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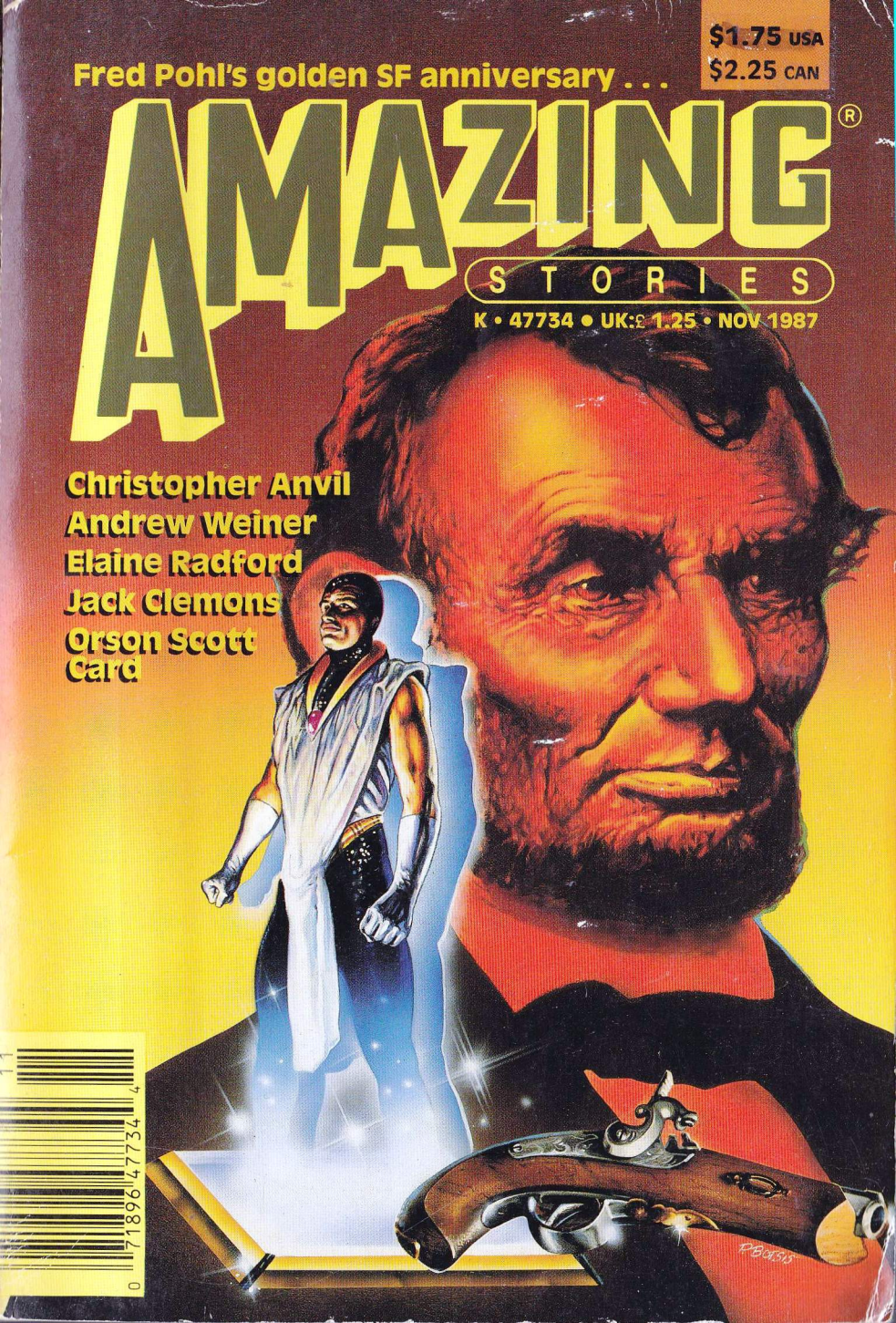

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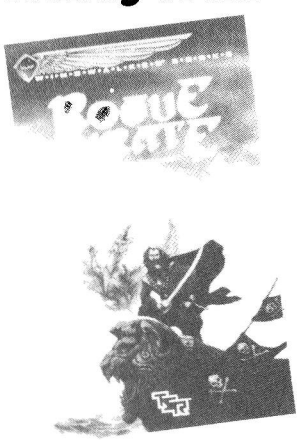

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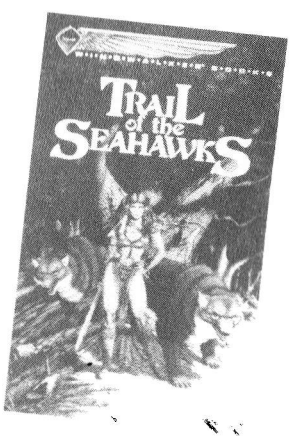

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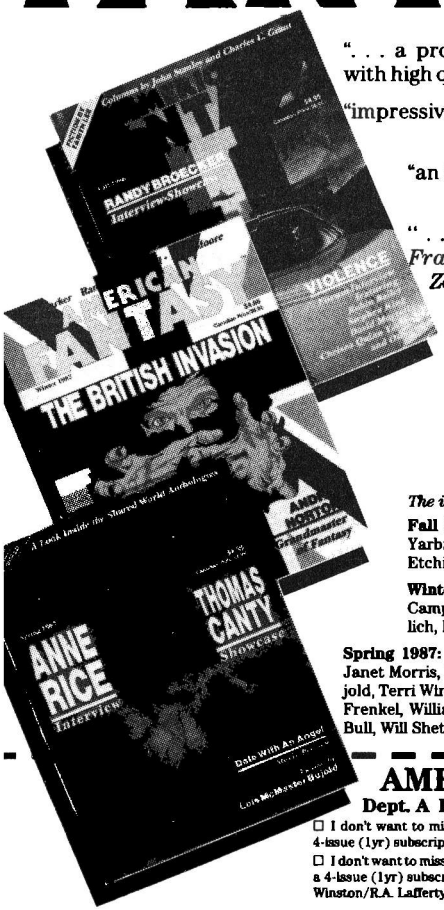

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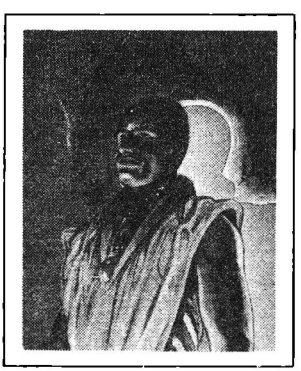

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COVER: Peter Botsis for "Will Little Note, Nor Long Remember"

NOVEMBER 1987

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NONFICTION

POETRY

DEPARTMENTS

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Reflections

Robert Silverberg

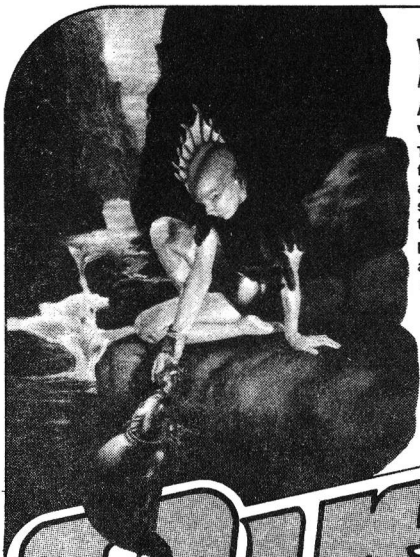
Dreadful mutant bacteria are loose among us. I hope the world lasts long enough for this to see print.

The sinister bugs are laboratory products, the results of artificially induced mutation via gene-splicing. They were developed by Advanced Genetic Sciences, Inc., a biotechnology company based in Oakland, California — the same placid pastoral community where I live myself. After a legal struggle that lasted for four years, Advanced Genetic Sciences finally received permission to let its new bacteria loose on an experimental plot in the town of Brentwood, California, a farming community of 5,800 people located 60 miles east of San Francisco.

The new microorganism bears the trade name of Frostban. It was designed to help plants resist frost, and if it works as intended, it may help farmers avert billions of dollars of losses each year and greatly expand the world's food-producing capacity. At first glance that sounds like an entirely meritorious project to which no one could possibly have objections. Why the four-year legal battle, then? Ah, never underestimate the ability of the American public — aided and encouraged by eager "public-interest advocates" and assorted lawyers — to drive itself into a frenzy of hysterical terror when some new scientific development with a scary name appears on the horizon.

Advanced Genetic Sciences began with a bacterium called *Pseudomonas syringae*, which has the capability of inducing water molecules to form ice crystals at low temperatures. By deleting a single gene from its makeup, the scientists produced a form of the bacterium that lacked this ice-inducing capability. Their hope was that Frostban bacteria, released in a field of plants, would displace the less vigorous natural form of *Pseudomonas syringae* and inhibit frost damage on the plants it occupied. Since the original bacterium has no harmful qualities whatever, other than its ability to intensify frost, and the new form differed from its predecessor only to the extent of a single gene, there seemed relatively little risk in releasing Frostban on an experimental test plot to see if it really could ward off injury to plants.

But the moment the plans for tests were announced, the guardians of genetic purity closed in. Jeremy Rifkin, who heads an anti-biotechnology group called the Foundation on Economic Trends, filed suit in September, 1983, to block all testing of Frostban, claiming that the altered microbes might multiply uncontrollably beyond the test area with unspecified dangerous consequences. In May, 1984, a Federal District Court ruled in Rifkin's favor, leading to a two-year delay while the Environmental Protection Agency came up with a set of regulations designed to guard against such calamities. Advanced Genetic Sciences persevered through all the legal challenges



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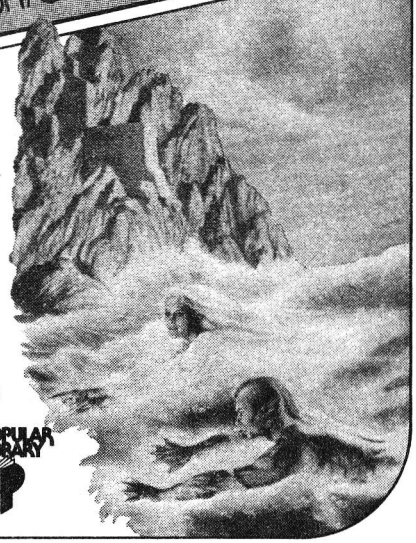

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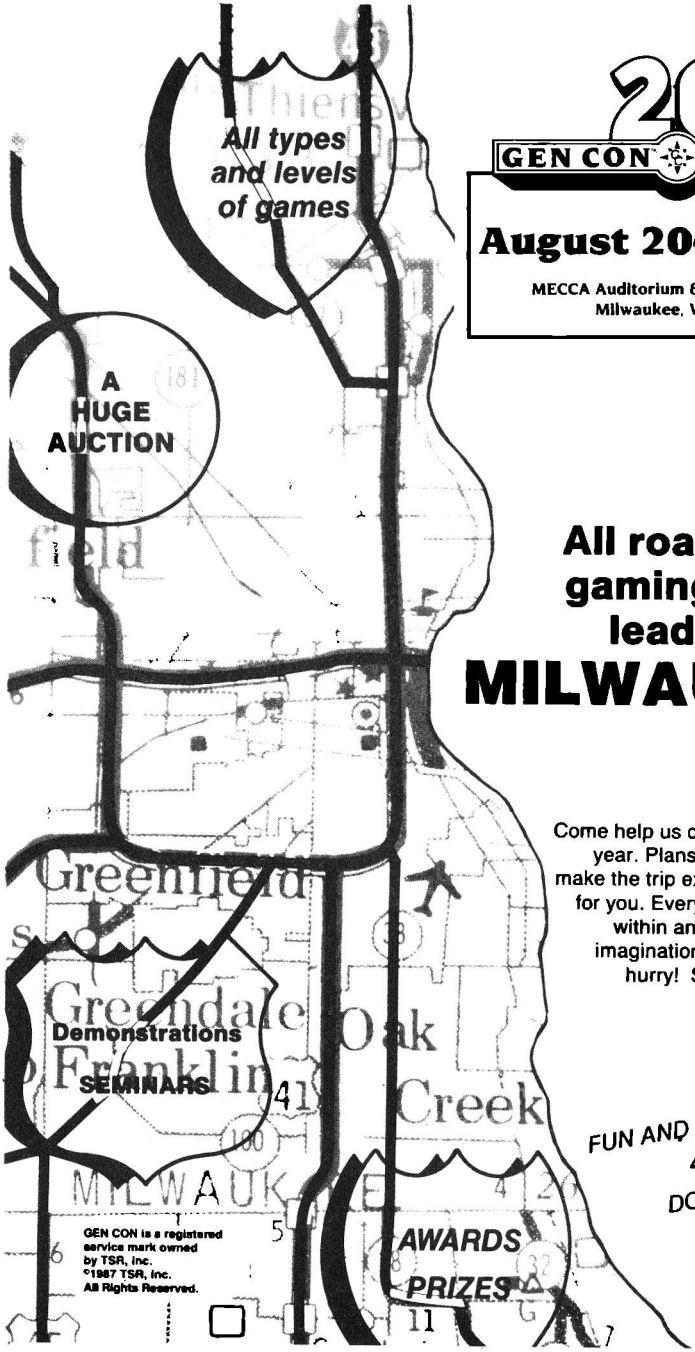

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and finally received permission in February, 1987, to test its critter outside the laboratory. The tests themselves were held, after a flurry of last-minute lawsuits, late in April, 1987.

The precautions that were taken were worthy of some truly Frankensteinian experiment. In the midst of a 200-by-200 test plot were 2,300 month-old strawberry plants, surrounded by a wide dirt buffer to keep the microbes from straying. Around the site were 16 generator-powered vacuum machines that the California Department of Food and Agriculture would use to monitor the air around the site. For further scrutiny of possible bacteria migration the state had set up 38 white trays in which barley was growing. Seven steel towers equipped with additional sophisticated devices rose on the borders of the plot. State officials stood ready to spray chemical pesticides into adjoining fields if any Frostban bacteria should escape. The technicians who would spray the bacteria on the plants were enclosed in head-to-toe protective gear very much like space suits, complete with goggles and respirators.

Despite all this, terror ran high. One 27-year-old Brentwood housewife, four months pregnant, left her home four miles from the test site and moved into a hotel in another town, saying she planned to remain there "until my money runs out. If I was rich, I would have moved." Other local people expressed misgivings also, though not so dramatically. And Andy Caffrey of Earth First, a radical environmentalist group opposing the test, declared, "There are too many vested interests involved in regulating and evaluating this technology. How can we be sure that these bugs are receiving objective evaluations and are safe?"

The night before the experiment, environmental-minded vandals cut through the chain-link fence surrounding the test plot and uprooted four fifths of the small plants that were to be used. "I'm thrilled," Caffrey said the next morning. "I'm sorry they didn't do a better job." The plants, though damaged, were put back in the ground and the experiment proceeded as planned — covered by television crews from as far away as Japan. Since frost does not occur in California in late April, the plants bearing the altered bacterium will now be transported to a laboratory where they will undergo simulated winter conditions. Apparently, there was no escape of Frostban bacteria into the surrounding countryside.

"I'm elated," said Dr. John Bedbrook, one of the scientists involved in the project. "It's good for the company and it's good for the industry. The judicial system has evaluated and recognized the thoroughness of the regulatory process for this industry." Elgin Martin, whose 110-acre pear farm is located right next door to the test site, was equally pleased. "This is the wave of the future, I think, in dealing with our bug problems, our frost problems," he said. "Hopefully, it'll really take off." But from Jack Doyle of the Environmental Policy Institute in Washington came the warning, "The people of California should really carefully weigh the high-tech fervor that seems to be sweeping the nation," and other leaders in the campaign against genetic manipulation called for intensified legal opposition to such research.

