their bright *Sarani*. Each bronzed, each powerful, each smiling.

"I give you *Seasnake*," said the Chief. "And this, my crew. May you be rewarded in your search."

Nath still hesitated. "Chief," he said, "a further boon . . . What of Talla?"

"She is with the Godspeaker," said Dagan. "She will meet no harm."

The other shook his head. He said, "She is my daughter."

"Yes," said the Headman. "The word was brought to me." He put his hand under the Mariner's arm; and Nath rose, dazedly. He said, "I leave at first light . . ."

The big man shook his head. "No," he said. "*Seasnake* is ready and provisioned. You go now . . ."

Platforms of earth were cleared, on the far side of the village. Corner stakes were driven for the first of the strangers' huts; and Dagan's prophecy came true. For several days the villagers gathered to mock, standing in bright clusters a little way from the scene. But one by one the smiles changed to frowns, and man after man came forward. These notches, that were to hold the platforms; they were too shallow. And these too deep; new saplings must be cut. The Tremarestians went to it with a will, forgetting their first distrust; carpenters faired up the many partitions, women and children wove the long grass walls. Finally the donkey-carts appeared, each loaded high with palm fronds. The spines, lashed each to each, were dropped across the ridgepoles. Their butts stuck up, like the backbones of great fish. Other layers followed, and more; and the thick wooden needles came into play, stitching each to each, making the whole secure. For a roofless house is unsightly to the God.

Kari alone seemed less than wholly content. Little to do, while the Tremarestians swarmed the fabric, Raoul the Kiteman directed their affairs; for her house had been built as an annexe to his own. She walked to the beach, stood staring; sometimes for hours on end. A shawl was round her shoulders; and she wore the bright blue Mainland cloth. She saw the waves lap, ruffling the white sand, leaving it sleek and dark. Once, the sea had taken Nath away; now, it had claimed him again. The sea and another. She would shrug then, turn back toward the village. At such times, had she but realized it, she had much in common with Addi; but had the words been made to her she would not have understood.

There was a feast, to celebrate the building of the new little village. Several pigs were killed. She did not attend.

Seasnake returned, finally. The villagers swarmed to welcome her home, grab the flung ropes, draw her onto the shore. They saw Ka'Alen had had his way with her. The figurehead, topped by its nodding fronds of palm, had gone, and the midships platform had been likewise swept away. Her curving sides were stained and bleached, her rigging frayed and slack. Her crew debouched wearily. Two — H'lassa, Gey Opten who was blood cousin to the Chief himself — had not returned. The rest were thinner to a man; but the Mariner was gauntest of them all. He walked to the Chief's hut. Dagan met him, on the long *stoep*; Nath stared at him and shook his head. He didn't enter the building; instead he trudged on again, to what had been Addi's home. He saw the house too was dead; dust lay thick on all the floors, and the kitchen pottery was smashed. Below each gable-end, holes had been torn in the flimsy woven walls, so the *Mimpan* could leave at will.

He walked again, to the hollow where they once played. Yellow birds darted above the bright-flowered bushes. He sat awhile, smoked *Cra'ach*, the narcotic grown in the Islands: the leaves they rolled in thin brown-paper tubes. It had little effect. His throat and palate became fusty, his tongue a little sore; but that was all.

He lay back. He remembered launching *Seasnake*; how many weeks ago had that been? They searched the islets, in the clearing fog: *Tap'Indis* and the rest. Turtles plopped from the rocks on which they sunned themselves, alarmed at the intrusion; the *Tapri* watched curiously, staring from the water with their lovely, long-lashed eyes. But there was no sign of Addi, no indication that a human had been there. They caught a great mottled lizard, roasted him above a fire pit; but he found he had little appetite. So they paddled on, under skies that were now a flawless blue. On days when the wind was favourable they hoisted a triangular, coarsely-woven sail. They raised Barassan, finally; but the answers to his questions were always the same. "Addi?" he would say. "Addi of Tremarest?" He was met with stares and headshakes, the little sign folk make to ward off the displeasure of the God. They stocked the proa finally; with dried and salted fish, the *Fraggen* nuts,

the flat oatcakes in which the Island specialized. They filled the water casks; and he turned to Tazik, his constant companion in the search. "Perhaps some boat came to her aid," he said. "Perhaps the God himself took her on his back." He knew then he was mad; but it seemed Tazik and the crew were as mad as he. So they went to Hy Antiel, another week away. He navigated, studying his charts, the great brass compass he had brought ashore from *Kitestrength*. They made landfall on a dull, cold day, the sky clouded, the restless water grey. Hy Antiel was always cold; and yet the folk wore no clothes. Instead they wove wicker shields, that they turned against the wind. In them they squatted, each with a little fire before him, each with a spear across his knees. They were short and square, as unattractive as the Ta'an men were graceful. He walked the high cliffs wearily, going from shelter to shelter in the mist; but the answer was always the same. A grunt, a headshake, the waving of a hand. Addi had not been to Hy Antiel.

They left the place — Fire Island, some folk called it — set course for Tremainest. They saw wonders: great beasts as long as islands, fish that flew in air. They saw, far off, the *Sapri*, the great serpent of legend, after which the canoe herself was named. It reared up from the water, watched them with its golden, glittering eyes. Later they encountered storms. In the worst, the two men were swept away; the proa itself all but foundered. They made their landfall finally, quartered the villages of the south and east. They were weary now, less welcome even among their own folk; for they saw in their eyes that they lacked the God's good thoughts. They launched *Seasnake*, from the one inlet of the south, rowed slowly toward Ta'an. On the way, the Mariner turned to Tazik. "Perhaps the God is wise," he said bitterly. "In old times, we would have been rivals. Ka'Alen saves bad friendship."

The young man smiled, and shook his head. "Tazik no bad friend," he said. "Tazik never . . . worthy."

"Me neither," said Nath Ostman. "Me neither . . ."

The sun was sinking when he walked back to the village. Raoul Josen, sitting on the stoep of the new hut, watched him approach; but he passed without acknowledgement, like a dreaming man. Raoul shook his head. Later, his fears were justified. Kari's rage was bitter; and the thin walls of the huts kept little in the way of secrets. The Mariner blundered finally into the night; and squalling was replaced by bitter sobs. He shook his head again. He said, "It was bound to come."

His wife rose silently and draped a *Saran* round her. She walked from the room; he heard the little creak from the verandah. In time, the crying ceased.