Did the release of Frostban in Brentwood, California, bring an end to life on Earth as we know it? As I write this, a few weeks later, it's much too early to tell — but you may already be

feeling the dire impact by the time this issue reaches you in the summer. Or perhaps not. It seems to me that legitimate concern over uncontrolled scientific experimentation became fused with a peculiarly anachronistic fear of science in this case — as though perhaps the specter of atomic holocaust now rises so high above the world of the late twentieth century that *all* scientific research has come to seem equally threatening, and an easily manipulated populace sees new devastating horrors lurking in every laboratory. Even Frostban's opponents privately admitted that the altered bacterium was almost certainly harmless. But they saw a way of launching a test case that might choke off gene-splicing research before it could lead to more dangerous things.

I am not, of course, advocating letting the folks in the white coats do whatever they want. Scientists, as a class, are just as prone to misjudgment as anyone else, and the time to monitor their activities is *before* the carnivorous amoebas are accidentally let loose in the water supply. But the dialogue between the genetic sciences and the guardians of the status quo must not be turned into a shrill demand for suppression of all research.

Nor will it be. Frostban has been tested, finally, and gene-splicing work of many another kind goes forward elsewhere. At the University of California at Davis, a laboratory run by Dr. Donald Durzan has inserted the gene responsible for the firefly's glow into cells of fir and pine trees. The project is one of pure research, but Dr. Durzan says playfully that it might some day have significant commercial results. Christmas trees in the next century, he quips, might come with their own built-in lights. ●

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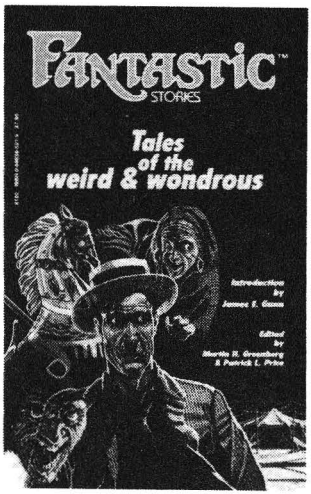

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AND WHO IS JOAH?

by T. S. Huff

art: Doug Chaffee

The author lives and works in downtown Toronto, Canada. She is a founding member of The Bunch of Seven, a Toronto-based writers' group. Recently, she has sold a story to the third installment of the Magic in Ithkar *anthology, edited by Andre Norton and Robert Adams.*

This is her second story sale to Amazing® Stories. *Her first sale, "Third Time Lucky" (November 1986), introduced the wizard Magdelene, who appears again in this tale, though with a young sidekick this time.*

The green and gold lizard leapt from his favorite sunning spot and darted for a crevice in the coral wall. Although he moved with panicked speed, another tiny missile bounced off his tail before he reached sanctuary. Once safe, he turned and allowed himself the luxury of an unwinking glare at his attacker.

Magdelene sputtered with laughter and spit another watermelon seed over the wall. "If you'd held still, little one," she admonished, waving a gnawed bit of rind, "I'd never have hit you."

The lizard gave that statement the answer it deserved. Whether she'd meant it or not, he had been hit, and a lizard's dignity is easily wounded. He flicked his tongue at the wizard and then vanished into the dark and secret passageways of the wall.

Magdelene laughed again, tossed the rind on the growing pile to her left, and plucked another slice of fruit off the diminishing pile to her right. It was a beautiful day. Not a cloud blemished the sky, and the heat of the sun lay against her skin like velvet. She stretched luxuriously and considered how wonderful life could be when there was nothing to do but lie in the garden and spit seeds into the ocean.

"You don't look much like a wizard."

At the sound of that clear, young voice, Magdelene unstretched so rapidly she cramped her neck. Fortunately, before she could add to the damage by turning, the owner of the voice came forward to perch on the wall and peer with frank curiosity at the woman in the chair.

She was small, this intruder, and young; probably no more than thirteen years old, still a child but already beginning to show signs of the great beauty that would be hers as an adult. Her skin was the deep, warm brown of liquid chocolate, and her black hair curled tight to her head. The linen shift she wore was torn and travel-stained but still held the hint of bright embroidery beneath the dirt.

The dark skin, even more than the calloused and dusty feet, told of the long road from the child's southern home. The most northerly cities of her people were more than a six weeks' hard walk away, and her dialect placed her home farther south than that. Her presence in the garden gave rise to an

amazing number of questions. Perhaps the most important was how had she done the impossible and entered the garden with neither Magdelene nor Kali, the housekeeper, aware of her.

"I came through the gate," she replied simply when asked.

Magdelene blinked at that. The coral wall didn't usually have a gate. After a moment of mutual staring, she asked, "Who are you?"

"I am Joah."

"And who is Joah?"

"Me." Golden flecks danced in Joah's eyes. "You don't look much like a wizard," she repeated, grinning.

Magdelene couldn't help but grin back. "That depends on what you expect a wizard to look like."

Joah nodded, but her face clearly said she hadn't expected anything like what she'd found: a naked woman, not young, for the untidy mass of red-brown hair was lined with grey, laying in the sun with watermelon juice running between her breasts to pool amid the faint stretch marks on her belly. If she were darker, the girl realized suddenly, she'd look much like Lythia. And no one would ever mistake her father's good-natured and indolent third wife for a wizard.

The two stared at each other for a moment longer; brown eyes curious, grey eyes thoughtful.

"I don't usually have unexpected visitors," Magdelene said at last. She took an absentminded bite from the slice of watermelon she still held. That the child had power was obvious from the moment she'd entered the garden unannounced. That the child had so much power — and Magdelene in all her dealings with wizards had never touched anyone with a higher potential — was another thing entirely. "Well," she finally continued, as Joah seemed content to sit and stare, "now that you're here, what did you plan to do?"

Joah spread her hands. "They say you're the best. I want you to teach me."

"Oh." It lacked a little something as a response, but it was all Magdelene could think of to say. *No* was out of the question. Untrained, Joah would be a hazard to all around her and a temptation to those who would use her for their own ends. Magdelene sighed and said good-bye to lazy afternoons in the garden. It looked like she had an apprentice.

"You might as well have some watermelon." Magdelene sighed again. Even to her own ear that sounded less than welcoming, and the smile that went with it was barely second best. She dragged herself from the chair and walked over to the wall, handing Joah the half-eaten piece of fruit she carried. "I'll show you around as soon as I've washed up." That was a little better. Very little. She hoped the child realized it was nothing personal . . . just . . . well . . . an apprentice? Magdelene couldn't remember the last time she'd even considered an apprentice, and suspected it was because she never had. She clambered to the top of the low barricade and launched herself off

the cliff in a graceful dive . . . which unfortunately flattened out just above the water.

A resounding slap broke the even rhythm of the waves.

"Lizard piss," said the most powerful wizard in the world a moment later. "That hurt."

"But why doesn't she ever do any magic?" Joah, industriously scraping clean one of Kali's largest mixing bowls, demanded of the demon. "I mean, if you didn't know who she was, she could just be somebody's mother."

"She is."

"That doesn't count." Joah dismissed Magdelene's absent son with a slightly sticky wave of her hand. "The old shaman back in the cohere used to do more hocus-pocus than she does, even if she wouldn't teach me any of it. Do you know what she told me she did this morning? She said she was arguing with the wind god, to stop him from destroying the village."

"She was."

"Yeah, right. Even if there is such a god, you just don't go out and argue with him. I mean, you've got to do things first — light fires, wave wands, sacrifice goats."

"Hard on the goats."

"Ok, skip the goats. But you don't just go argue with a god. I mean, it's undignified. I'm finished with this bowl. Can I have that one now?" Bowls were duly exchanged. As to ivory horns and burning red eyes, well, to dark-skinned Joah everyone in this part of the world looked strange. And the demon sure could cook. "Do you know what she's teaching me? She says I have to know myself and keeps asking me who I am. As if I didn't know who I was. I grew up with me. This is new. What flavor are these?"

"Pumpkin."

"What's a pumpkin? Never mind, it doesn't matter as long as it tastes good. She says all power comes from within and that self-discipline is the key to all magic."

"It is."

"Ha," Joah snorted. "You're just saying that because of the chickens. I mean, I'm glad you took care of them while I was busy, but I was going to get to them. I really was." She licked the last bit of batter from her fingers and studied her hands.

"Remember," Magdelene had said, "how your hands looked when you were a baby. Imagine how they'll look when you are old." As she spoke, her hands shifted and changed, fat and dimpled one second, gnarled and spotted the next. "When you can do this, then we'll go on."

Joah's hands had stubbornly stayed the age they were, although to her astonishment she had watched a scrape across her knuckles heal in seconds.

Now, she sat and watched her nails slowly growing and muttered over and over, "I am Joah. I am Joah." A dimple flickered for an instant on her wrist.

"I am bored," she said aloud.

"JOAH!" Magdelene's summons, in less than dulcet tones, echoed around the kitchen. "I NEED YOU IN THE TOWER! AND RIGHT AWAY!"

The girl grinned at the demon and swung gracefully off her perch on the high stool. "She needs me in the tower right away," she explained unnecessarily, and skipped from the room.

Kali shook her head, retrieved her bowl, and, although her face had not been built for the expression, looked relieved.

Magdelene's tower was only one of the peculiarities of the turquoise house on the hill. From the outside, it appeared to be no more than a second-story cupola. From the inside, the view put the room some fifty feet above the rest of the house. And the room was mostly view; walls provided only an anchorage for the roof and a place to hang the huge window shutters.

It was a little longer than right away before Joah appeared in the tower. She'd run out of the kitchen into a hall she'd never seen before, and it took some time for her to reorient.

"Why," she demanded, throwing herself down on a pile of cushions, narrowly missing the overweight black cat who had curled up there for a nap, "did you make this place so much bigger on the inside than the outside?"

Magdelene shrugged. "It left more room for the garden."

"Well, then can't you get it to stop shifting around? I mean, I never know where I am."

The most powerful wizard in the world considered it. The house *had* been getting more eccentric of late. Visitors very often discovered that the shortest distance between two points became the long way around. Eventually, Joah would learn to impose her will on the building; in the meantime, chaos was a handy way of preventing her from discovering there were places she was not permitted to find.

"I can," said Magdelene at last. "But I won't." She dropped to the cushions beside her apprentice. The cat stalked off to find a safer place to sleep. "What do you have to say about this?" She waved a hand at the oval mirror propped by the south windows.

"Wow! Is that ever great!" Joah leaned forward, her eyes wide. "When are you going to teach me to do that?"

The mirror held a bird's-eye view of a running man. Except that it was totally without sound, the two wizards might have been looking out another window.

"When I think you're ready," Magdelene replied firmly. The view moved closer. "Do you know this man?"

Joah nodded, her face splitting in a grin. "Oh, yes. That's Zayd, one of my brothers. I mean, one of my older brothers. He's one of the first six."

"The first six?"

"Father's first wife had six sons, which pretty much secured the heritage, but Father took another four wives anyway. Mother says that was a good thing 'cause it needs five women to get all the work done around the cohere and take care of Father, too."

"Joah, tell me your father isn't the Tamalair."

"Well, I'll tell you if you want me to, but he is." The grin suddenly disappeared. "That doesn't matter, does it? You won't send me away."

"Probably not." Magdelene put an arm around the girl and hugged her close. "I've gotten kind of used to having you around. But, if your father is the ruler of the Alair, that does explain why this young man is a scant twenty-four hours away and still running hard."

Joah giggled. "Zayd isn't young. He's almost as old as you."

Magdelene laughed and somehow didn't look much older than Joah while she did it. "Impudent child. No one is as old as I am."

Joah stuck out her tongue and Magdelene attacked. Unfortunately, the most powerful wizard in the world was the more ticklish of the two, and Joah soon began to turn the tables.

The shriek of the wind through the room and the crash of the mirror on the tiled floor stilled the laughter. Magdelene stood, pulled Joah up from the cushions, and with a wave of her hand backed the wind out the windows and blocked its re-entry. They stared down at the shards of glass, each fragment holding the entire original image. Magdelene shook her head.

"You broke that mirror," she said firmly out the west window. "The seven-year curse I place on you."

Joah's hand tightened on her teacher's. Just for a heartbeat she saw hanging over the ocean to the west a man's face, huge and ethereal and looking more than a little miffed.

"Mistress, the —"

"Not now, Kali, whatever it is. That little imp spent the morning badgering me, and I'm exhausted." Magdelene closed her eyes, and a breeze came out of nowhere to rock the hammock. "She wanted me to teach her how to shoot lightning bolts from her fingertips. Lightning bolts yet. I finally taught her sparks. I'm sorry, Kali, but she wore me down."

"Mistress, the way has been opened."

Not even the most powerful wizard in the world can jerk erect in a hammock with impunity.

"I should've strengthened the wards," Magdelene muttered as the demon untangled her. "If the ones around the garden didn't stop her, how could I expect those to?"

"As much my fault as yours, Mistress. I said nothing to you about her rapid control of the house."

Magdelene waved that away. "I knew about it. The child's power is incredible, and she gains control daily."

"Then you think she lives?"

The wizard paused in the doorway and allowed herself a small grin. "I think she's being a royal pain in the ass to somebody else at this very moment. They'll want to use her power, not destroy it. You start cooking, I'll change into something warmer, and then I'll see about kicking some ass myself." She paused and waved a gate into the coral wall. "Big brother's about due. Might as well make it easy for him."

As Magdelene ran into the kitchen some moments later, Joah's older brother entered the garden. Kali turned from the stove, but Magdelene waved her back. She grabbed a couple of muffins and headed for confrontation.

Zayd stared suspiciously around. The place looked ordinary enough, but he didn't trust wizards. He'd dealt with the shamans of his father's court, and he knew where wizards were concerned things were seldom as they seemed. He had no intention of letting this wizard take him by surprise. He would grab the child and go, and if anyone or anything tried to stop him . . . he gripped his broad-bladed spear tighter.

He was almost twenty years older than Joah; tall, and sleekly muscular. His skin was a little darker and just now glistened in the sunlight. Magdelene watched a rivulet of sweat run over the corded muscles of his stomach to disappear behind his embroidered linen loincloth. She smiled. Even in the midst of disaster, Magdelene could appreciate the finer things in life.

"If you're looking for Joah," she said at last, rolling her eyes as Zayd leapt backward and dropped his spear into a fighting stance, "she isn't here."

"Where is the wizard?" Zayd demanded.

Magdelene polished off a muffin and bowed.

"You?" He recovered faster than most. "What have you done with my sister, Wizard?"

"I haven't done anything with her, but about two hours ago she wandered into the Netherworld." Magdelene stopped his charge, freezing him in a ridiculous and very uncomfortable position. "Now, you can stay like that for a while, or you can believe me when I say I had nothing to do with it and help me go and bring her back."

Zayd considered it and found he believed her. Not even a wizard would send another to the realm of the demonkind and then risk her own life with a rescue. "If you're going after her," he said grimly, "I'm going with you." No sooner did the words leave his mouth than the hold on him released and he was face first in the dirt. He scowled up into laughing, grey eyes.

"Sorry," she said, holding out her hand. "I forgot that would happen."

That he didn't believe, and he got to his feet without her help. Still, he realized that a man who attacks the most powerful wizard in the world should expect a little discomfort, and he held no grudge. He brushed himself off and met her eyes squarely. "What I can do, I will. Command me."

Magdelene bit her lip and got her thoughts back to her unfortunate apprentice. "Goddess," she muttered, "you'd be proud of me now." She

headed for the house, indicating that Zayd should follow. "First of all, we'll find you some warmer clothes. You'd freeze in what you have on. The Netherworld is always cold, and I think they lower the temperature more for me. They know I hate it and . . ." She paused at his exclamation. "Oh. That's Kali."

Kali nodded and took a pie from the oven.