The night was dark and humid. *Ziz-ziz* called from the grass, the unseen bushes; from far off came the howling of the monkey-things. The Mariner trudged unsteadily. Over his shoulder he held a crock of the strong palm wine; from time to time he stopped to swig at it, teetering a little. He burst into snatches of song; because nothing mattered, nothing mattered any

more. Addi gone, and Kari; Talla, the hut. The place that had once been home. He had no home now, nowhere to lay his head. He was an outcast, the blood of three folk on his hands. H'lassa, Gey Opten; and the girl he'd loved more than all the earth. He tried to imagine where he had gone wrong. He'd given, given of himself, desired no ill. Yet ill had come; and by his hand. Certainly, he could blame no other. Now, perhaps, was the time to take a boat, as he had once promised Dagan: take a boat and sail her, into the blue. The blue that lasts for ever.

The wine had got him, finally. He fell, listened dully to the gurgle as it flowed from the neck of the pot. He cursed, and set the thing upright. Later he staggered on again. He realized, equally vaguely, that the pathway trended upward. Unaware, he had climbed toward the hills.

There was light ahead of him. He stood swaying, trying to focus his eyes. He moved toward it, made out a little hut. Its walls were of bamboo; it was topped, as ever, by a ragged thatch of palm. He walked again, clung giddily to the doorframe. He saw the place was empty.

She spoke behind him. "Nath?" she said. "Nath Ostman?"

He turned, with difficulty. She still wore the remnants of the black face-paint. He smiled; a little grimace that was more an expression of pain. "Talla?" he said. He put the wine-crock down. He said, "It was fitting I should find you. Only we two are left."

She stared at the tangle of black beard, the haunted eyes, the stained, torn uniform. She gestured, to the hut. "Enter," she said curtly. "Enter, and be welcome."

A part of his mind registered the words. He shook his head; for this was her *Kra'an* place. "*Ho'orm*," he said. "It is holy. It may not be. . . ."

"*D'yen ho'orm*," she said scornfully. "*D'yen* . . ." She pushed past him, turned to tug his sleeve.

There was a crock of water. She knelt, washed her face finally clean. She sat back on her heels, skin golden in the lamplight. She smiled at him, slowly; then the child that was inside her began to cry. "*N'sadu*," she said. "*Addi n'sadu. Do n'sada. Do . . .*"

The world was roaring. He took her in his arms. "No, Talla, no," he said. "You're not dead . . ." He rubbed her slender back, kissed her forehead, her hair. "Talla is the world," he said. "The world . . ."

She pushed away, stared down at him. She walked deliberately to the bunk. Her huge eyes were inscrutable. She twitched the *Saran* loose. She squeezed her nipples, touched herself lower down. "Grey stuff for tum-tum," she said. "Like in Addi."

He groaned; and the roaring was back. It was succeeded by darkness.

Next morning Tazik, preparing his father's boat, was startled by an apparition. The Mariner stood swaying, his face a deathly white beneath his tan. His eyes glared; but the boy knew he saw neither him nor the sea. He started

back involuntarily, making the sign that wards off evil; for so the Demon marks his chosen, this is the form in which they later appear. "Nath?" he said uncertainly. "Nath Ostman?"

The other licked his lips, and whispered. Tazik inclined his head, frowning; and the words came again. "Kiteship," said the Mariner. His voice was a mere thread of sound. "Take me . . . Kiteship."

The young man touched his arm, tentatively. "Mariner sick?" he said anxiously. "Tazik help?"

The other turned, seeming to become aware of him for the first time. "Kiteship," he said. "Mariner go from land." There was almost a species of pleading in his voice.

The fisherman hesitated no longer. For the *Kra'an*, for whatever reason it is undertaken, is a holy thing. He leaned his weight to the stern of the little craft. She took the water easily, lay bobbing; he steadied her against the lapping of the surf. "Mariner come," he said. He paddled from the coast, hoisted the little lateen sail. It filled at once; the boat, broad-bellied, high at bow and stern, scudded toward deep water.

Kitestrength emerged slowly from the morning mist. White birds clustered her upper works, streaked now with their guano. They took wing in a cloud, cawing irritably as the boat approached. Tazik dropped the sail. He touched the other's arm again. He said once more, "Tazik help?" but there was no response. The Mariner stared rigidly ahead. He sighed and took up the paddle. He maneuvered past the high, battered bow, to where the waves lapped the treads of the still-lowered companion. He grasped a dangling rope, drew the fishing boat in; and the Mariner climbed out. He ascended, not looking back, vanished from sight.

The Tremarestian waited, frowning. He was half-minded to follow; yet he felt unwilling. He sensed a mystery; something Ka'Alen might perhaps resolve, or Chrois to whom the God often spoke. He called, but there was no reply. Instead a white bird circled, settled back contentedly on the high rail. He called again, standing anxious in the boat; and a sound came from above. The steady clanking of a hand-winch. The iron ladder creaked, began to rise up slowly from the sea.

Nath sat a day and night, at the foot of the high wheelhouse. He saw the cluttered deck, the tangle of rigging and broken spars, heard the calling of the birds. His senses recorded these things; but his mind was locked inwards. At dawn on the second day he rose, painfully easing his cramped limbs. He went below to the Kitehold, stood awhile staring vaguely. Then he broke out a drum of cable from the locker. Lifting it was beyond his strength; he rigged shear-legs over the forrard hatch, made up a threefold purchase. He hauled the drum to deck height, tied off, reattached it to the derrick on the Kiteplatform itself. He climbed the latticed iron tower, fitted the big crank. The derrick, low-g geared, raised the thing smoothly enough; he guided it to position, eased it onto the winch shaft, locked it in place. He

went below, returned carrying a Pilot: the little Kite that would lead the String, draw the Trace to operation height. He streamed it, paid out cable; dropped the pawl onto the ratchet, attached the first of the bronze cones. The later cones decreased progressively in diameter, allowing each Kite to ride to its proper station. He streamed the first of the Lifters. The great bright structure sailed up smoothly; the angle of the Trace altered at once. A second followed and a third, gaudy and proud, dipping in the slight flaws of breeze. Finally he fetched the Godkite, the great oval with its sacred marks. The Seeing Eye, fierce and electric-blue; and the Vestibule, scarlet, edged with gold. Leafshaped and flaunting; the glory of Woman, and the curse of men. He knocked the pawl back, eased the brake. The winch clattered, a little stiff at first; then the String rose smoothly, frightening the wits from a fisherboy who scurried for the shore, ran wailing to his house. For the God himself had stared at him, glaring down angry from the sky.

And that is how the Codys came to Tremarest.