Zayd looked from the demon to the table groaning under its load of food. He was willing to accept the demon, most wizards kept a familiar, but he had a little trouble when Magdelene slid into a chair and began to eat.

"My sister lies in the Netherworld and you fill your stomach?"

"Energy," Magdelene explained around half a fish. "Any energy I use in the Netherworld I have to take with me." She slathered a baked yam in butter. "Kali, when you've drained those noodles, take Zayd to Ambro's old room. There're clothes there that should fit him."

Kali faced her mistress in shock. "But Ambro's room is lost."

Magdelene studied a sausage with unnecessary intensity, refusing to meet the demon's eyes. "Third door on the left," she said, memories lifting the corners of her mouth. "Go."

The third door on the left opened into a large, pleasant room, obviously once occupied by a musician. A table, still holding sheets of paper scrawled over with musical notations, stood by the window; the chair pushed back as though the composer had just left. A harp with two broken strings rested against the wall, and a set of cracked pipes peered out from under the unmade bed.

Kali flipped open a small trunk and silently handed Zayd trousers, shirt, and boots. She glared around the room, snorted, began to leave. Then she stopped in the doorway and pinned the warrior with her gaze. "Do you make music?" she hissed.

Zayd took an involuntary step away from the fire in the demon's eyes, but his voice was steady as he answered, "No."

"Good." On any other face, Kali's expression would be called a smile. She closed the door on Zayd's question.

When Zayd returned to the kitchen, Magdelene was just finishing charging her powers. His jaw dropped in astonishment. In the short time he'd been out of the room, enough food for a large family had been devoured by one medium-sized wizard.

"Magic," Magdelene explained, and belched. She stood and stretched, looking Zayd over. The clothes, even the boots, fit perfectly. He held his huge spear in his right hand, and his dagger now hung from a leather belt. Magdelene nodded in satisfaction. Joah's brother was a formidable-looking man. They just might stand a chance. She picked up a large pouch and slung it across her shoulders. "All right then, let's get going."

The hall outside the kitchen was not the one Zayd remembered. This one was large and square, and flooded with sunshine from a circular skylight.

Each of the four walls held a door. The one they'd passed through, he assumed, led back to the kitchen, but he wasn't willing to bet on it. He jumped as Kali glided up behind him and dropped a serviceable, brown jacket over his shoulders. He shrugged into it, thinking that he'd never worn so many clothes in his life.

Almost too fast to follow, the demon twitched a bright orange cape off Magdelene's turquoise and red clothing and replaced it with one of a neutral grey. "No need to annoy them unnecessarily, Mistress," she said in reply to the wizard's raised eyebrow. "They are demons, but they are not colour blind." Her hands rested for a moment on the wizard's shoulders. "Be careful."

"If I can." Magdelene raised her hand to stop the demon's reply and then continued the gesture, beckoning Zayd. "Let's go."

"Go where?" Zayd spread his hands. "You've drawn no pentagrams, burned no incense, sacrificed no goats. How do you expect us to travel to the Netherworld?"

Magdelene threw open the door she stood beside. "I thought we'd take the stairs."

The stairs went down a very, very long way. Twice they stopped to rest, and once Magdelene picked a jar of pickles off the shelves that lined the walls, and crunched as they walked. Zayd declined. He'd peered into a jar earlier on and was sure that something had peered back.

And down.

And down.

And down.

At the bottom of the stairs, where the stone walls glistened with a silver slime that was not quite frost, their way was blocked by an immense, brass-bound door. Runes burned into the wood told, in horrific detail, the tortures that would befall the mortal who dared to pass. Embedded in the stone above the door was the living head of a demon.

As the travelers approached, it drew in its grey and swollen tongue and announced with great spatterings of mucus, "Abandon hope all ye who . . ." Then through the scum encrusting its eyes, the demon saw who it addressed. "Oh gee, sorry, Magdelene. I didn't realize it was you." And the door swung open on silent hinges.

"Come on." Magdelene grabbed Zayd's arm and pulled. "All he can do is drool on you."

The door closed behind them with the expected hollow boom.

Grey and bleak and cold, prairies of blasted rock stretched as far as the eye could see in all directions.

"Wizard! The door!"

There was no door.

"Don't worry." She gave his arm a comforting squeeze and released it.

"The door will be there when we need it. The demonkind are usually very good about getting me out of their domain." And she smiled at a secret thought. It wasn't a very nice smile.

Zayd dropped to one knee and studied the gravel at their feet. "I don't understand it," he muttered as he stood. "She should've left tracks in this."

"The door never opens on the same place twice," Magdelene explained, wrapping her cloak tightly against the biting wind. "The Netherworld follows only its own laws, and sometimes not even those. Joah could've entered ten inches from here or ten miles. Reach inside to the blood tie, and feel which direction we have to go."

"To the what?"

Magdelene brushed his eyes closed with her left hand and with her right turned him slowly about. Her voice dropped so low it became almost more a feeling than a sound. "Find the tie that binds you. Find the cord of your father's blood that links your life to hers. Reach for the part of Joah that is you." When Zayd's body no longer turned under her hands, Magdelene dropped them and stepped back.

Zayd's eyes flew open, searching for the crimson line he knew stretched from his heart to Joah's. The Netherworld lay desolate and empty before him. He took a step and felt a gentle tug on the cord he couldn't see. His teeth flashed in a sudden feral smile. "We can find her, Wizard."

It is impossible to judge distance when the landscape never changes, and time looses meaning when the light remains a uniform grey. Only aching muscles and extremities growing numb from the cold gave them any indication of how far or how long. Magdelene's eyes were hooded, and she hummed as she walked. Zayd followed the cord, rejoicing that the pull grew stronger, and giving thanks the way had, so far, not been blocked.

"It's the humming," Magdelene explained. "It keeps the lesser demons away."

"I'm not surprised," Zayd admitted. In any other circumstances he'd be well away from the tuneless drone himself.

Magdelene, who had a pretty good idea of what Zayd was thinking, only smiled and went on warning the demonkind of who walked their land.

They'd eaten twice of the supplies in Magdelene's satchel when four horsemen appeared on the horizon. Magdelene and Zayd stood their ground as horses and riders thundered towards them. In less time than should have been possible, the dark rider was flinging herself off the pale horse and into Magdelene's arms.

The most powerful wizard in the world extracted herself from Death's embrace and caught the bloodless hands firmly in her own. "Calm down," she advised. "I'm glad to see you too, but I'm not trying to knock you over."

Death grinned and backed up a step. "You're looking well," she said in such a disappointed tone that both women broke down and roared with laughter.

Zayd found himself meeting the gaze of the rider on the black horse who rolled his eyes in cadaverous sockets and shrugged boney shoulders.

Finally, the laughter faded to giggles. One arm wrapped companionly about Magdelene's waist, Death wiped her streaming eyes and noticed Zayd. "Oooo nice," she crooned, jostling Magdelene with her hip. "Aren't you going to introduce me to your friend?"

"Not on your life," Magdelene crooned back.

That set them off again.

Pestilence buried his head in his hands and groaned, but Famine was made of sterner stuff. Boney fingers beat against an equally skeletal thigh. "Put a sock on it, ladies," he boomed. "We have work to do."

"Ok, ok." Death flipped a hand at her companions and fought to get her mirth under control.

Magdelene steadied herself against Death's shoulder and enquired innocently, "So, where are you headed?"

"Well, we . . ."

"Don't tell her!" War used the flat of his sword to pry the women apart and push Death towards her horse. "Remember what happened the last time!"

Famine and Pestilence shuddered at the memory, and Death shrugged. "Sorry."

"Never mind." Magdelene winked up at her. "Maybe next time."

Then the riders were gone.

Zayd emptied his lungs and tried to work the tension out of his shoulders. "You have weird friends, Wizard," he muttered.

"Have an oat-cake" was the wizard's reply.

The palace appeared to have sprung up between one heartbeat and the next. It was never on the horizon, never in the distance; it was just suddenly there. Made of the same dull grey stone as the rest of the Netherworld, it wasn't difficult to believe that the structure had sprouted from the ground like some particularly foul species of fungus.

Magdelene noted the seal etched over the door and sighed philosophically. "Well, it could've been worse."

She turned to Zayd, and for the first time, something in her eyes made the warrior believe she could indeed be what she was called.

"Your sister is the guest of Lord Rak'vol" — her tone made the name a curse — "one of the five demon princes." She waved a hand at the cold desolation around them. "Here, I can only contain his powers. You must defeat him."

"I do no magics," Zayd growled.

Magdelene's voice was grim. "Neither will he, but he'll still have his physical strength, and that fight is yours."

Zayd looked up at the prince's seal, leaned his spear against the wall, and

began to strip off his clothes. He shook free the ends of his loincloth, tucked his dagger back under the fold, and stood as Magdelene had first seen him in the garden. "If I fight," he said, "I do it on my terms." Ignoring the cold, he began to murmur the warrior's chant.

A knocker of bone on the palace's door boomed a summons impossibly loud when dropped. The doorman was familiar; the red eyes, ivory horns, and features bore a startling resemblance to Kali's. A lower look, however, showed this demon to be very obviously male.

"You're here at last." He reached out a taloned finger to stroke the wizard's cheek. "But you'll have to go by me to get in." His chuckle was obscenely caressing. "The prince awaits, and you have no power to spare. What will you do to Muk to pass my door?" Gestures made the demon's preference plain.

Magdelene's eyes narrowed to slits. "Zayd," she said, and stepped aside.

A demon's knees are no more protected than a man's, and beneath the copper-bound butt of Zayd's spear, they crushed in much the same way.

Magdelene stepped over the writhing body and into the building. Zayd followed. Shrill shrieks of pain followed them both.

Torches that smoked and flickered lit the way, making even more unpleasant the inlay work of gold and gems that ran along the walls. They came to the end of the corridor, turned, came to a branching, turned, came to a dead end, retraced their steps, turned, came to a branching, turned, came to a dead end.

"If he thinks to keep me out with this," Magdelene growled, glaring at the wall, "he can think again." She took Zayd's hand. "Close your eyes," she commanded. "Let me lead you."

"I'd rather see where I'm walking, Wizard."

"Suit yourself," Magdelene snapped and walked into the wall she faced.

Zayd closed his eyes as his hand and lower arm followed the wizard into the stone. Some moments later, when she released him, he opened them again.

The room they stood in was lovely; brilliant tapestries hung on the walls, thick carpets covered the floor, the light was soft and golden. On a pile of brightly colored cushions a young woman lay sleeping. Her skin was a rich, dark brown with warm velvety shadows and glowing highlights. Her body was an artist's dream and graceful even in repose. Just as the beauty that was to be hers as a woman had shown in the face of Joah the child, the innocence of the child showed in the face of the woman.

"Joah?"

"Joah." Magdelene confirmed.

Zayd took a step towards his sister who slept on unaware. "Has he —?"

"No, he hasn't." Rak'vol answered for himself. "But he will."

The demon prince was taller than the warrior, but not by very much. Broader through the shoulders, but only barely. Curls like copper silk tum-

bled down his back. Golden brown skin stretched over sculptured muscle. His face was beautiful without being soft — straight nose, angled cheeks, generous mouth. Amber eyes were amused.

"The more human evil looks," said Magdelene softly to Zayd, "the more dangerous it is."

Rak'vol laughed and tossed his head. "You were a fool to come here, Wizard," he said, friendly, chiding.

"Once, there were six demon princes," the wizard replied. "Now, there are five."

The perfect smile broadened. "Kan'kon was an idiot. He challenged you where you were strongest. This is my domain, and I am stronger here." His eyes began to darken, and he turned to Zayd. "I assume you have come to fight for the fair maiden?"

"Don't look in his eyes!" Magdelene cried, jolting Zayd from what was intended to be a fatal hesitation.

The battle joined.

Zayd needed every advantage his spear provided. In spite of his human appearance, Rak'vol moved with inhuman speed, using hands and feet as deadly weapons. Zayd took a kick to his thigh that would've broken the bone had it not been partially blocked. As it was, the muscles knotted in pain. He let the leg collapse and, as he twisted, dragged the blade of his spear along the demon's ribs.

The blood on the steel sizzled, and the metal began to melt and run. Zayd froze in horror as his spear became a wooden staff.

Rak'vol chuckled as his wound closed. "The wizard may hold my power" — he waved a magnanimous hand at Magdelene who stood eyes closed, hands clenched, ignoring them as she ignored the crimson drops that fell from her ears — "but she cannot change what is bred in bone and blood. What has never lived cannot harm the demonkind. You are welcome to do what you can with that stick of course."

The battle began again.

Zayd felt ribs break a moment later, but he got in blows of his own, and the demon was not as unhurt as he pretended. His spear shaft shattered against a golden elbow, and he tossed it away as Rak'vol twisted to protect his numbed arm. They closed, brown hands around golden throat, golden hands around brown. Zayd peered over the demon's shoulder, through the red mist that was rising behind his eyes, and screamed, "Magdelene!"

Too late, as Muk, who had crawled on his belly all the long way from the door, threw himself at the wizard's back. Magdelene went down.

Golden talons grew suddenly on fingertips and dug furrows of pain through the muscles on Zayd's back. He felt blood run down his legs, felt his hands loose their grip, and heard the demon call his name.

He had no choice. He looked into the ovals of onyx that had become the demon's eyes. The sound ripped from his throat was more than a scream.

And he couldn't stop making it.

On the cushions, Joah stirred. She raised one hand as if to bat away the rising cadences of sound, frowned, and opened her eyes.

"NO!"

The lightening bolt caught Rak'vol in the center of his back. His cry of agony added to the din, and he dropped Zayd as he turned to face this new menace.

Zayd's whole awareness was centered on pain, but he dimly knew he couldn't quit yet. He saw his sister facing the demon, her lips drawn back in a snarl, then he saw her fall, wrapped in blue light and shrieking. With both hands he drew his dagger, and with the last of his strength he drove in, up, and under the demon's ribs.

The sudden silence was overwhelming.

Copper brows rose as Rak'vol sank to his knees. "Who," he demanded querulously, "carries an ivory dagger?"

"The sons of the Tamalair," Zayd told him, and they collapsed together.

Joah was at her brother's side in an instant, but Magdelene was there first.

"Help me lift him," Magdelene commanded. "We've got to get out of here."

"But he's hurt," Joah protested. "And you're hurt. Can't we wait? The demon's dead."

Magdelene rolled Rak'vol's body out of the way with her foot. "Demon's turn to ash when they die," she said shortly. "This one will be back."

"Then kill him!" Joah shrieked, cringing from half-memories of her time in the Netherworld. "Kill him!"

Magdelene shook her head; her eyes were sunk deep in purple shadows, her skin was grey and clammy, and her ears were still bleeding freely. "I can't."

The two women half-carried, half-dragged Zayd from the room, disturbing a pile of ash and two ivory horns. Muk had clearly marked the route through the maze with his broken and bleeding knees.

Outside, the freezing wind dragged Zayd up from unconciousness. He groaned and tried to stand.

Magdelene twisted around, searching the immediate area desperately, but there was nothing to find. She draped Zayd in Joah's arms, spread her own, and called, "Door!"

Still nothing.

She straightened and reached. Power crackled around her, and this time she didn't call, she commanded, "DOOR!"

"Onyx eyes," Zayd muttered as darkness claimed him again.

With a pop of misplaced air, the great brass-bound door appeared inches from Magdelene's nose. She flung it open, helped Joah get Zayd inside, then slammed it shut.

"Never forget," the most powerful wizard in the world snarled at the

demon embedded above the door, "who put you there."

His terrified gibbering followed them up the stairs.

"But how did you summon the door," Joah wanted to know, "if you had no power left."

"I tapped into the power of the Netherworld."

Joah's eyes went very wide, and she bounced on the end of Zayd's bed. "Wow! Can you do that?"