4

The word spread rapidly, as such news will. The villagers came to the beach, stood frowning and biting their knuckles, staring at the distant shape of the Kiteship. More than one looked askance at the great String, high above in the blue. The Eye winked and flashed; the other Mark they understood well enough. Chrois was summoned, hastily. She appeared holding the arm of Dagan, for she had aged this past two seasons; rumour had it she was not long for Ka'Alen's world. She stared long and carefully; finally she shook her head and turned away. This was a God's work; and all Gods must be respected. For they are powerful folk.

Raoul Josen took a boat, paddled out to *Kitestrength*. But the companion was raised up level with the rail, and the dangling ropes by which he might have climbed had all been cleared away. He paddled to the buoys; but there was no chance there. The mooring cables had been greased at bow and stern, six feet down from the fairleads. Not that he would have cared overmuch to try to climb them. He worked the boat back to the companionway, and shouted. "Nath," he said. "For God's sake, it's Raoul Josen. You can talk to me." He tried again. "You can't do this," he said. "We need you. Kari needs you. Nath, it can be sorted out. Let the ladder down . . ." He sat most of the day, calling at intervals till he was hoarse; but there was no response.

For Nath, it was as if days and nights were blended into one. Sometimes, certainly, voices spoke to him; once he was almost sure he heard the Kite-man, like a being from another world. But mostly the sounds were in his brain. He lay on the bunk in what had been his cabin, and Addi spoke to him. "*Mariner come home*," she whispered. "*Mariner come home . . .*" He moved, restlessly. Home, now, was the sea; so his course after all was plain. But he lacked the strength to crawl on deck, throw himself into the water.

He drank from the bottle of spirit at his elbow, felt the rawness burn his throat. He collapsed again in sleep.

Later he wondered dully if he should scuttle *Kitestrength*. That way too he would go to her. He groped his way below, stood a long time staring vacantly at the big valves of the seacocks. But again his hand was stayed. No action seemed possible, either for good or ill. Deaths resulted from actions; hatred, loss and grief. The grief he had brought to Tremarest, times beyond counting now. *Kitestrength* was not his own, any more than Addi had been his own. Or Kari, Talla. He had no right to decide her fate. He returned to the cabin, fumbled in the locker for more of the harsh yellow drink.

The spirit, he decided, was good. It blurred the hard edges of memory. *Kitestrength* had carried a considerable stock; he found a crate in The Master Heldon's cabin, another in the First Engineer's quarters. The crewmen also had kept their own supplies, while Yarman's locker was stacked above head height. He lay dozing on the bunk, conscious that his body was becoming weaker; but that was only right. The flesh had taken control, when brain and heart screamed no; so it was fitting it should be punished. Later, though, he rallied fractionally. He saw Addi clearly, swimming from the open sea. He called her and she turned, looked at him with her lovely, liquid eyes. He ran to the boarding winch, cranked desperately; but the *Tapra*, alarmed by the clanking of the companion, submerged swiftly and streaked away. He was disappointed; but his heart was lightened by the vision. If she had come once, she would come again; he must be ready for her. He rigged nightlines from the stern rail, caught a fine silver fish. He scaled and gutted it, fired up the galley stove. The first mouthful made him retch. He persevered. At first he could hold down very little; but matters improved after a time. He still found he needed the liquor. The water in the Kiteship's tanks had become brackish and stale; at least it rendered it drinkable.

The year wore on. The pink fish swarmed; he heard the distant excitement as the nets were run out from the coast. Later, the sea round *Kitestrength* became discoloured. That too seemed fitting. He had stained Tremarest; now the land was making answer.

He took to walking the ship, prowling endlessly from compartment to compartment. Why, he was unsure; save that Sinaken, who owned him, wouldn't suffer him to rest. The forepeak, piled with its sausage-shapes of canvas; the workshops, silent now, that had once been his domain. The lathes and drills had grown fine coats of rust; the flat belts leading to the countershafts were spotted with green mould. The Kitelocker still smelled faintly of the dope they used to proof the great wings of the Lifters; in the engineroom, though, the brasswork of the telegraph was dulling. He laid a hand to it, saw it still repeated Heldon's final, weary signal. *Finished with engines . . .* He walked the gantry, heels clicking, raising little echoes in the shadowed quiet. The ghosts fled ahead, twittering. Heldon, Yarman, all the rest. Later they would return, hang gossiping beneath the coamings, flit

invisible through the complication of great wrapped pipes. Like the *Mimpan* of Tremarest, the land on which he would never set foot again. He prowled the boiler room, still stinking of fuel oil, descended to the shaft tunnels. A foot or more of oily water swirled and slopped below the packing glands; but it seemed of no importance. Sometimes he climbed to the wheel-house; and there he played a little game, swinging the brass handle of the telegraph, hearing the big bell tinkle far below. *Quarter Astern, Quarter Ahead, Half Speed.* One day, it was answered.

His heart began to pound. The repeater crept, jerkily, to acknowledge Full Ahead. He ran down, overjoyed; and Addi stood on the diamond-patterned plates, feet spread and arms akimbo. She wore a tiny *Saran*; and her eyes were as bold as before. He hugged her, tears coursing down his cheeks; feeling the warmth of her at last, the firmness. "You shouldn't be down here," he said. "You're a very naughty girl!" She hugged him back. "Addi go with Mariner," she said. "Addi all-time his woman . . ." He laughed at that, laughed through the tears, kissing her cheeks, her hair, rubbing her breasts, the deep curve of her back. "Addi come home," he said. "Addi come home . . ." He took her to the cabin, and they loved. He said, "Addi, do you Name me?" and she said, "Yes, yes, yes . . ." She snuggled, sighing; later he too slept. But when he woke, his arms were empty. He realized he had had a dream.

The Fog returned. Day after day the Kiteship lay in a pearly void, cut off alike it seemed from land and sea. The vapour muted sound as well; bird-voices came dim, even the waves touched the ship's sides in silence. *Kite-strength* rolled slowly, to a long, smooth swell; so the storms were blowing again, far to the south. Round Hy Antiel, the far rim of the earth.

Seasnake paddled carefully, nosing through the mist. Dagan stood on the rebuilt midships platform, in the full robes of a Chief. A shawl of richly-patterned cloth was round his shoulders; his *Saran* gleamed with thread of gold. Feathers nodded above his head; and he carried a great Staff of Office. Beside him his attendants also stood stiffly; two massive men, each with a polished *Narda* at his shoulder. The drum beat, steadily; from time to time the signal shells blew hoarsely, warning possible voyagers of their approach.