"I did it." Magdelene's eyes were still shadowed. Although she had healed Zayd, certain wounds of her own only time could take care of.

"Oh boy! When will you teach me?"

Magdelene's "Never!" and Zayd's "Are you crazy!" rang out at the same time. They looked at each other and laughed, but Joah only looked sulky.

"It's not like I'd do anything stupid," she protested. "I've learned my lesson." She stood and turned before them, a young woman in her mid-twenties who had lived only thirteen years. "I've lost ten years of my life."

"Balderdash," snorted Magdelene, sounding more like her old self. "You haven't lost anything. You are who you always were, not even the demon princes can change that. So, who are you?"

Joah glanced down at herself and shrugged. "I am Joah," she said at last.

"And who is Joah?"

"Me."

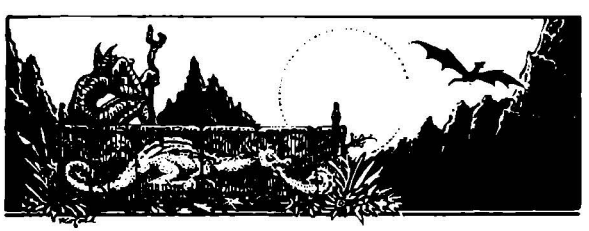
"Well?"

"Well, what?" Joah wanted to know. Then she looked down at her hands. Old hands. Young hands. Joah grinned.

"That's very good." Magdelene took a five-year-old by the shoulders and pushed an old woman out the door. "Go show Kali," she told a young matron. "Your brother has had a rough time, and he needs his rest." She closed the door on a giggling thirteen-year-old and leaned against it with a sigh.

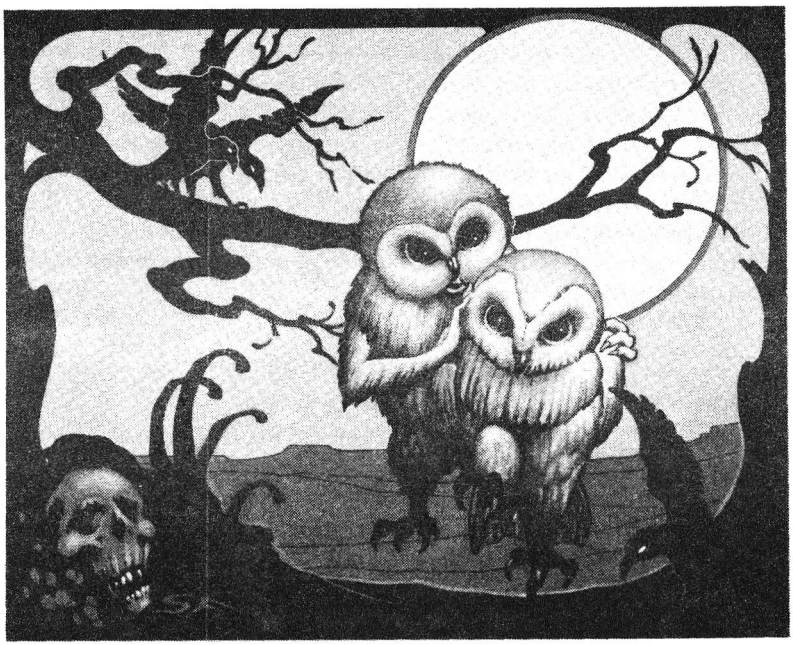
Zayd looked up at her through his lashes. "Uh, actually, Magdelene," he murmured, "I'm not that tired."

Magdelene's smile said many things as she twitched back the covers, but all she said aloud was "Good." ●



ANOTHER CROW'S EYES

by Elaine Radford
art: Stephen E. Fabian



Elaine Radford is a former geophysicist who resides, with an assortment of pet birds (only two of which talk — and one of those is electronic), in a suburb of New Orleans. She is currently working as a free-lance writer, mostly in the area of nonfiction. Many of her articles focus on pets, from exercising your parrot to brushing your dog's teeth. But she has also published fiction in such magazines as Night Cry, Far Frontiers, *and* Aboriginal SF. *Her last appearance in* Amazing® Stories *was "The Ramsey Gryphon" (May 1986).*

The Earth has been dying for a million years.

Leading Soviet climatologist M. I. Budyko: "In a few hundred thousand years or in a few million years, the ice cover will reach a critical latitude and then expand to the equator in a self-propelled process. As a result, the planet will be completely covered with ice, which will be stable because of a low negative temperature at all latitudes.

"Probably all biological processes on the Earth will cease under the conditions of complete glaciation."

Fifty million years after the flood.

A small group of novices perched on the low T-bars of the open lecture area, their tawny feathers flat and their round pupils contracted to pinpoints in the sunlight. Despite the fact that they were learning that incalculable eons had passed since the aberrant strigiform ancestor, they still looked strikingly like so many giant owls. The single male present, as in all birds of prey noticeably smaller than the females, was the only creature to break the illusion as he stood before the group waving his delicately groomed arms. The others, with their double-jointed arms folded behind their backs in the attitude of respectful listening, resembled nothing so much as half-slumbering primitives waiting for wild prey to come stumbling into their clever claws.

Ontoo felt a nip of impatience bite her as she surveyed the little group. Why in the air must she waste her time investigating a male teacher? One glance at him was enough to tell her La-oola R was a fluffbrain: how else could he fail to be aware that the morning sun reflected distraction off the gold crescents painted on the end of his each and every bronzed feather? Ontoo drew the fist of her left foot nearer her breast as she let her inner eyelids droop. For though lectures were always dull, they were doubly so when presented in the singsong drone of the male.

"When a geologist tells us that she's describing a set of random samples from an area, what does she mean? Can anybody tell me?"

"That she's a damn lair!" suggested a wit perched at the other end of Ontoo's back row T-bar. The class hooted its appreciation, and R himself managed a delicately masculine whoop. Attractive enough, Ontoo thought sleepily, for a cock who hadn't been able to find a hen to give him her eggs. His huge amber eyes were especially fine, highlighted as they were by rich rings of carefully plucked and gilded skin. This chore could be a pleasure after all.

"If you'll remember our working definitions of art and science, I'll think you'll be able to understand why our geologist has no choice but to lie. Science is analysis, breaking things down until you get to a point where you can ask questions that always have the same answers — the method of physics, mathematics, and a few odd branches of chemistry. Art is synthesis, putting things together until you have a coherent whole — the method of drama,

music, philosophy, geology, and sociology. But unless we want to reproduce the universe itself, rather a chore for our undergraduate flock" — the students hooted dutiful amusement — "we must make *choices* about what to include in our synthesis. And we invariably make those choices in the context of the story we've already formulated to tell ourselves about the universe. A fossil, say, in an area we don't expect gets discarded as a contaminant. . . ."

What nonsense. Ontoo fluffed out her feathers and wondered why anyone much cared about the orthodoxy of R's teaching. He'd be off rearing chicks in a year or two, the effort of his teachers and employers wasted. The paternal urge got all males in the end.

It is not, of course, a coincidence that we are living in the final days. The rise of civilization is intimately bound to a narrow band of environmental change. Too little change, and there's no need for civilization; hence, the intelligent dinosaurs left naught but a few feathers and bones to record their passing. Too much change, and even the most intelligent animal is wiped out; thus, these same dinosaurs succumbed to that fatal meteorite as rapidly as their less-gifted cousins.

Perversely, the fever and chills of the dying planet fell within this precisely specified band of change, spurring the quickening of civilization without choking it off in its womb.

After class was dismissed and the students had straggled off toward the laboratory enclosure, Ontoo hopped down from the T-bar and walked toward the young teacher. "Could I have the pleasure of your company in the dining field?" It was an order, not a request, and La-oola R recognized it as such. "Certainly," he murmured as he hurried to keep pace with her long-legged stride.

The field was empty except for the frumpy-looking male who was waving away the greencrows and the thief harriers that would otherwise gorge themselves on the food animals circulating dully in the fouled dirt. A particularly large and sassy crow — a female, Ontoo decided — cried derisively as it flapped off with its kicking victim, insolent in its implication that the hens had done poorly to trade their wings for arms. The guard male cursed and redoubled his waving.

Ontoo purred as she drew near: the prey skittering in the fenced yard was wingless brownfowl, a special favorite. It was a matter of a moment to pick up a sturdy net and scoop a trio of the fattest for her luncheon. "Want some?" she asked R casually as she twisted the neck of the first.

"No, thanks. I ate yesterday."

She crunched into the small brain, savoring the fresh blood streaming down her throat. La-oola waited nervously, perched on one foot while the other flexed open and shut near his breast. At length she spoke. "You consider the concept of progressive evolution a fiction, do you, R?"

He coughed and twisted his small, wide-eyed head up at hers. "It's a useful working approximation, Teacher, but it fails to answer all my questions about the geologic record."

"Yes. Well." She swallowed the last tail of brownfowl and brushed a bit of loose down from her beak. "I'm sorry to have to tell you that the committee has decided that your latest paper is a rather colorful fiction itself, and not a very useful one. How is society supposed to receive the idea that intelligences have arisen before us only to vanish utterly?"

"Perhaps as a spur to avoid the same fate?"

"Perhaps. But it seems more reasonable to suppose that these vanished hens never existed at all. Certainly, the bulk of the evidence agrees with the official position that animals become increasingly larger and complex with time. We would need overwhelming proof to the contrary before we could consider your dramatic speculations. But I think you're intelligent enough to withdraw your paper without further . . . complications. Let us talk now of something else."

La-oola looked up at Ontoo and hooted silently within, his amusement wild with hysterical despair. *Let us talk now of something else.* Hens were transparent animals; his father had always said that was because the ruling sex had the luxury of neglecting sensitivity and guile. But La-oola sometimes thought the truth was simpler: hens were by their very nature less intelligent than cocks. Why else were they so determined to keep males on the nest and out of the real world's competition?

The little male looked up, considered his options, and belatedly began to flirt.

Almost every human culture has sensed this truth, celebrating its temporary triumph over entropy with some myth of the flood. The souls of the Northwest Amerinds, for instance, were said to be drowning in the chaotic darkness of the Great Flood when Raven stole fire from Chaos and created sun, land, and human life itself. Later, he brought fire — culture — to his human creations. Thus, nature conspires with civilization to postpone the death of all.

Ontoo, of course, already had a male to take her eggs. She'd met him during her travels among the tiny white-feathered tribes of the far north, delighting in the way his racial inheritance enhanced the male delicacy of his features. But lately, Selry O had become a bore, talking of nothing but chicks and eggfood, and Ontoo couldn't help but think how well he fitted the latest modification to progressive evolution theory. Smallness of race equaled smallness of mind, and as a member of both the smaller gender and the smallest race, Selry O had an exceedingly small mind indeed.

And besides, he'd let himself go shockingly since the last clutch hatched out. Ontoo couldn't be blamed if her attentions wandered toward a cock who still cared about pleasing hens, could she?

Selry O was nattering on now about some letter from his brother, a cock who'd long ago gone crazy from raising too many chicks. "He says there's a rumor that Browns are killing Whites, eating their chicks and taking their land. One village not a day's cart-ride off has completely vanished —"

"Your brother's hysterical," Ontoo said. "Eating chicks indeed!"

"But if hens accept this new theory, that Browns are more advanced than Whites —"

She broke in impatiently, rattling her papers. "You don't have the capacity to understand what you're talking about." Was it too much to ask that a hen be allowed to get some work done within the walls of her own home?

Apparently, it was. Selry O just wouldn't drop it. "What if . . . I mean, the chicks . . ."

"The chicks will be fine." She slapped her papers into her folder and rose. "I'm going back to the temple. Maybe I can get something done out there!"

But she was hardly into the night before the urge to work had left her. The air was cool and sweet with the scent of moon-followers, teasing her blood with indefinite promise. Somehow, rather than climbing the broad steps to the main building of the Temple of Knowledge, she found herself at the door of the small outbuilding where La-oola R analyzed an oddly chosen assortment of rubble. For a moment Ontoo stood in darkness, content to look at him through the door he'd left open to catch the evening's coolness. Sudden affection flooded her as she studied his intent face and was reminded of a chick struggling with some private mystery.

"La-oola," she purred at length.

The little male's head jerked up. "Teacher? I'm sorry, I didn't see you —"

"What are you doing at work so late?"

His gold-tipped neck feathers upraised ever so slightly. "Take a look." Ontoo moved in slowly, edging herself a bit too close as she took the specimen. "I've found several of these near the area I call the 'exhibition site.' "

"Hmmm." She turned it over in her hand. A curious specimen indeed, this small and featureless green disc of ancient copper.

"Looks almost hen-made, doesn't it?" R asked.

"Almost . . . but I'm sure there's a perfectly natural explanation that doesn't require invoking mysterious races." She hooted softly to gentle her words, for she didn't feel like quarreling. Not now. Her very feathertips seemed to burn where they brushed against his body. "R . . . La-oola . . . perhaps we might work together on some of your questions."

My big chance, La-oola thought with some irony. He closed his eyes and let her gather him into a circle of feathered arms.

But entropy always wins. The astronomical factors that created temporary ice ages in the past have at last coincided with the conditions necessary to make glaciation complete and therefore permanent. The wandering continents have wandered fatally, isolating the Arctic polar basin and preventing easy circulation of

warm waters from lower latitudes. Meanwhile, the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has decreased steadily during Tertiary times; the greenhouse is closing up shop and the Earth overall grows ever cooler.

It was a three-day cart-ride to the exhibition site that La-oola R was excavating. Ontoo found herself suddenly willing to come along. Officially, of course, she went as representative of the committee.

The high priestess was pleased with her decision. "Analyzing the geologic record properly has become vital now that we're civilizing the north," Ronnaroo explained. "We must present a united front at this point in time. . . . We don't need certain . . . irresponsible speculations making their way into the minds of hens."

"Of course," Ontoo said. Now she rattled along behind the unmatched pair of sway-necked stepping ratites, alternately wondering if progress was worth it and if they'd actually made any. The damned grass-eaters were enough to make you disbelieve in any kind of efficient evolution; they were always stopping to graze, and you had to give them feed two — sometimes three — times a day. Ontoo's sore, cart-bounced hocks assured her there had to be a better way. She was glad it was evening when they arrived at the site so that she could retire directly to a cozy perch. Thank reason that La-oola R had had the sense to construct a wooden sleeping shed when he'd been out here before.

Her dreams tumbled over one another like a clutch of half-fledged chicks. She awoke in the still of predawn, painfully aware of La-oola's nearness. In the darkness, his sleeping body was a headless ball of fluff on a stick. Helpless, innocent, alone. She moved forward without willing it and began to groom the soft feathers at the base of his neck. He stirred in his sleep, purring. Emboldened, she began to scratch about the crown of his head. Slowly, slowly, she began the thrilling dance of seduction.

No one could have convinced her that the sudden wideness in La-oola's eyes was pain rather than pleasure. La-oola R himself could not have convinced her.

With all our skill, we can't move continents. With all our filth and dire predictions, we can't seem to effect a worldwide rise in atmospheric carbon dioxide. The Earth is dying, and must die in one hundred thousand to a few million years.

Ontoo supervised as La-oola chipped away at a gray rock. It was hot and thirsty work; the trees here were twisted limbs of spine and stump, and the neverdrink birds scolded from every branch. La-oola's little hammer rang as tinnily as a death rattle on the hard stone surrounding the twice-preserved scrap of what had once been a terrible archosaur capable of snapping his spine with a single bite.

"But if it *is* an elongated vertebra, can you imagine the size of the beast that went with it?" La-oola asked, pupils wide with excitement.

Ontoo hooted noncommittally as she studied the curious boulder of gray mineral that was almost as big as La-oola himself. "I'll grant you that there's a superficial resemblance to an avian or reptilian vertebra, but that's all. I'm sure it will turn out to be a normal geological phenomenon — perhaps something related to ancient glacial deposits. You must realize, after all, that the existence of an animal that size in past ages runs entirely counter to the concept of evolutionary progress."

La-oola's hammer paused a moment. "At least you'll concede that this fossil or rock or whatever you want to call it has no business being in this particular geologic formation?"

"It does seem more typical of some of the much older disturbed formations," Ontoo admitted grudgingly. "But that hardly supports your theory that this site is the museum of yet another lost race! There are too many natural, scientifically acceptable explanations for the contamination of geologic zones."

"It doesn't disturb you that we need so many theories? That there are so many disturbed and contaminated zones?"

"The Earth is old. Accidents happen." Ontoo was tiring of the discussion and sought a way to end La-oola's nonsensical speculations. She couldn't help noticing how the dirt of excavation had dulled his once-bright feathers. "As long as you were composing your dramatic fiction, why didn't you go ahead and tell us what wiped these grand creatures out?"

La-oola gaped slightly in the heat. "I can't," he said at length. "It's frustrating. If only we had a decent way of dating the age of this stuff —" He scratched his neck thoughtfully. "But I can't even work out a time scale, much less guess at what kind of catastrophes destroyed these hens."

"Catastrophes plural? My, you do believe in geology as fiction!"

La-oola began to chip once more. "If my retrenchment theory is correct, the whole ecosystem of the planet has probably been disrupted several times, on each occasion wiping out most of the higher forms of life and letting evolution begin anew from a lower level. There might have been many lost races. It would be nice if it turned out that the hens who built this museum, say, had collected much of the evidence for us. It would certainly explain why the fossil record's such a mess in most areas we've sampled so far."

"Very nice. Convenient, too. You'd think the odds against your finding such a place quite long."

La-oola heard the irony and shrugged uncomfortably. Art, like science, sometimes proceeded by lucky accident, but it wasn't a process easily explained.

"But you still haven't told me what catastrophe could have wiped out such grand creatures," Ontoo said, urging him. Baiting him? But no, he saw

that she truly thought her careless banter erotic.

"Sometimes," he said slowly, "sometimes I wonder if they didn't kill each other."

Even Ontoo couldn't miss the dirge in his tone. Clumsily, she quoted the old proverb: "No crow pecks out another crow's eyes."

La-oola's hammer rang out so sharply that a neverdrink called back a raucous distress cry. His thoughts were burning, and his voice hardly more than a croak. "You would tell me that?" he whispered. "You would say that to me?" The hurt surprise in her eyes sickened him. *Of course. She would say it to her mate, while his kind is being exterminated in the north. Why shouldn't she say it to me?*

But no one, really, fears death. It's dying we fear. . . . We know of one event that might spew enough carbons into the atmosphere to prolong the Earth's survival for millions of years.

American ecologist Paul Ehrlich and co-workers: "In a nuclear war, large quantities of air pollutants, including CO, O_3, NO, cyanides, vinyl chlorides, dioxins, and furans would be released near the surface. . . . [A]n event encompassing both hemispheres, with the ensuing damage to photosynthetic organisms, could cause a sudden increase in CO_2 concentration and thus long-term climatic changes."

Ontoo walked slowly through the twisted trees, her thoughts a chaos. There had been what looked like another vertebra in the rock behind La-oola's find, and Ontoo was starting to feel a chill that owed nothing to the desert air. The committee would be disturbed. If the committee were forced to correct the findings, Ontoo might be removed from her position on the board. Wincing, she cursed her student aloud. He should have known that now was not the time to raise questions about progress.

Onward and upward, bigger and better. Ontoo found herself atop a scrubby little hill. Looking down, she could see a beetle-sized La-oola working, while nearby the stepping ratites munched hay from a bucket. The stepping ratites . . . they were larger than hens, taller and heavier, but their brains were smaller. Surely, that would prove to be the case with this mysterious giant. Or if its brain *were* larger, perhaps it was only because it had so much body to contend with. Yes! The giant had to be stupid, despite its larger brain, because it took every speck of gray matter just to monitor the inner workings of that great mound of flesh! Therefore, its existence was no threat to the logical progression of life that had culminated in the hens. In the Browns.

Off to the side, a lake of sand flashed red in the setting sun. There was a wide glass lake near the temple, broken by stunted grasses and trunks of quick-growing trees as quickly killed by lightning, and Ontoo was well aware that such lakes consisted of an infinitude of tiny fragmented grains.

But from here this one seemed a single sheet of unbroken crystalline lifelessness. Death. What had made them? La-oola no doubt would claim them for his world-killing creatures. Ontoo shivered and looked away. A story, a theory, was taking shape in her brain.

Unfortunately, the price of the Earth's extended life is the death of her physicians. The immediate effect of the massive infusion of particles into the atmosphere is a long night of cold and darkness. Many of the plants and animals that might have otherwise survived the rigors of cruel winter will succumb to a battery of diseases. Mammals, including humans, will largely vanish along with the poisoned ozone layer that had previously shielded us from levels of ultraviolet-B known to destroy most mammalian immune systems.

Of the higher vertebrates, Arctic, near-Antarctic, and oceanic species probably enjoy the best chance of making it through the cruel winter. Then, as nuclear winter rebounds into prolonged summer, they must continue to adapt to a changing world. . . .

There was outrage at first. Ontoo expected that. Scientists, despite La-oola's odd accusations, accept nothing without proof. White patches mushroomed among her brown feathers, and La-oola reared another hen's chicks to adulthood, but Ontoo refused to despair. The world would hear her truth.

And, of course, in the end, it did. The new version of progressive evolution answered too many questions. It made too much sense to assume that Father Nature had gone down a few dead ends, tried a few different models before converging on the ultimate. Crises convulsed the planet, and the new was born from the old. Dead ends, blind alleys . . . how else, for instance, to explain the small-brained Whites and their stubborn resistance to true civilization?

It all seemed so obvious now. Of course, the evolutionary process hadn't aimed — couldn't aim — at the goal of producing the intelligence that could understand it. Progress was a fortuitous result of the struggle for survival: the fit lived long enough to perpetuate their traits, while the unfit died out, and since intelligence is the ultimate survival trait, this mechanism that Ontoo tentatively called "natural selection" inevitably culminated in that pinnacle of nature, the Browns. Oddly enough, but proven now by the fossil record, it was possible for less intelligent creatures to attempt culture if conditions were right. Naturally, since they weren't fit (bright) enough for their artificial environments, they perished. The Whites, for instance, could be understood as a modern example of the racial overachiever. While it was regrettable that Whites seemed to be dying out, it was probably for the best that nature was eliminating the inferior race quickly and mercifully. And if a few Browns used their superior brains to help finish them off, well, wasn't that only natural? The young hens who led the new organization they called

an army were instrumental in helping older priestesses of knowledge understand the essential correctness of Ontoo's theory. . . .

It was a great day for Ontoo when she received the appointment to the office of High Priestess of the Temple. Selry O couldn't be at the installation ceremony — it was a poor time to flaunt a White mate, what with the eugenics campaigns becoming so popular, and La-oola R (now La-oola M) was working in his lab, both refusing to understand why he hadn't been invited and telling himself he'd have had no part of it, anyway. How many times had he tried to tell Ontoo that she'd simplified his ideas out of all recognition, that she'd raped them, raped *him*? It had been years since they'd managed a civil conversation. But male attention seemed trivial now as Ontoo basked in the esteem of her peers. Rumors were already flying about her latest project. It was said that as soon as the hens had cleaned up the north, they would be asked to begin working together to search for the specific cause and prevention of mass extinctions, for the Browns must be prepared to meet challenges that had bested the lesser species. It was their duty, their sacred responsibility, Ontoo stressed, to preserve and cherish nature's finest creation — their own hungry, searching brains.

In the Old World, it is said that after the Great Flood, the patriarch released the Raven to fly out across the world to see if the waters were receding. But the Raven never returned. Presumably, he was too busy cleaning up the mess. ✪

ERASURE

We first took notice when we noticed less:
they stayed in the peeling antebellum manse,
attending no town meetings, or cotillions.
The three misanthropic brothers worked only
as wizards of hack, plucking their histories
from Georgia's data banks, the FBI, IRS,
catalog mailing-lists as far off as Indonesia.
Slowly, the old bamboo patch walled them.
Mail trickled to nothing, like a desert wadi.
Eventually, phone lines they used were dismantled.
On the night they vanished, the auroras danced
in veils of vermilion, sent streamers down like
fishing jigs to touch the dewdropped magnolias.
In the morning we found the grounds seemless
and so green where once the foundation stood.

— Robert Frazier

ARE YOU RECEIVING ME?

by David M. Charles
art: Stephan Peregrine

The author is an art assistant and proofreader in the design department of the Ernest & Julio Gallo winery. He is 29 years old and lives with his wife, Terri. When he isn't busy writing a science-fiction short story or novella, he enjoys painting, reading, and golfing.

This is his first SF sale.

The smell of sweat filled Laroque's suit. They were less than an hour out from base, their vehicle just landed, and already the stench of perspiration stung his nostrils.

"Power down all systems," Laroque said, playing his hands over the board.

"Roger," replied Poindexter. He flicked a few switches, paused uncertainly, and threw a final one.

"Lock helmet."

"Helmet locked."

The two men disembarked, Laroque first. As Poindexter followed, backing out, he felt a twinge of unease. Something nagged at the back of his mind, prodding him. He stopped, unable to shake the feeling, and looked around. Whatever it was it refused to come. With a shrug he climbed out.

They were nearing the end of their second hour on the asteroid when the shiny metallic rock caught his eye. Captain Ken Laroque picked it up, turning it around in his hands. Poindexter was less than ten meters away. Thumbing his short-range radio on, Laroque called, "Hey, Dex. Come look at this."

"What have you got?"

Ben Poindexter, the navigator and geologist on the flight, moved carefully to Laroque's side, making sure to keep one foot securely on the surface. The gravitational pull was almost nil. The flexible grip of his boots, coupled with the adhesive-like soles, kept him from drifting away.

"I'm not sure," Ken replied. "It looks like a gold nugget."

"Gold would be nice," Poindexter replied. "But it's platinum we really want. Make this rock worth mining."

Poindexter arrived and reached for the specimen. It was then, out of the corner of his eye, that he saw the explosion.

"What. . . ?"

They turned simultaneously. Eighty meters away their shuttle, the *Einstein*, sat nestled between two small boulders, its quadrupedal base firmly anchored to the surface. Weak sunlight reflected off the rounded module which sat atop the base. Its nickname was the "Golden Apple," partly due to its shape and to its major function — short hops between asteroids where mining was considered economically feasible.

The astronauts watched, astonished, as a cloud of ice crystals, spewed from the base of the lander, rose quickly and dissipated in the near vacuum.

Laroque moaned. "Oh God, you're kidding."

As fast as possible, the two men hurried towards the shuttle. They boarded quickly, but the damage was done.

"How bad is it?" Poindexter asked.

Having checked the base of the shuttle, Laroque shook his head. "Atmosphere pumps blew. The tanks are gone."

He tried to punch something up on the terminal. "Great."

"What's wrong? What happened?" Poindexter asked, a note of panic in his voice. Ben Poindexter was an inexperienced navigator with only three missions to his credit. Laroque, twenty years his senior, had been flying since the late nineties.

"There must've been a power surge. All systems are down."

Laroque scanned the console in front of him. He swore softly.

"You find something?" Poindexter asked carefully.

Laroque nodded. Without turning around, he said, "I sure did. You left half your board on. The batteries aren't designed to run this long. Computer probably tried to compensate and sent a surge down the line."

And look what happened, he finished silently.

They left the vehicle. Poindexter followed a few paces behind Laroque, hot-faced and feeling very small, wondering if his mistake had just killed them both. Laroque glanced up and spotted Mars, less than twenty million miles from their location in the Belt. If he squinted, he could almost see the polar caps.

Poindexter, trying to sound hopeful, asked, "What do we do now?"

Laroque turned and faced the younger man, very much aware of how vulnerable they were. "Ben, we're without power. The ship needs at least a day's worth of repairs. But we don't have a day. All our oxygen, except for suit reserve, is gone."

Poindexter twitched nervously. "Well then, what do we do?"

Laroque took his time, thinking carefully before replying. "Well, we've got two options as I see it. One, we stay with the ship and wait for a rescue —"

"With four hours of air?" Poindexter broke in. "We'll die long before they realize we're in trouble."

"Two," Laroque continued smoothly, "we try to make radio contact with Delta."

"That'll take line-of-sight contact, and we're on the wrong side of this rock," Poindexter said morosely. He brightened quickly. "Wait a minute. What about the relay on Deimos?"

"Try it," Laroque suggested.

Poindexter thumbed on the long-range mike, gazed longingly at distant Mars, and called, "Mayday, mayday. Delta Base Two, Delta Base Two, *Einstein* here. Are you receiving me, over?"

He waited a few minutes, allowing for the lag time. There was no answer. He tried again, without success, then faced Laroque. There was desperation in his eyes.

Laroque saw the desperation, and thought of his wife, back on Delta. She hadn't said good-bye. Another fight over his refusal to retire. He wondered if that would be their last memories of each other.

"Radio's too weak for Deimos," Poindexter said. "It has to be line of sight with Delta Base.

"So," he continued, trying to get his fear under control, "how do we get into sight?"

Laroque tried to sound optimistic. "We'll just have to hoof it."

Poindexter laughed hollowly. "Twenty-five kilometers? Even if we hurry — and we can't — it'll take us hours. We've only got four hours of air apiece. It's at best an hour's travel time from Delta."

I know, Ken thought, *I know.*

"Christ," Poindexter continued, "the exertion will probably drain us of our air even faster. We'll get there just in time to gasp out our good-bye."

The two men were silent for some time. It was Poindexter who finally spoke. "There might be a way."

Laroque stared at him then looked away. "No."

"Come on, Ken." He stepped up to Laroque, his faceplate inches away. "Look, it's my goddamn fault this happened. Take half my air. That'll give you six hours, and leave me with two. If I stayed very still, maybe laid in the ship —"

Laroque shook his head. "I don't blame you, Dex." He examined his feelings. *No*, he decided to himself, *he's still green. How could I blame him? I'm the Captain. I should have checked it myself.* "The answer is still no."

Poindexter snorted. "This is futile. How do you propose we get there in time, pull ourselves up by our bootstraps and float on over?"

Laroque walked away and leaned against a large boulder, staring at the crippled shuttle — *his* shuttle. He'd never lost a man or a ship in twenty years of flying. And now he was faced with a terrible decision. Let one man die so one could live, and admit defeat, or condemn both to death, and admit defeat.

Both conclusions stuck in his throat. He was missing something — he *had* to be missing something.

Be calm, he thought. *You've flown for twenty years. What does your experience suggest?*

He pondered his options. Unbidden, Poindexter's remark intruded. Float? He glanced at the young geologist, a safety line wrapped around his waist.

Float. Well, not *exactly* . . .

"Dex, come here. I think I've got a solution."

Poindexter stared uncomprehendingly, at first. But as Laroque explained, hope flooded into him. "By God, it's crazy. Let's see if it's crazy enough to work."

The two men connected the ends of their life lines, then separated. The line stretched over fifty meters. When they were at the full extent, Laroque yelled, "Now!"

Poindexter leapt into the sky, aiming his body several meters above Laroque. As he passed overhead, Laroque anchored himself to a nearby rock. When Poindexer's momentum had carried him nearly to the end of

the line, Laroque pulled on the line, relying on his strength and the resulting arc to deflect Poindexter downward. It worked somewhat, but Poindexter drifted back nearly thirty meters before landing.

"Try a sharper arc," Poindexter called as Laroque prepared to leap. "When you reach the apex, I'll try to snap you down more smoothly."

"Roger. And anchor yourself, Dex. Your momentum nearly pulled me loose."