Kitestrength showed ahead, a pale silhouette in the murk. Dagan raised a hand, and the drumbeat ceased. The paddles checked, dipped again; the big proa circled the forward buoys, nosed alongside. The shells sounded once more; and the Headman called. "Nath Ostman," he said. "I must speak with you."

No answer; and he called again, his deep voice rolling through the fog. "Nath Ostman," he said, "the Father of the Village summons you. The God commands you answer."

A ragged figure showed above him. "I have no words for you," said the Mariner wearily. "Leave me in peace." He vanished.

Dagan set his lips, and nodded. Grapnels were flung, hooked themselves over the battered rail. Two men swarmed up, swung lithely on board. A wait; and the companion ladder began its creaking descent. Dagan climbed with dignity, stood staring at the dishevelled, empty deck. The Clubmen followed; and he jerked his head. He said, "Find him. Bring him to me."

They ran him to earth in the boiler room, crouched on the bottom plates amid a swill of greasy water. He was hustled to the deck with scant ceremony, stood blinking before the Chief; and Dagan stared again. He would scarcely have recognized, in this scarecrow, the Mariner of a season before. His uniform hung from him in tatters; his body seemed to be little more than skin and bone. The Chief shook his head. "Greetings, Nath Ostman," he said.

The Mariner stared dully. His eyes took in the great clubs with their wicked cutting edges; and he nodded. "So you have come at last," he said. "It is just." He dropped to his knees, bowed his head for the stroke.

Dagan raised him with his powerful hands, shook to make the other hear. "This is the talk of children," he said. "You have spoken it enough. There is men's work to attend." He swung the end of the shawl across his shoulder. "Take me to your cabin," he said. "The rest of you, wait here."

Nath sat on the bunk-edge as the other talked; and slowly his wandering attention was riveted. A ship full of the Red Men, a ship that bristled with guns, that was laden down with hate; putting out from the battered mainland, making sail. A ship on course for Tremarest . . . He blinked, swallowed; and something of the man he once had been showed in his eyes. "How can you know this, Chief?" he said. "Has she been seen? How could the news have travelled?"

"She has been seen," said Dagan calmly. He didn't elaborate. Her ghost showed in the Speaker's magic smoke; and Chrois had never yet been wrong. "She comes," he said. "As night comes beyond day."

The Mariner bowed his head. The Ultras. Kiteworld lay burned and smoking; but still they hadn't done. They would descend in hordes, onto this peaceful land. He knotted his fists, pulled his lips back from his teeth. The Ultras. Here. And yet . . . his force was spent, his life run to the dregs. Wrong, now, to set one foot before the next; for fear of the harm that could follow any act. But . . . set against that the Ultras. Madmen, desecrators, enemies of Life itself. Enemies of Kari, enemies of Talla; if indeed Talla still breathed. He groaned, and clenched his fists again.

Dagan saw well enough the struggle going on inside him. He waited, patiently; and finally the Mariner raised his head. His eyes were haunted. He said, "How long?"

The Headman held a hand out silently, the fingers extended. So they were sailing all the way; the wells had dried at last. But less than a week . . . he shook his head, as if to clear it from the cloud of buzzing thoughts. He said. "What will you do?"



"Fight," said the other. "We have fought before. We are not afraid to die."

"Fight?" he said. "Fight? With slings, and wooden clubs?" He beat the sides of the bunk. "Why me?" he said. "Why come to me?"

"Because we need you," said Dagan simply. "Both my people and yours."

Nath stared round again. A bottle stood on the table beside the bunk, half full of a yellow fluid. He picked it up, stared at it almost wonderingly. Then he flung it from him, with startling force. It hit the cabin wall and smashed. He rose, swayed for a moment and collected himself. "Take me ashore," he said. "Summon a Council. Hurry . . ."

He sat in Raoul's hut. The Kiteman sipped thoughtfully from a jar of spirit. "It's suicide, of course," he said. "It's a lot to ask."

The Mariner shrugged. "They gave us all this," he said. He waved a hand at the surroundings. "They could have knocked us on the head. Or just thrown us back to grow. I don't think we've got a choice." He smiled, wanly. "In any case, it doesn't make much odds. If that lot land, we're all dead anyway." He drank himself. "There's enough spare steel on *Kitestrength*," he said. "We can make one Hell of a ram."

The Kiteman frowned. "Yeah," he said. "But look . . ." He sketched rapidly, on a sheet of the rough brown paper. He held up the results; and the Mariner's eyes widened. "My God," he said. "A spar torpedo. There's just one little thing . . ."

"Fire Mountain," said the Kiteman before the objection could properly be voiced. "There's pure deposits of sulphur. As pure as you'll find. I checked them out myself, a long time back."

The Mariner shook his head. "We can't do it," he said wearily. "We haven't got the time."

"We've got to do it," said Raoul Josen grimly. "We'll *make* the bloody time . . ."

Seasnake was launched within the hour. She carried most of the Realm men, plus as many native volunteers as could be crowded aboard. Night had fallen by the time they reached the Kiteship. They set to work nonetheless, by the light of blazing torches, clearing the rubble from the decks, dumping the coils of rusty rigging overboard. Nath himself sounded the main fuel tanks. He stared at the long dipstick, frowned. Then he shrugged. He turned to the lad beside him. "It will serve, Tazik," he said. "Ka'Alen will provide." The Kiteship's last voyage, after all, would not be of long duration. He ordered the firing of the donkey boiler. An hour later the generators clanked, arc lamps blazed on fo'castle and stern.

The Tremarestians crowded below. Now, with light to work by, they could assess the magnitude of the task. The carpenters among them jabbered anxiously, measuring the gaping holes torn in the hull. So many palm-spans broad, so many high . . . but at least, patching material was ready to hand. Partitions were torn away, what wooden decking *Kitestrength* pos-

sessed; by dawn the cabins — Nath's among them — were gutted. Meanwhile the ship rang with noise; sledges were brought into play, hammering the buckled plates to the semblance of straightness. Bedding and hammocks were torn up, moulded into long sausage-shapes; so the covers would fit snugly. The pumps were started, discharging their streams of filthy water; the Kiteship, her bilges finally dry, rode high and lighter, snubbing once more at her cables. Nath climbed to the weather deck, stood hands on hips and stared. Finally he nodded. He spoke curtly, and Tremarestians and Realm men scrambled into the rigging. By noon the fore and mizzen to'galants were struck, and they were preparing to hand the topmasts. The hammer was useless to them; it merely added instability. *Kitestrength* would steam into battle, or not fight at all.

The light brought further helpers; their boats clustered the Kiteship's sides, a bright, bobbing shoal. Girls and women were among them; for each, a task could be found. Rope — what rope was salvageable — was laid down into coils, the wheelhouse tidied and swept, the remaining glass prized from the edges of the frames. The less debris, the less deadly flying splinters. The Mariner went ashore. He took with him Ch'enzin the woodcutter, a huge, smiling man, broader across the shoulders even than Dagan himself. He outlined his requirements. They were simple enough: the tallest, straightest tree on Tremarest. Ch'enzin nodded, beaming. He knew just such a monster. "Hard," he said. He made motions with his hands. "No bend."

"That's what I want," said Nath. "Hard. No bend." They rounded up Ch'enzin's sons, selected a party from the villagers, all of whom clamoured to help. They headed for the high hills, taking with them oxcarts, axes, rope. By evening the job was done; the slim, smooth trunk, lashed to a cart at either end, began its precarious descent. The villagers pushed with their shoulders, strained back on the anchor ropes. Disaster was narrowly averted a dozen times; finally the worst of the descent was over. More oxen were yoked; the convoy rumbled through the straggling main street of Ta'an, torches lighting its way, and villagers came to their hut doorways to stare, knuckles to their mouths in awe.

By twenty-four hundred the Mariner was reeling with fatigue; but there could be no thought of sleep. *Seasnake* was waiting, drawn up on the beach; they lashed the great spar to the outrigger, the canoe made its lopsided way back to sea.

Dagan met him on the ship. He took his arm, peered closely into his face. "Mariner rest," he said. "We bring big mast on board."

"I can't," he said. "There's still too much to do." But the other shook his head. "Man tired," he said bluntly, "no good to Tremarest."

He realized, vaguely, the Headman was right. His thoughts had begun to churn and tumble, making no sense. He stared round. He saw the boat derrick was already prepared, the boom swung outboard. Orders were being shouted; a party was attending to the fixing of the slings. He nodded, wea-

rily. "OK, Dagan," he said, "you win." He forced a smile. "If there's a cabin left you haven't wrecked . . ."

Raoul too was snatching an hour's rest. His day had been equally hectic. At first light he had headed for the hills, leaving the village smiths preparing the piles of charcoal he would need. He took ox carts with him, and a working-party of the villagers. The trek itself took the best part of the day; shadows were lengthening by the time they reached the awesome slopes of Fire Mountain. The Tremarestians set to work regardless, shovelling at the yellow drifts, filling wicker baskets that they heaped into the carts. Torches were improvised from tight-wound grass, dipped in the tar they had brought with them: the tar that outcropped naturally, in certain parts of the Island. The women who had come were kept hard at work, replenishing the brands as fast as they burned down.

There was a cough behind him. He turned. Dal'hroth stood a little uncomfortably, at the head of the further party of men he'd brought. Raoul grinned, for the first time in a good few hours. "My God," he said. "Who's running the shop?"

The stout storekeeper lowered his eyes. "Dal'hroth make bad words," he said. "But Kiteman fight for Tremarest."

Raoul considered. "We all fight for Tremarest," he said. He clapped the other on the shoulder. Dal'hroth squared his shoulders. He waddled forward, possessed himself of a spade.

The job was finished, finally. The Kiteman stared at the loaded waggons. More than enough; much more than he would need. He headed back. He would have liked to rest the people, rest himself; but there was no time. Torchbearers moved ahead, lighting the way; the carts bumped and lurched; finally, after an age it seemed, they reached smoother ground. He spread a tarpaulin, curled atop the leading waggon. The brief sleep he enjoyed was the last he would know for several days.

It seemed the Mariner's head had scarcely touched the pillow before he was shaken awake. Arne Bentik stood before him. "What's up?" he said bleakly. "What's the matter now?" For answer the other turned the red canister in his hands. One of the demolition charges from the Tower struts; he'd ordered them stripped, last thing before he slept. He saw the case was empty.

He sat up. He said, "All?" and Bentik nodded.

"Fine," he said. "Just great." So the Ultras had won after all. Won by default. Every Kiteship was wired; in emergency — dire emergency — they could jettison the topheavy structures. But it seemed for the Vars emergencies no longer existed. And now he had no detonators.

Raoul was appalled when the news was brought to him. He said, "What the Hell do we do now?"

"Leave that to me," said Nath. "I'm the engineer. You just make your pretty bangs." He nodded. "How's it coming?"

The Kiteman ran a hand through his hair; unfastened for once, grubby and shoulder-length. Women and girls were still working, passing a sparkling salt through fine-meshed sieves. "All right," he said. "We can start the mixing soon. Only hope I get the proportions right."

"You'd better," said the Mariner. "It was your idea."

In fact Raoul did the mixing on his own, working with a wooden spade and wooden tubs. He chose the Feastground as the site of his activities, it being sufficiently distant from the village. The dust, he knew, would hang in an explosive cloud that the slightest spark could ignite; he had no intention of atomizing Ta'an and most of its inhabitants. Guards were stationed at a respectful distance round the perimeter, to turn back children and such of the villagers as became over-curious; for curious they certainly were. Indeed more than one of the Councillors had shaken his head. All stood in healthy awe of Kiteworld magic; but how the present danger could be dispelled by digging earth from hills and caves was beyond their comprehension. To Dagan alone he explained more fully. The Chief stirred the mixture curiously with his finger. "What do you do, Kiteman?" he said.

"Call Sinaken, and all his legions with him," said Raoul grimly. "I hope," he added, underneath his breath.

The Headman frowned. "Such a thing was never known, on Tremarest," he said. "Not in the lives of many men."

"That's the trouble with violence," said Raoul. "It's catching. Peaceful men get very violent indeed." He wielded the spade.

He added the ground charcoal, stirred again. As each batch was finished it was damped, set in flat trays to dry. He fingered his lip, stared at the overcast sky. This was the part that privately worried him most. The stuff would never be ready in time. It seemed, though, that Ka'Alen smiled. Next morning the sun broke through, beating down strongly.

Now came the tricky bit. He used a graincrusher to grind the lumps. Its teeth were set as far apart as possible; but it was still a dubious operation. He sacrificed the first batch; heaped it into a pile, laid a trail of black grains from it, struck a lucifer. A fizzing; then a brilliant orange *whoosh*. He nodded, satisfied. The formula would work.

Dagan had started back. He walked forward, examined the scorched grass. He said, "This will . . . destroy?"