Adjusting himself accordingly, Laroque jumped. There was a moment of panic as the line grew taut, followed by relief as he felt himself being guided forward and downward. He glanced down as he passed over Poindexter and saw him looking up. Laroque readied himself to land, turning slowly so that he was coming in feet first.

"Watch it," Poindexter called. "You're coming down pretty fast."

He heard Poindexter's warning and tried to brace himself. The ground came up quickly. He landed, caught his foot in a crevice, and sprawled out on the rocks as his boot held him fast. Pain shot through his leg.

"You all right?" Poindexter called.

"I — *damn*. I twisted my ankle. I think something gave inside."

By the time Poindexter arrived, Laroque had eased himself to his feet and was gingerly testing his ankle.

"How's it feel?" Poindexter asked, his voice filled with concern.

"Not broken, thank God. But it hurts like hell." He shook his head and looked at Poindexter. "Afraid my leapfrogging days are over."

Poindexter asked uncertainly, "What do we do now?"

Wincing, Laroque limped over to an outcropping of rock and leaned gratefully against it. "Go back to the ship," Laroque said. He paused, glanced up at Mars, now directly overhead, and added, "Or, you could go on."

Poindexter shivered. "No way. I won't leave you behind."

Laroque continued, all the fight gone from his voice. "With the extra air in my reserve tank, I figure you can make it with an hour to spare."

Now it was Poindexter's turn to make the decision. What had seemed an obvious alternative minutes before no longer looked as attractive. He could no more leave Laroque behind than Laroque could leave him.

"I can't do that. It'd be murder, Ken."

Laroque glanced over at him. "Tell me, Dex, what will it be called if we both just stand here and asphyxiate? Justice?" he finished bitterly.

Startled by Laroque's vehemence, Poindexter muttered to himself, "There must be another way."

Laroque grunted.

Poindexter turned away, his mind in turmoil. His gaze rested on the crippled shuttle. Could they have missed something? Was there anything usable still on board?

He took a few steps towards it, shook his head, and returned to Laroque's

side. He knew the answer. They were just a survey party. Aside from the manual sampling equipment and their life lines, there was nothing. The ship was designed to handle everything else.

Almost everything, he corrected himself ruefully.

"We're running out of time, Poindexter. Have you come up with something, or do we go with my plan?"

Poindexter grabbed a rock in disgust and hurled it at the ship. It flew straight and true, covering the distance in less than two minutes, and impacted on the side of the craft.

"Nice toss," Laroque commented.

"How can you give up so damn easily?" Poindexter demanded, his voice catching. "What am I supposed to do?" He was near tears.

Laroque shook his head. *He's right*, he thought. *What's wrong with me? Poindexter's just a kid. Are you going to burden him with all this because you twisted your ankle? Think!*

"I'm sorry, Dex."

Poindexter nodded, saying nothing.

"Listen, you're the scientist, Dex. Tell me about this rock. What do we know?"

Poindexter began hesitantly, "Fifty kilometers in diameter at its widest, gravity point oh-oh-one Earth normal —"

Laroque caught the sudden change in his voice.

"What is it, Dex?"

Poindexter smiled, feeling some of the tension drain from him. He glanced back at the ship.

"I'm not sure." He grabbed another rock, aimed, and tossed it slowly at the shuttle. It flew straight, never wavering.

"Why the hell not?" Poindexter questioned himself aloud.

"Huh?"

"We'll *fly*." Poindexter said.

Laroque shifted uncomfortably. "You want to explain that to me?"

"Look, consider the shape of this rock. It's almost an oval, right?"

"Yeah."

Poindexter demonstrated excitedly with his hands. "If we could launch ourselves *parallel* to the ground, travelling spinward to bring us into line of sight faster . . . why hell, in this gravity, we'd go on forever."

Laroque was silent as he contemplated the idea. With a noncommittal shrug he said, "Dex, how do we start, how do we stop, how do we make the curve? There are too damn many ways it could go wrong."

Poindexter waved aside his objections, caught up in his vision. "You want to stand here and debate it? I say it will work.

"I'll set you in motion about, oh, six feet up — as high as I can reach — and I'll give you a push, but I'll keep the lines connected, just in case. Once we're sure you'll stay pretty level to the ground, I'll follow."

Laroque, his ankle throbbing but his interest growing, asked, "How are *you* going to start from six feet off the ground, levitate? There's bound to be obstacles if you're too low."

Poindexter looked around. The nearest rise was less than twenty meters away. "We'll start from that mound."

The two made their way to the rise. It sloped upwards some five meters. Once on top they gazed out at the landscape in front of them.

"Doesn't look too bad," Laroque said, his voice sounding hopeful. "It might work."

Poindexter nodded. "Now, as for stopping . . ."

He scanned the horizon until he found what he wanted.

"That peak over there, about two kilometers. We'll try and shoot for that first. Ready?"

Laroque took a deep breath. "Ready."

It was easier than they thought. Poindexter lifted Laroque, pointed him headfirst at the distant peak, and paused. As carefully as possible, he shoved him in its direction, aiming downward slightly to compensate for the asteroid's rotation. Moving quickly, he lay as flat as possible, bunched his legs, and sprang after Laroque.

Damn, too much! he thought, as he first caught, then passed Laroque.

"Try not to move around," Poindexter called out as he unsnapped his line and drifted ahead.

Laroque, his arms stretched out in front of him, gave an OK sign. "I feel like Superman!"

Poindexter smiled to himself. "Just don't start calling me 'Chief'."

He reached the peak several minutes later. His aim was good, as he came to an abrupt halt midway up its side. He spun at the last moment and managed to absorb the shock with his legs.

"How's the landing?" Laroque inquired.

"Not bad. Can you do it on one leg?"

Laroque considered. "I think so. Better be nearby, just in case."

"Roger."

Poindexter positioned himself about five meters away, in Laroque's path. As Laroque came in, Poindexter reached out and grabbed him, cushioning the impact.

"Not bad, Dex. Not bad. Good thing I was moving slower."

"Still have doubts?"

Laroque grew serious. "I'm worried about our air holding out."

Poindexter checked his gauge. "If we can keep this up, we'll reach line of sight with air to spare."

Laroque nodded. Some of his jauntiness returned. "And you had doubts when we started."

Poindexter started to protest, then laughed. "Well, we aren't done yet."

Laroque smiled inwardly, thinking of his wife. *If I see her again, I think I'll*

let her win the next argument.

They moved to the top of the peak and sought their next landing point.

"We should just about be there," Laroque said.

Poindexter, breathing heavily, nodded. "Next peak, I think."

He scanned the horizon. There was no sign of Delta Base Two in the sky. His gauge read seventy minutes.

It better be soon, Poindexter thought. *It better be soon.*

They launched again. As they approached the chosen landing site, Poindexter signaled. "Shall I give it a try?"

"As soon as we land," Laroque replied.

He touched down, moved aside, and helped Laroque to stop. Clearing his voice, Poindexter thumbed on the long-range radio, and called, "Delta Base Two, Delta Base Two, this is *Einstein*. Come in, please."

Silence. After a minute had passed, he tried again. "Mayday, Delta Base Two, *Einstein* here. Are you receiving me?"

"Are we in sight? Maybe we're not far enough," Laroque suggested.

Poindexter shook his head and pointed. "You can see it — there, on the horizon, about two degrees above."

They stood together, staring into space. Poindexter thumbed his radio and tried once more. "Mayday, mayday, Delta Base Two, *Einstein* here. Are you receiving me?"

Their headsets filled briefly with static, then fell silent.

That's it, thought Laroque. *We're too damn far for these radios.* He thought of his wife. *Why didn't I listen to her? I should've stayed, I should've . . .*

There's one hope left, a voice inside him said. Laroque recoiled from the thought. *I want to live!* he cried inwardly. *Both of you can't,* it replied. *You've had a good life, but Poindexter is just a kid, barely in his thirties.*

So, what are you going to do?

I — I —

Don't think about it, do it!

He watched as Poindexter tried the radio again. He heard the resignation in his voice. He knew what he had to do.

Moving quickly, he unsnapped the life line, stepped behind Poindexter, and secured one end to the rocks. With a rapid movement he looped the other end around Poindexter and pulled it taut, tying it simply behind his back.

"What the hell are you doing, Ken?" Poindexter asked incredulously.

Laroque answered quietly. "I'm going for help. You'll have to wait here."

"Going? Going where? Laroque, *don't*!"

It was too late. Laroque crouched down as far as he could, took brief aim, and vaulted into space. There was a sharp pain in his injured ankle, but he ignored it, filled with exhilaration as he rose above the asteroid.

"Ken . . . Jesus, Ken, why?" Poindexter, freeing himself from his bonds, called after him.

"It's the only way they'll hear us, Dex."

"But it's suicide."

Not necessarily, Laroque thought. *They might find me on the way in, they might —*

His joy evaporated. *Don't fool yourself. Leave or stay, you were dead either way.*

He watched as Delta grew slowly in size. When he checked his gauge, it showed fifty-three minutes of air left in his tanks. *Now or never,* he thought.

Thumbing on his long-range radio, he called, "Delta Base Two, this is *Einstein.* Come in, please."

"Roger, *Einstein,* Delta Base Two here. Receiving you loud and clear. What is your position?"

Laroque quickly relayed Poindexter's location and his plight. He paused, then continued, "I'm, ah — I'm in a different position, Delta."

"Can you give me your coordinates?"

Laroque looked back. The asteroid had dwindled to a small rock. Ahead — Delta loomed in the sky, the size of a light bulb.

"I'm about a hundred kilometers from you, and closing fast. I should miss you by about fifty kilometers."

"Jesus," the operator swore softly.

He could just hear Poindexter. "Ken, can they get to you?"

"I don't know, Dex . . . Dex?"

"Yeah?" Faintly.

Laroque paused, not knowing what to say.

"Captain Laroque, Delta here. Shuttle being diverted. It will arrive at Poindexter's coordinates in approximately fifty minutes. Can you confirm he knows?"

"Affirmative. Dex? They're on the way. Did you hear? Dex?"

There was no answer.

"Ahem." He cleared his throat. "Delta, any chance of catching me? Over."

There followed what seemed an eternal delay before a reply was forthcoming.

"Captain, this is Delta. We are tracking you on radar. A shuttle is being fueled. With any — hopefully —"

He was going to say "luck," Laroque thought. *And he would've been right.*

"Hopefully, it will arrive within forty-five to fifty minutes. Can you hold out?"

He checked. Forty minutes left. He'd been breathing too heavily — too much chatter. *And I know these guys,* he thought. *They're being optimistic. More like an hour before they even launch. By that time. . . .*

* * *

His air was getting thin and he was afraid he would black out. *Oh God, I'm really going to die. Please don't let it be in vain.*

"Captain, are you there? We've found geologist Poindexter, alive and well. Second shuttle is prepared for launch. Over."

Thank God they found him! he rejoiced. *Is it too late for me?*

Ten minutes of oxygen were left. The rescue shuttle would never make it in time.

The stars seemed beautiful. Somehow Laroque felt as if he had grown jaded, for he hardly looked at them the past ten years.

"Captain, are you there?"

Why are they bothering me? he wondered. He knew the Delta Base operator meant well, but he didn't want his hopes rekindled, not now. *I can accept this, I think. . . .*

"Captain Laroque, are you there?"

Laroque looked away from Mars. Inhospitable desert that it was. *But still lovely,* he thought. *Getting mighty cold out here.*

Earth! Ah, Earth, jewel of the night. If he wasn't mistaken, he was heading toward her. *Am I going home after all?*

"Captain Laroque, are you receiving me?" ●

ELEGY TO A DEAD SATELLITE: LUNA

Darkness descends — and the cluttering towers
Of cities and hamlets blink into light.
The harsh brilliant glitter of day's bustling hours
Gives place to the glowing effulgence of night.
The moon — that blanched creature — the queen of the sky
Peeps wistfully down at the life forms below,
Thinking, perhaps, of the aeons rolled by
Since life on her bosom lapsed under the snow.
A dead world, and cold, this satellite bleak,
Whose craters and valleys are airless and dry;
No flicker of motion from deep pit to peak;
No living thing's ego to ask, "Why am I?"
But once, ages past, this grim tomb out in space,
Felt bustle of life on her surface now bare,
Till Time in his flight, while speeding apace,
Swept life, motion, thought away — who can know where?

— Elton Andrews

[originally published pseudonymously by Frederik Pohl in the October 1937 issue of Amazing Stories*]*

ADOLESCENCE AND ADULTHOOD IN SCIENCE FICTION

ESSAY

by Orson Scott Card

Orson Scott Card currently resides in Greensboro, North Carolina, with his wife and children. He obtained his Bachelor of Arts in Theater from Brigham Young University and then his Master of Arts in English from the University of Utah.

His literary career has been moving along quite rapidly recently. In 1978, he won the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer. In 1985 his novel Ender's Game *was awarded a Nebula, and then the following year his novel* Speaker for the Dead *also won the Nebula.*

"The golden age of science fiction is 12," says the maxim. That's putting it kindly — others say worse things. "Science fiction is the literature of adolescent escape."

There is some truth to this. Most American males who read at all discover science fiction in their teens and read it heavily, often exclusively, for several years. Then most abandon it, to look back on it later as the literature of those dreamy, passionate years before adult responsibility confined them to the real world.

And in recent decades, as science fiction has gratefully shed its males-only image, an increasing number of adolescent females are following the same pattern.

This phenomenon has led some to say that "science fiction is a branch of children's literature." The academic-literary community has used it as an excuse for ignoring science fiction — after all, it's not a literature for grown-ups. And even within the field, whenever someone doesn't like somebody else's book, there are charges of "arrested adolescence" and "adolescent wish fulfillment."

Why Do Adolescents Like SF?

Certainly, for at least some of the adolescent readers of science fiction, SF is used for wish fulfillment. It may well be that many teenagers identify strongly with the "competent men" of hard SF or the "future Rambos" of military SF, just as they have long identified with the strong-thewed Conans of sword-and-sorcery fantasy. (Of course, the sensitive-artist types who populate academic-literary fiction also serve as wish fulfillment for frustrated English professors; it is hard to imagine a kind of literature that does not involve wish fulfillment of one kind or another, and it is also hard to think of a reason why this function of storytelling should be considered less valid than any other.)

But there are other reasons for SF to be the primary literature of American adolescents. For one thing, adoles-

cence is the period of life when we reject the old order of our lives and remake our world. Usually the child's world is the home, with excursions to school; all is structured by others, and the child has only to learn and follow the rules to get along. In adolescence, however, the child rejects the imposed structures of home and school, and deliberately seeks out other structures of his or her own choosing.

For many, this takes the form of gangs (violent or chummy); for others, it is a sally into the adult world of jobs (though usually teenagers are only allowed access to low-order, non-career jobs). For some, however, the need for world-reconstruction is met or partly met by science fiction. Of all the genres of fiction, only SF, fantasy, and historical fiction require the creation of worlds that differ significantly from present reality — and present values. And of those three, historical fiction must be believable, but can never be truly strange; fantasy can be strange, but never truly believable. Only SF requires a tight combination of believability and strangeness, both of which are exactly the medicine for the malaise of adolescence.

Teenagers, after all, live in perpetual abeyance; all the rules of life are negotiable during that time, and they are hard bargainers. In science fiction, there is not one future but many; an infinite array of possibilities are open to the reader, who can sample many lives and many futures. All SF readers are on a voyage of discovery, and while we who are long familiar with the field can easily identify clichés and hoary traditions, to the adolescent reader even the most derivative science fiction is fresh and new.

So it is not because of a weakness in science fiction that adolescents favor it — it is primarily (I believe) because of one of its greatest strengths, the infinite array of possible worlds, values, and ideas.