He nodded. "Sinaken will one day destroy," he said. "Confinement gives any Demon strength."

He set to work again. He realized he would never finish. Dal'hroth came, bringing his slender son. As each basket was filled, a man came forward from the trees that fringed the clearing. The coarse black powder was carried to the beach, poured carefully into the big fuel drums that had been ferried from the ship. They carried on through the night, working largely by

touch; for naturally no torches were allowed near.

By the fourth dawn the job was done. The Mariner stood hands on hips, staring down at the mill, the baskets of powder remaining. He said quietly, "Is it going to work?"

Raoul looked at him tiredly. Like the others, he was blackened from head to foot. He said, "There's one way to find out." He hefted a small wooden keg, swung it to his shoulder. He walked into the woods. A hundred yards on, the trees thinned. They emerged on a little rocky headland, overlooking the now-sparkling sea. He waved the others back, lit a short fuse. He ran himself, dropped flat. The explosion shook the village, sending children squalling in fear, startling bright birds from the jungle far inland. The Realm men sat up, ears still ringing. They looked at each other; then they solemnly shook hands.

The drums were transferred to the proa, swung carefully aboard the Kiteship; and Raoul stared. Two similar containers lay on the foredeck. They were lashed firmly together. From their fronts protruded a strange contraption. Pistols — the Observer's pistols used by the mainland Corps — had been fixed barrel-first into their stoppers. An arrangement of levers connected with their triggers; slim metal rods thrust forward. They terminated in welded steel discs. The Kiteman shook his head. He said, "You reckon that'll work?"

The Mariner smiled grimly. He picked up a maul, walked forward. He clouted each of the discs in turn. Two muffled cracks; ragged holes appeared in the far end of each drum. He straightened. He said, "We shall only need one."

"Yes," said the other slowly. "We shall only need one. . . ."

The mist returned, through the day. The boats plied forward and back regardless; every Tremarestian, it seemed, was eager to see. Delegations even came from other villages; but those Dagan forbade to approach. "It is our Mystery," he said. "If the God smiles, all will live in peace; if we fail, then look to your own lives." He repaired to the Kiteship. To every Realm man he gave a torc of gold, marked with the figure of the God; theirs to keep, whether they lived or died. It was an honour such as had not been seen.

Chrois sniffed the magic smoke again. She saw the Red Men were close. The report was brought to the Chief; he in turn conveyed it to Nath Ostman. He spread his hand, one thumb withdrawn across his palm. "Zero . . . nine . . . hundred," he said, pronouncing his words with care.

The main boilers were fired. The furnaces blew back, time and again. The Realm men persevered, turning the cocks, thrusting the long torches cautiously toward the jets. The oil caught finally, with a roar. Nath hurried to the gantry, watched the pressure begin to build.

The boats sailed out again, to see the Kiteship leave. The Tremarestians stared up, awed. Her masts, now, were reduced to stumps; rough wooden

patches were bolted to her sides; and from her foredeck jutted the great spar. At its tip, they saw, the drums had been attached. The drums of Demon-powder. Steel hawsers held them high up in the air; soon they would be lowered. Becoming evil, level with the sea.

The Mariner stared at Dagan. "Chief," he said, "this is not your place. We called these folk; it is for us to fight them."

The Headman watched back calmly. He had dressed for the part, it seemed; he wore a jacket, gold braid on breast and cuffs, serviceable blue trews. "I am the Father of the Village," he said. He jerked his head. "Who will navigate? Who will steer your great canoe?"

The Mariner said, "Arne Bentik."

"And does he know the shallows? The tides round *Tap'Indis*?"

The seaman shook his head; and unexpectedly, the other smiled. "Then get below," he said. "See to your engines, Nath."

The Mariner hesitated a moment longer; then he straightened his back. He said, "Aye, aye . . ." He swung down the ladder, and vanished.

Dagan picked up a curious tin funnel, leaned from the glassless window. "Let go forward," he said. He turned back. "Let go aft . . ." He rang the telegraph for Quarter Ahead.

The fishing boats and proas clustered round the buoys, long after the Kiteship had gone from sight. They heard her voice call, and again; finally, it was answered. At first it seemed an echo; but it was not the case. The villagers peered into the coils of vapour, straining eyes and ears. Rattlings and boomings sounded, hollow across the sea; then the mist lit up with a vivid orange glare. The Tremarestians crouched, appalled; the sound roared above their heads, flung itself back from all the inland hills. They straightened slowly, stared at each other with frightened eyes; but the rest was silence. Silence, and the lapping of the waves.

5

The village lay calm under bright sunlight. Housewives pounded palm-nuts, baked, washed clothes; children squalled and played. But one by one they stopped; held knuckles to their mouths, stared fearful at the sky.

A Dragonfly was heading in from the sea, the limitless blue horizon. It flew steadily, on course it seemed for Ta'an; this time, though, it didn't swerve aside, as was their habit. Its puttering voice grew louder. The shadow of its great wings flicked across the huts; and shutters were slammed, the children scurried inside, doors were hastily bolted and barred. The creature banked, turned out across the sea, flew low on another pass. It selected its landing ground finally: a high, smooth meadow, a mile or so beyond Ta'an. It rolled, bumping, across the grass; and its voice fell quiet. The spinning blade on its nose was stilled at last.

The big man came slowly, picking his way through the scarlet-flowered

bushes. He wore a shawl, and a brightly-printed *Saran*. He carried a war-club on his shoulder; in his other hand was a long, curiously carved staff. He paused in sight of the Dragonfly, appalled afresh; then he set his lips. He tramped ahead stolidly, hesitated again. He stared at the man who had risen from the grass. He was tall and slender; black-haired, and with a curly, neat-trimmed beard. He wore a curious tight-fitting suit; like the wings of the Dragonfly, it glittered silver. "I am Rand Panington," he said. "Once, I was a Realm man; now, I live in another World." He held his hand out. "I mean no harm," he said.

The other ignored the gesture. "I am Dagan," he said. "The Father of my village." He circled, cautiously; and the Skyman turned and smiled. "It is a machine," he said. "It flies by the power of the sun. Ka'Alen's sun; for we too know him and respect him."

Dagan was not to be mollified. "What do you want of us?" he said.

The stranger spread his hands. "I seek Nath Ostman," he said. "You call him the Mariner. His ship is in the bay."