Besides, what many critics of SF forget is that adolescence is the time of life when we are most passionately involved in all the arts. It is a perpetual romantic era, reinvented by each new child to feel the rush of hormones at puberty. Joy is more joyful, grief more desperate, anger more violent, love more passionate than at any other time of life. Adolescents discover music, films, fiction and become a vigorous, if naive, audience for them. They are more open to innovation in all the arts; yet they are not jaded, they do not seek novelty for its own sake, since all arts are new to them. They are burdened with neither prejudice nor ennui.

And in their determination not to endure imposed structures, they refuse to be told what to like. Indeed, the surest way to guarantee that science fiction will maintain its primacy among the literatures of adolescents is for parents and high-school English teachers to continue to scorn it openly. Think of what adult ridicule of "teenage music" did for rock and roll, and then decide whether you really want SF novels added to the high-school English curriculum.

In some ways, the adolescent may be the ideal audience for all art, for it is the adolescent who is most open to influence, most able to be changed by the experience of art, and most likely to hold a story in memory forever. I believe that the prime value of storytelling (fiction, film, theater, history, news, etc.) is in its capacity to change the moral and causal universe of the audience. The audience is changed only to the degree that it believes in, cares about, and understands the story — faith, hope, and clarity — and no

one cares more and believes new ideas more readily than adolescents. If science fiction's primary audience is the adolescent, and the adolescent's primary literature is science fiction, then I believe this makes science fiction the most effective literature of our time.

The "Nerd Theory"

There is another dimension to the issue of adolescence and science fiction that goes well beyond the age of the audience. An astonishingly large proportion of science fiction tells the story of an adolescent or child protagonist. This is often explained with the "nerd theory" of science fiction. Since SF fans are nerds — i.e., bright but physically weak social misfits — and many SF writers began as fans, then of course a large portion of SF is going to present characters who offer a positive self-image for nerds: the gifted child or adolescent who is despised, rejected, even attacked by others, but who turns out to be the one person who can save the community, the noblest one of all.

This pattern is followed so often that the "nerd theory" has gained wide currency in the SF critical community. But before accepting that theory, it's also good to remember that the same description applies to the stories of Moses, Jesus Christ, William the Conqueror, Oedipus, Cassandra, and a good many other characters in the world's greatest mythic, historical, and fictional literature.

In fact, the "nerd theory" breaks down completely when you realize that it's hard to find a human being who at some point in his life did not suffer from painful rejection by the community whose acceptance he most desired, and who did not at least entertain the pleasing thought that he was, in fact, exactly what that community most needed if its members only had the brains to realize it.

It's a human universal, not limited to nerds at all. And when science fiction returns again and again to that central myth, it is not because SF writers began as nerdy fans, but rather because that myth is an archetype that insists on showing up in all storytelling arts and in every place and era.

Child, Adolescent, Adult

I'd like to stick my neck out and propose another way of looking at childhood, adolescent, and adult characters. First, though, let me explain that I am speaking only of chararcter-oriented stories — stories which are about a significant change in the hero or other major characters.

There are many SF stories in which character is irrelevant — think of Arthur C. Clarke's best-known idea stories, "The Star" and "The Nine Billion Names of God," and his award-winning novel *Rendezvous with Rama*. Most Campbellian "hard-SF" stories have characters only as they are needed to explore or explain or discover or realize the idea or gadget.

There are many other stories in which the characters matter, but undergo no change at all — almost all series characters, for example, are usually required to remain the same from episode to episode. Think of James Bond, Hercule Poirot, Sherlock Holmes, Superman, the Lone Ranger, James Kirk, Spock, and Haviland Tuf; they are permanently frozen, showing the same manners, purposes, and emotions from story to story. It is impossible for such stories to be character stories — they are always about ideas, events, or milieus.

This series rule is changing, however. Just as *Hill Street Blues* and *L.A. Law* have proven that episodic TV-series characters can grow and develop

over time, so have Robert Parker's Spenser novels and Harry Turtledove's Argyros stories (which first appeared in this magazine) proven that character change can work in episodic mystery and science fiction. But a character-oriented series is necessarily finite — once that character has changed, you can't go back and have him be the same again.

(Daytime soap operas seem not to fit that rule, of course. You can do *anything* with those "characters," and they certainly change, from good to evil and back again at will. But this is because in the soaps, character changes matter less than in a straight series. Characters change often, but the changes are random and meaningless — the stories are about the milieus and events, and the pseudo-people are plugged in wherever necessary to move the plot along — or slow it down, as needed.)

The character story is about change in one or more characters — in science fiction, the "character" in transformation can even be a whole community. The change is not necessarily an improvement; in some character stories, a character's attempt to change may end in failure.

I propose that in character stories the change is almost always from childhood to adolescence or from adolescence to adulthood. The character isn't necessarily of the age we normally associate with each of these roles, however. Some who are children by age are forced into adolescent or adult roles; some so-called adults function throughout their lives as children or adolescents. So let me define what I mean by *childhood*, *adolescence*, and *adulthood*.

Child. A character in the child role is dependent on others; most of his environment is controlled by others. In return, the child is kept safe and supplied with all the necessities of life. In exchange for such palliation of needs, the child gives up any right to control his world.

The reward of childhood is security; the penalty is lack of control.

The virtues of childhood are naiveté, trust, and innocence; the child does not understand the consequences of his own actions, and is usually shielded from those consequences. But this is also the evil of childhood, for the child can cause harm without any idea that harm is being done. What is good for the child is perceived as absolutely good, and when the child obeys rules, it is because of fear of personal punishment or desire for personal reward. The child's moral system is absolutely dependent on direct intervention by a caretaker. Yet because of his innocence, the child is incapable of "crime." At the same time, the child believes that any punishment he receives is also just; even his self-valuation depends on others, so that while the child cannot commit crime, he can believe himself to be a criminal.

Adolescent. A character in the adolescent role is independent. He comes and goes as he likes, and is responsible for taking care of himself. At the same time, he is ultimately responsible for no one else. He may help others, or not, as he pleases; when he is through helping, he leaves. He is neither controlled by nor in control of his world.

He belongs only to communities of equals, whose commitment to each other is tentative and revocable. Yet as long as the community endures, he is capable of cooperative manipulation of the environment.

The reward of adolescence is freedom; the penalty is unconnectedness: freedom without control.

The virtues of adolescence are pas-

sion, intensity, and freedom. The adolescent is shielded from nothing. He understands the consequences of his own actions; he can tell good from evil. He also can reject the values that others place on his acts, and resists punishment that he feels is unjust; his self-valuation is in flux, as he rejects the moral system imposed on him in childhood but has not yet settled on a moral system by which to judge the world. The adolescent quickly strikes out to protect or avenge himself; he as quickly reaches out to love or help others. But these actions are temporary, and last only as long as the desire or emotion that caused them. The adolescent may do good, but cannot be depended on. The adolescent may knowingly commit crimes even while believing himself not to be a criminal. He is a natural revolutionary, a natural wanderer.

Adult. A character in the adult role is dependable. He is no more free to come and go than the child because he is irrevocably committed to the care of others. His passions are under his own control; he may feel love or rage, but he does not necessarily act on those feelings.

The reward of adulthood is a sense of being larger than oneself; the penalty is responsibility for others, with all the lack of freedom that entails: control without freedom.

Once the virtuous adult has made the commitment to care for others, that commitment can only be revoked at the option of those he cares for, never his own option. This describes the ideal parent-child contract, of course, but it also describes his other adult commitments. (I deliberately chose to use the word *adult* instead of the word *parent* because they are not synonyms. Many parents are not adult at all, and many adults have no children.) He has control over the immediate environment of those he cares for; the virtuous adult uses that power for the benefit of his dependents and his community, even, when necessary, at the expense of his own needs or desires; and in cooperation with other adults of the larger community, he shares control of ever-larger environments.

It is essential to realize that while the adult retains a strong sense of his identity as an individual, he subsumes that identity in his significant communities (family, civitas, church, for instance) and, for the sake of the whole, willingly regards his self as including a much larger group of human beings so that his "self-interest" includes the interest of many others, and their will is part of his own will.

Only the adult is capable of conscious, systematic evil: the exploitation of others. He does evil, not blindly, like the child, and not out of passion, like the adolescent, but by design, to bring others under his control and increase his control at their expense. To the evil adult, the contract is perverted: once you are under his control, he will never let you leave, and he is willing to cause you any amount of suffering if he believes it will accomplish his purpose. Instead of acting for the good of the whole, he says "L'état c'est moi" and treats all others as if they were parts of his own body and not other individuals worthy of respect.

Neither Good nor Evil

There is no particular action a character takes that in itself defines him as a child, adolescent, or adult. Take, for instance, a crime that at first glance seems to be uniquely parental: child abuse.

The act of beating a child may be

performed by a parent who in fact functions as a child; the parent enjoys causing pain and does so blithely because he has no concept of empathy, no sense that it is wrong to cause pain to others. We would regard such a parent as insane and not "guilty" of what he did to his child because he had no concept of good and evil. He neither feels nor understands remorse.

The child-beater may, however, be functioning as an adolescent, fully aware that he is harming the child but feeling momentarily justified by intense and uncontrolled passions. When the passion has ended, such a parent may be devastated by remorse and compassion, or may attempt to justify his cruelty by claiming that the child deserved to suffer — but underlying it all is a clear understanding that he has actually inflicted pain on another person and that to do so is ordinarily wrong.

The child-abuser may instead be functioning as an adult; he may believe, for instance, that beating a child is the only way to teach it virtue. This is evil adult behavior, of course, because such an adult refuses to allow his dependent the option of terminating the contract. A good adult may use discipline, but only with the goal of helping the child internalize moral principles and learn the difference between good and evil. The evil parent, however, intends the child to be under his control forever and uses any means to promote that outcome, even if it destroys the child physically or mentally.

Taking such crimes out of the family and moving them to the level of international politics, the dictator of the Central African Republic, who briefly renamed his country the Central African Empire (his name mercifully escapes me), obviously functioned at the child level, killing and torturing by whim or for pleasure, with no concept that he was doing evil. He made no particular effort to conceal what he was doing. Killing people was no big deal — it was, to him, on the same moral level with taking apart a toy made of Legos. Idi Amin committed exactly the same crimes, but seemed to do them as an adolescent, out of rage or fear; he understood their criminal nature well enough that he denied, concealed, or tried to justify his crimes. Adolf Hitler and Josef Stalin, however, functioned as adult criminals. Both were absolutely in control of their momentary passions — they had no particular bent toward luxury or personal gratification. When they killed, it was purposeful, designed to bring them some benefit. Hitler even believed that the extermination of inferior races would be to the benefit of the world — both Hitler and Stalin knew they were committing murder, and went to elaborate lengths to conceal or justify the fact, yet they also showed not a moment's remorse or regret because it was simply a necessary step in achieving their overall goal of personal dominion over every other person in the world. M. J. Engh's brilliant novel *Arslan* (Arbor House) is the best fictional exploration of the supremely evil adult mind that I have ever seen.

I have deliberately concentrated on criminal behavior to show that *child, adolescent,* and *adult* are morally neutral terms, not necessarily implying either goodness or evil, and fine stories have been written about both good and evil characters in all three stages. It is not what they do, but why they do it that shows us whether a character is child, adolescent, or adult.

Think of these roles as analogous to the old craft-guild roles of *apprentice,*

journeyman, and *master*. The apprentice's job is to learn: his work is always supervised. The journeyman is certified as a competent craftsman and a free agent: his work is not supervised, but neither does he supervise others. He is free, but he is also not committed to any community. The master has undertaken the education of others and has assumed a permanent location and a role in the community of his craft.

Another analogy: The child role is the seed still attached to the plant, developing as a part of and under the control of the parent. The adolescent role is the seed separated from the plant, wind-blown and free, but not yet productive of anything. The adult role is the plant itself, a rooted seed, bound to one spot and living only to produce more seeds.

Passage from Role to Role

Most romantic fiction — which includes much that passes for "serious literature" — is not about character at all, and the hero is almost always adolescent, if only because his unconnectedness, freedom of action, and indulgence of strong passions makes him more intrinsically interesting. Such stories can never extend beyond such irrevocable commitments as having a child or marrying — with the making of such a commitment, the hero is no longer interesting to the romanticist.

The fiction I take most seriously, however, is fiction of character, in which the hero (and others) pass from one role to another. In this type of fiction, it is as legitimate to write about the attempt to pass from childhood to adolescence as it is to write about the attempt to pass from adolescence to adulthood. The former is the *bildungsroman* or coming-of-age story; the latter is the literature of commitment. The child protagonist is not "inferior" to the adolescent or adult protagonist, and it is as difficult to write good *bildungsroman* as to write any other kind of fiction.

As an example of the best sort of coming-of-age science fiction, let me remind you of the story "The Tyrant That I Serve" by Rebecca Ore (then "Rebecca Brown Ore"), which appeared in this magazine last year [September, 1986]. Her protagonist is a genetically altered sentient creature that is forced into a child role — a pet whose master has absolute control over it. However, its mistress/parent is a young woman who uses the pet in a complex hunting game, in which the pet is forced to stalk its beloved mistress *and try to kill her*; the mistress has the power to stop him electronically at any point, but delays later and later, as if she enjoys the threat of death. Thus the pet is consumed with love for its "parent," yet is forced to remember nearly killing her.

The plot follows the pet's attempt to gain independence, but Ore's hero finds the passage from child role to adolescent role is a difficult one. The security of its old home constantly draws it, and its sense of self-worth still comes from its mistress. As a result, it decides at a crucial juncture to return to childhood — despite knowing, intellectually, that the decision could be fatal.

At the same time, Ore implies that the mistress may also wish to pass into adulthood: certainly she talks as if she has learned her lesson and wishes to be a good, reliable "parent" to the pet. But her promises amount to nothing. What Ore never fully resolves is the motive of the mistress. Is she a child, simply unable to conceive that the pet's feelings are worth considering? Is she an adolescent, aware she is doing

wrong but unable to control her impulses? Or is she an evil adult, who knows exactly what she is doing but loves the feeling of power and control she has over the pet?

This moral vagueness about the mistress is one of the strengths of the story and illuminates the terrible dilemma of the hero. It wants to win its freedom, but does not want to lose its secure place in its mistress's affection, and it is as impossible for us as for the hero to determine the mistress's motives and therefore predict her behavior.

The same story devices — genetically altered sentient "monsters," an organization devoted to freeing them — could have been treated differently: as a gadget or idea story, as a milieu story, or for the pure adventure of it. But Ore determined to write a character story, and so she labored — successfully — to deal with the inner conflict involved in passage from childhood to adolescence. It is at once the most terrible and the most desirable thing to do.

I deliberately did not use for my example a story with a human child as its hero, because coming-of-age stories don't have to deal with children. In fact, the hero of a coming-of-age tale can easily be a grown-up who is caught up in a relationship in which he has a child-role. Much feminist fiction of the 70s and 80s works exactly that way. The hero is a woman who is caught in a child-relationship with a male — husband, father, brother, boss — and must find the strength and courage to break free into adolescence. The wife in *Kramer vs. Kramer*, though her story takes place primarily offstage, begins the story with her passage from a kind of childhood into the independence and irresponsibility of adolescence, and ends it with her passage from adolescence into adulthood; the husband was already an adolescent, and his story is of the passage into adulthood by accepting and embracing the role of parent.

Robert Heinlein is noted for writing "coming-of-age stories" — I think immediately of two of my favorites, *Tunnel in the Sky* and *Citizen of the Galaxy*. In fact, however, Heinlein's "juveniles" (nowadays we would call them "young adult novels") generally *begin* with an abrupt entry into adolescence, and the story progresses through the adolescent's preparation for permanent commitment until he is ready for real adulthood. In *Tunnel in the Sky* this is made most explicit by the fact that the hero actually has a family; he has accepted responsibility for others and has kept his commitment flawlessly. But in almost all the other so-called "Heinlein juveniles," the hero's story is not over until he has stepped into a fully responsible adult role. Far from writing "adolescent fiction," which is romance that celebrates adolescence, Heinlein's heroes develop and change until they're ready to fulfill adult roles. Heinlein's fiction is, if anything, adult fiction — even when the hero is a child.