The Chief shook his head. "He sees nobody," he said. He walked beneath the nearer of the wide-spread wings. Up close he was still awed by the Dragonfly's sheer size. He saw the many rigging struts, the wires stretched tightly from the slim kingpost. He realized what he had taken for eyes were the windows of a cabin. He shook his head again. Although he stood beneath it, the thing still seemed curiously insubstantial. The great wings flashed and glittered; the sunlight glowed through the slim, tapering body. He saw it was truly a machine; fragile and elegant, but a machine nonetheless. He touched one of the thin-spoked wheels on which it rested. He said wonderingly, "The power of the sun . . ."

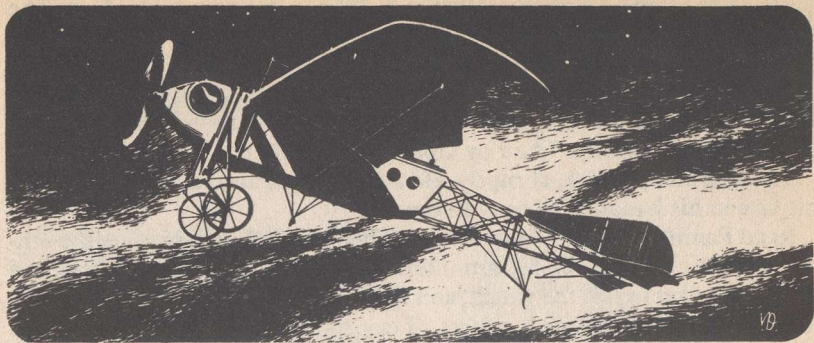
He made his mind up, turned. "The stranger come with me," he said. "Ta'an bids you welcome. Your great creature will be safe."

They sat in the Headman's hut, sipping some native spirit from small pot-bellied jars. At first the liquid had stung the Skyman's throat. He'd persevered, from politeness; now it didn't seem too bad. He supposed the taste-buds were numbed. "We have watched," he said. "We saw the Kiterealm burn. We saw the danger to your land. Now it is over; no more ships will come." He set the little pot down. "What of the little one?" he said. "The child we returned to you?"

"She is no child," said Dagan. He considered. "She mourns," he said finally. "As we all mourn." He told the story of the battle, told how afterwards the Mariner had retired once more to his solitary life. He added certain facts. "Her Waiting Time was over," he said. "She could have taken any man. Instead, how often has he paid? How many dawns and sunsets? For a sin that only happened in his brain?"

Rand frowned. "Will you take me to him?" he said.

Dagan shrugged, where he squatted on the richly-patterned couch. "He will not see you," he said. "He sees no man; even those who would honour



him.”

The scowl deepened. “He’ll see me,” said Rand Panington darkly.

The big canoe moved steadily, drum beating. The Kiteship grew from a tiny silhouette, developed form and solidness. Rand frowned. She sat low in the water, much lower than he remembered; her masts were struck, her superstructure dishevelled. Her bow, above the waterline, was almost wholly gone; that she had limped back to the Island at all was a miracle. Above, the Tower was a jumble of twisted struts; yet from it a Cody Trace still flew. The bright sails of the Lifters were weatherstained, the Godkite frayed and rotting; but he still made out the Marks it bore. The Seeing Eye; and the Vestibule, both sacred and unhallowed.

The iron companionway was drawn up to the rail. The proa eased alongside, rising and falling in the swell. “Nath Ostman,” called the stranger. “Mariner . . .”

The voice that finally answered was creaking and faint. Like the voice of someone who has not spoken in a long, long time. It said, “Leave me alone.”

“Nath?” said the Skyman. “Nath, it’s Rand. How are you, you old bastard?”

The tousled head regarded him. Greying now, or pale-bleached from the sun. “Go away,” said Nath. “Talla was my daughter . . .”

“She’s still your daughter,” shouted Rand. He danced in sudden temper. “You were too pissed, you stupid wimp,” he said. “You went out like a light, you couldn’t even score. The rest was in your mind . . .” He swore, with surprising fluency. “You’ve got her back,” he said. “You never lost her. Now drop the bloody ladder . . .” A pause; then, to the amazement of all on the canoe, the companion began a slow, creaking descent.

Rand squatted on the deck. At first he’d been shocked by the other’s appearance; certainly he wouldn’t have known him, if he’d passed him in the street. “Look at you,” he said. “And I took you for an intelligent man. *Look at you . . .*” He grabbed the Mariner’s wrists, shook vigorously. “You saved this Island,” he said. “There’s folk who want to tell you so. But you’re

too thick to listen.” He tried another tack. “We’re in a new world, Nath,” he said. “New rules. I’ve got three to see to; so have you.” He hauled the other up by main force, shoved him to the rail. “Look,” he said. He pointed.

Three faces stared up from the proa. Kari, Addi and Talla. Each wore the formal *Saran* of a matron; and they were hand in hand. “They need you,” said the Skyman softly. “And by God, you need them . . .”

The Mariner sat back, abruptly. He stared round him, dully; then he put his face in his hands. He began to cry.

Rand Panington stared down at him. Then he reached to squeeze the other’s shoulder. He walked forrard, climbed to the Kiteplatform. He kicked the rusty locker beside the winch, and again. The thin doors yielded; and he took out a pair of massive cutters. They too were bright with rust. He worked the handles briefly, stared up at the Trace. He applied the jaws to the cable, squeezed. The severed end lashed back; the Kitetrain snaked and dipped, began to rise. It whirled off to the east, vanished finally in the bright horizon haze.

And that is how the Codys went from Tremarest.



HOLLYWOOD REVISITED: NOSFERATU

The orthodontist worked terribly hard
at saving those sleek fangs, but,
alas, they’re all caps now.
His diet’s strictly goose liver.
His nails are clean and manicured.
The hair-growth formulas have produced
a passable peach fuzz. You know,
he’s really quite imposing
as this growling old ad-image
for some new investment firm.

— Robert Frazier

Inflections

The Readers

*Readers and writers, take note!
Please be aware that all materials —
manuscript submissions, letters to the
editor, subscription problems —
should now be sent to our Wisconsin
office: Amazing® Stories, P.O. Box
110, Lake Geneva WI 53147.*

— Patrick Lucien Price

Dear Mr. Price:

I began reading *Amazing Stories* with the first issue (April, 1926) as a high-school student. I kept every issue, binding each with a hard cover to protect it. In the early 1930s the quality of the magazines deteriorated. By that time I had entered the University of Colorado and got married. These factors prompted me to concentrate on other reading material, and my subscription to *Amazing Stories* lapsed.

Fifty years later, my 42-year-old daughter told me that *Amazing Stories* was improving significantly and sent me the September 1982 issue. She is a science-fiction enthusiast with some 4,000 volumes in her library — all catalogued and indexed in her computer. I had done no reading of SF during the 50-year period, as completing requirements for a Ph.D. in physical chemistry, working as an active research associate for a large chemical company, and performing the many community service projects took up all of my time. However, now I am retired and have a subscription to *Amazing Stories*, as of 1982. I am very pleased with the magazine and can take up where I left off fifty years ago.

Keep up the good work.

Sincerely,
L. E. Kuentzel
1773 - 15th Street
Wyandotte MI 48192

*It's always fun to return to the pleasures of an old pastime or hobby, even after fifty years. And we're even more delighted to hear that one of those pastimes is reading *Amazing Stories*. Though the visions of science fiction have changed during the past half-century, *Amazing Stories* still fulfills its original intent: to fascinate you with the marvels and wonders of science.*

So, enjoy, and good reading.

— Patrick Lucien Price

Dear Mr. Price:

I just finished reading Robert Silverberg's "Opinion" for May 1986. I have read it, heard it, and taken it to heart, a million times. BUT — there are those of us who are late-bloomers in life! Some of us take an incredibly long time to find ourselves — don't even decide to write until our thirtieth birthday — and then squeeze our muchly deserved writing time in between changing diapers and playing chauffeur. And when we look up from our art, blinking our eyes to the real world, we find we have to spend the rest of the day cleaning the crayon marks off the sliding glass doors, figuring out a new and better way to remove the magic-marker off expensive wall paper, and cleaning the wet flour

off the tub and bathroom floor. On a good day it takes me five hours of repair for every hour of writing.

It is worth it, even at the price paid. Someday, regardless of cost in time and nerves and a husband who threatens murder every time he even thinks I am near (much less actually sitting down at) the word processor, IT WILL HAPPEN! I will find that illusive thing in the mail that says you're buying my story. But maybe first I should take down the framed rejection notice hanging over my desk on the wall, though I'll have to do something about the white spot.

I just wanted to say that, even if you didn't start writing at the tender age of two, there is still hope: just begin NOW, and never stop. The kids will live through the food poisoning, and if you smile at your husband at least once a day, he might even do the dishes for you.

Sincerely,

Alison Royem

1311 S. Finley Rd., #114
Lombard IL 60148

Yes, Alison, you're right: despite the daily hassles, one must write every day. For us, that's the indicator of a dedicated writer. No matter what else happens during the day, the true craftsman must spend time working his craft. This is the only way to perfect his skill. So, write and write and write. Maybe someday soon we'll send you a contract — something to cover up that bare spot over your desk.

— Patrick Lucien Price

Dear Mr. Price:

Thank you very much for having a rejection-slip format designed to help writers improve their work, and thank you even more for taking the time to add your comments to it about my

style and my story. I cannot begin to tell you how astonished and thrilled I was to receive some actual feedback on one of my stories.

A knowledge of faults is the first step towards improvement, and your inspired use of an itemized checklist will surely encourage many other new writers as it has me.

Expect to receive more submissions from me in the near future, and this time I'll do a better job.

All my thanks,

Timothy J. Sweeney

4628 Broadway, #203

Kansas City MO 64112

Gee, Tim, thanks for the compliments! Believe it or not, surly editors need positive strokes occasionally.

As for the itemized checklist and personal comments, well, all that is a part of our job. We must indicate what's wrong — and right — with your story so that you don't continue making the same mistakes and so that the next time you'll send us a story we can buy.

— Patrick Lucien Price

Dear Mr. Price,

I have been an avid reader of science fiction and fantasy for a couple of years now, and I have been reading your magazine for most of that time. I wanted to compliment you on your very fine magazine, especially the great covers. My favorite one recently was Larry Elmore's cover for "The Intercept" on the May 1986 issue. I was instantly enthralled by the idea.

I would also like to express my appreciation for your thoughtfulness in sending the magazines in nice, sturdy envelopes. Nothing makes me more mad than to receive a mangled and torn magazine. I also hate those mailing labels that never quite come

off without part of the cover with them.

Sincerely,
Mary Doolittle
Tongonoxie KS

Mary, we're glad you like our covers. We have a very fine group of artists working for us, whose works help sell the magazine on the newsstands. After all, if the cover doesn't attract the consumer, he certainly won't consider purchasing the magazine.

As for the use of envelopes, we share your sentiments. Though the cost is a bit more than it would be were we not to use them, consumer satisfaction is more important to us.

— Patrick Lucien Price

Dear Pat:

I'm very delighted with the changes you've made with the contents page and the department heads of the September 1986 issue. With me, I had to show continuity with the previous direction of *Amazing Stories*; with you, you have to establish a new direction without abandoning the old. Now

for an increase in circulation!

Darrell Schweitzer, John Betancourt, and I are busy being literary agents, especially for science-fiction and fantasy books and other genre books. Our office is at 4426 Larchwood, Philadelphia PA 19104.

Again, an outrageously good issue.

Scientifictionally,
George H. Scithers
Philadelphia PA

Thanks, George, for your compliments and continued support. Best of luck to your new agency.

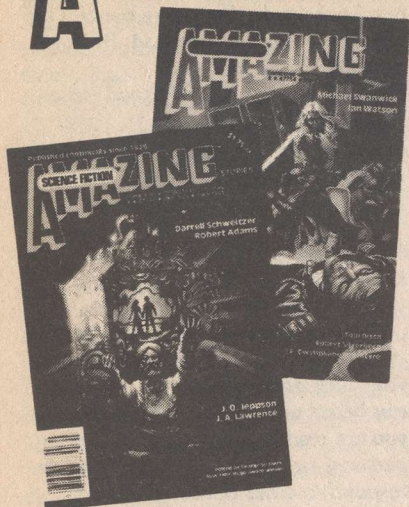
Readers, please continue to send us your letters. We'd like to read about your likes and dislikes; this way we can better serve your needs. After all, you are reading this magazine for personal enjoyment. Also, feel free to respond to other issues — be they about writing, the SF and fantasy community, or the general state of affairs in the world at large. We do value your opinions, though we may not agree with them. So, write us!

Till next issue.

— Patrick Lucien Price

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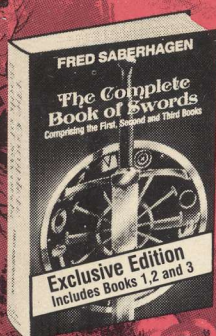
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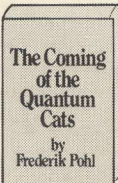
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