It is possible, by the way, to do the whole cycle of life in a single tale. That is what happens in *King Lear*, arguably the greatest single work in the English language. Lear functions as an evil adult when he refuses to allow Cordelia to be independent. As a result, he falls from the ultimate adult role — king — into child-role dependency on his other two daughters. Unable to endure the child role, he passes into self-destructive adolescence, wandering alone and seeking death, as he is swept by grand passions that we would consider normal in a teenager, but which seem mad in an

old man. Finally, at the end, he is restored to adulthood once again, not as king, but as father, finally dealing with Cordelia as a good adult, too late to save her, but not too late to accept responsibility for her. The subplot of Edgar and Edmund echoes and clarifies these passages as the half-brothers both progress from childhood through adolescence to morally opposite kinds of adulthood, but the miracle of Shakespeare's greatest play is that he has encompassed all of life's human roles within the single character of Lear.

What most excites me in science fiction today is the number of writers who are writing real character stories. Academic-literary writers have long promoted a sort of pseudo-character story, in which the main character in fact never changes, but goes through a lot of angst on the way. Science-fiction writers who aspire to acceptance by the academic-literary community have often been deceived into writing such empty tales, in which the characater's feelings and motives get a lot of play but don't have any effect on the events of the story. Now, however, an increasing number of writers are turning from stories primarily concerned with idea, milieu, or event, and are writing true character stories.

A few brilliant examples from recent years:

Pamela Sargent's *The Shore of Women* (Crown) is set in a world where men have become wholly absorbed in the hunter-gatherer life, while the women maintain high-tech enclosed cities. The men are kept in savagery by brutally efficient means and remain subservient to women because of a system of "worship" of idealized female holographs; the most promising male stock is brought to the cities from time to time for breeding. But coitus between sexes is repulsive to these women and tinged with awe and holiness to these men. In short, the world as a whole has moved from our present amoral and destructive childhood to adolescence, the two halves of humanity unconnected from each other and unwilling to take full responsibility for each other.

In this milieu we follow the story of a male and a female, each of whom has just been forced into the adolescent role, the boy by the death of his father, the girl by expulsion (usually fatal) from the city of women. At first the plot seems concerned with the adventures involved in their survival; in fact, however, we are watching them come to change their attitudes toward the opposite sex, until at the end of the novel they — and we — have arrived at an understanding of adulthood through true mutual commitment. In their passage into adulthood, we see hope that the world as a whole may also pass from its desperate adolescence into an adult relationship between the sexes and, by extension, between and within all communities.

The hero of George Alec Effinger's *When Gravity Fails* (Arbor House) begins as the quintessential fictional adolescent — the hard-boiled detective, unconnected from society, free and lonely. As he works out the obligatory mystery (in one of the best-realized milieus in recent science fiction), we also see that he is working out his own passage from adolescence into adulthood. He is taking responsibility for others in an irrevocable commitment; by the end of the novel he is a different — and better — person.

Leigh Kennedy's *The Journal of Nicholas the American* (Atlantic Monthly Press) starts with Nicholas in an explicitly adolescent state — he has rejected his family and is living alone. The whole movement of the story is

toward his empathic coupling with the mother of his lover, who is dying; he risks his life and sanity in order to meet *her* need and keep her from going alone, cut off from others, into that frightening and painful passage.

Mike Resnick's *Santiago* (Tor) has as his villain the traditional space-opera figure, bigger than life, already a legendary Robin Hood-like criminal. His hero is a bounty hunter — an adolescent hero if there ever was one — out to kill Santiago, not really for the money, but to prove himself, an adolescent goal. Yet in his pursuit of that goal, he finds himself making commitments to others, and while many of them are not worthy of trust, he finds that *he* must be worthy of trust in order to be himself. In short, he becomes dependable and makes irrevocable commitments, and by the time he meets Santiago and discovers who he really is, he is fit to take a position of ultimate leadership and sacrifice for the good of the largest community of all.

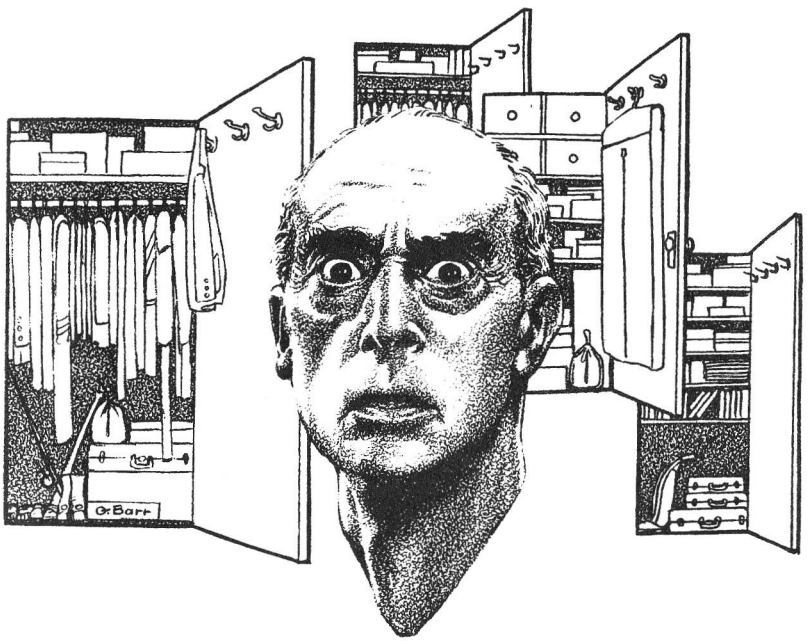
Notice, please, that these four books are as different from each other in style and structure as any novels could possibly be. Sargent's novel is written with the clarity of idea fiction; Effinger's with the bleak relentlessness of detective fiction; Kennedy's with the style and pacing of performance fiction; Resnick's with the vigor and extravagance of space opera. Other critical methods would never place the four of them in the same subgenre of science fiction; few would find reason to link any two of them.

Yet I believe they *are* similar in that they are directly concerned with the passage of at least one human being from adolescence to adulthood, and that is one of the most important tasks a writer can carry out.

For the function of storytelling within a society is to teach us how to be human. Next to this, matters of style and genre are secondary issues. These and many other novels and stories prove that every type of science fiction is a fit vehicle for the most important literature of our and any other time.

That American adolescents choose to learn some of the techniques of being human from science fiction is to the benefit of society at large. That many if not most of the finest and wisest storytellers of our time have chosen to work in the genre of science fiction guarantees that science fiction will outlive the influence of critics who dismiss it as "adolescent literature," and will eventually force us to develop new critical theories to explain its deserved preeminence in late twentieth-century American literature. ●

SMILE!
by Frank Ward
art: George Barr



Frank Ward is a high-school English teacher at an all-boys school in Louisville, Kentucky. He is married and has a nine-year-old son.

Though Frank has been writing part-time on a professional basis for the past five years, his interest in science fiction and fantasy stems back to his preteen years. Currently, he is working on a novel and on a screenplay that is a prequel to Shakespeare's Tempest. *But he also* ***sells*** *stories: most recently to* Haunts, *and now to* Amazing® Stories.

Senator Joshua Purcell smiled.

For the first time in his forty-five-year career in the Senate of the United States, he pulled the corners of his mouth up into a shape that could be considered an honest and true grin. His wrinkled, arid, ancient face was transformed. It became that of a child, a child whose expression presaged half-drowned cats and deflated tires, garbage strewn across front porches, and broken glass falling like diamond snowflakes from shattered streetlamps.

It was the face of a mischievous ten-year-old boy about to make a great deal of trouble and love every moment of it.

Don't be so obvious, he warned himself. *You're not supposed to be enjoying this.* He stuffed the smile back into the recesses of his cheeks and glanced about to see if he had been discovered.

None of his colleagues in the great expansive room of the Senate had taken any notice of him, at least not for the moment; their attention was fully commanded by the blur of rambling platitudes coming from the train of dignitaries parading past the podium. Later in the day, afterward, the media would thrust him into the spotlight, the circle of national and worldwide attention, but for now he was just another senator, one of dozens who were witnessing the changing of a nation.

Senator Purcell decided to take a chance. The wicked smile crept back out on to his face.

You've earned it, he thought.

The truth was it didn't really matter what people thought of him now. He could stand up at this very instant and confess to a thousand murders, hundreds of child molestations, paying for a dozen abortions. His reputation as the "New Voice of the Right," "The William Jennings Bryan of the 21st century," could be wiped out forever, and his accomplishment would still occur, carried forward to completion by the sacred laws of political inertia.

He had won. And now was the time for the fun to begin.

Why the hell not smile?

The president was moving to the podium, Purcell noticed, no doubt to try his best to turn the occasion into a campaign rally for his reelection.

For one brief instant, the grin flickered.

The man was a simpleton, a party flunky. Purcell hated him, especially the fact he couldn't utter two coherent sentences without a written text. Still, he had served a purpose.

You couldn't have accomplished it without him, he admitted to himself. His support had made the difference, pushed the fence-sitters off into the safe side of the pasture. And then there was the matter of the Supreme Court. Purcell had to give him credit there, too. How he had managed to ramrod those two new appointments through was masterful, no doubt about it. For the first time in twenty-five years, a conservative court, a *really* conservative court. A court that would back the constitutionality of the Purcell-Silva Act.

So let the old bootlicker take the glory. You didn't do it for the credit or the fame. You did it to save the country.

The hell you did. It was that old voice of honesty, the one he reserved for private dialogues with his own soul. *You did it to get rid of the bastards.*

Purcell glanced over to the far side of the room, found a morose, sullen figure sitting at his designated station with the look of a condemned man.

Bastards like that one. He watched the thin, haggard wisp of a human being take notes and unconsciously shake his head over and over again at each declaration coming from the podium.

Not exactly your day. The octogenarian legislator wanted to walk over and whisper in his fellow senator's ear. *No,* you people *are going to be very uncomfortable, I fear.*

Not that they hadn't made the majority of Americans uncomfortable, too, and for quite a long time. Hell, back to 1960s with the crackpots and freaks and hippies and every other kind of human obscenity that could follow the setting sun, ending up in *that man's* state. Purcell remembered the old joke from his childhood, something about tilting the East Coast up into the air and letting all the loose trash in America roll down to where it belonged.

You people might consider secession from the Union, or blowing the San Andreas Fault and sinking back into ocean where you all belong. Whatever you do, things are going to change. In your home town it might be okay to be a pervert, since ninety-eight per cent of you are. The rest of the country, though, hasn't been crazy about a bunch of degenerates sitting on the coast, flaunting their disease. Golden Gay Bridge, indeed.

After today, I'd go back in the closet if I were you. He stared long and hard at the thin, exhausted figure across the room, and the smile broadened.

Twenty-five years he had worked toward this moment. All the frustration, the failures, the loss. He was always amazed at how simple the answer was when it finally came to him. Incredibly simple, really. When he explained it to Silva the first time, the man had thought he was joking.

"We've got two problems." He remembered exactly how he had begun to lay it out that afternoon in the Senate dining room to his incredulous fellow senator.

"First, we've got to get past the constitutionality problem, and second, find some way to make it seem fair and impartial. The Supreme Court has ruled that legislation regarding questions of moral conduct is the territory of state and local government. The federal government can't set a national standard because it would exercise power that it doesn't have. And we can't try for a constitutional amendment on any one moral issue because they've ruled that no such amendment is binding unless *every* state votes for it. That's how they killed the abortion amendment in '97."

"So you give up," Silva had answered, nibbling at a dinner roll and trying to be politely attentive. "If you couldn't get abortion, how are you going to get fifty-two states to agree on what's pornography, criminal sexual behav-

ior, or any of the other hundred areas you'd like to see controlled?"

"We don't have to." Purcell remembered his excitement. He'd almost spilled his coffee in his lap, his hand had been shaking so badly. "We let it remain a local decision. We just find a way to make the local decision apply on a national level."

"And how are you going to do that?" Silva had demanded.

"The same way we get the majority of the nation behind it. By appealing to the gambler in everybody. We make it a game, with the biggest prize you've ever seen."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"A lottery, Dave. A lottery."

Of course, it hadn't been that simple or that easy. But the principle was sound. And its day had finally come.

The president stepped down from the podium. Purcell noted that the entire room had fallen silent as the huge, lumbering mechanism was rolled into the room. It reminded the senator of a bingo machine with its transparent cage filled with tiny, bouncing balls — 26,000 of them, 500 from every state — each electronically encoded with an identification number of some metropolis, city, town, village, or hamlet.

A second device was brought in from the other side of the room, looking like nothing less than a race-track tote board. From where he was, Senator Purcell couldn't read the individual side entries, but it didn't matter. He had helped create the 100 categories listed: abortion, pornography, obscene language, drug usage, the dozens of others — all of which neatly established an area of moral behavior. He was almost as proud of that list as he was of the entire bill. God, what a struggle it had been to get some kind of committee agreement on what needed to be controlled. And then through the Senate itself, and after that, the House.

But I did it. Purcell wanted to shout it to the entire room. *I did it — who else but I could have?*

The tote board was wired into the first mechanism, and an even greater silence fell over the room. Purcell was sure he could hear the combined heartbeats of everyone in the room. The vice president moved down from his high podium and stood before the device. With a steady, unhesitating hand, he reached forward and threw a small lever.

Almost instantly, one of the small, white balls bubbled through a channel in the machine and popped into a holding ring. The vice president reached forward, took it, and placed it in a niche on the tote board directly across from the first category label. A millisecond passed, and then a small section of the category label glowed with tight, digital lettering.

The vice president leaned forward to read it, then turned on the microphones.

"On the question of abortion," he intoned with a voice as solemn as that of a federal judge, "Pittsfield, Kansas."

Purcell's smile expanded to fill the entire room.

Congratulations, Pittsfield. Have a wonderful decade. For the next ten years there is no higher authority in the land on the question of abortion than your group of taxpayers, the registered voters of Pittsfield, Kansas.

The very thought made Purcell excited. Whoever those people were, their word — in the form of referenda — was the law of the land. For a decade, until the next drawing.

The vice president continued, drawing more cities and towns: Frankfort, Kentucky, for pornography; Cairo, Illinois, for drug usage; Peterson, Vermont, for prayer in schools. Senator Purcell stopped listening and stood up.

Tomorrow I'll look at the list, he thought. *The odds are in our favor. So many small towns, so much of the United States still holding on to the old values. Now they'll be law, and the degenerates and the perverts will have to go underground, out of sight. Or we can finally arrest them, drive them out.*

He started down the aisle, ignoring the startled looks of some of his colleagues, and turned to take in one last glimpse of the wisp of a man, his strongest opponent through every day of the fight. The drone of the vice president's voice was like a dirge in the background.

A funeral for your kind, he wanted to say to his opponent. *Back into the darkness, into hiding. Where you all belong.*

Still oblivious to the voice of the vice president, Purcell stared at his colleague from the West Coast, and for a few moments it was all he had hoped — the defeat, the despair, the death of the man. Purcell grinned even more at the sight of his fellow senator's expression.

Until his fellow senator grinned back.

A look of shock at first, then consternation, then disbelief, and then a smile that swelled rich and full and burst into grating ricochets of laughter that beat the explosion of sound in the room by only a second.

Purcell turned to face the vice president.

He's going to faint, the old senator thought, staring at the deathly pale features of the President of the Senate. He was saying something, but the uproar of the room drowned him out. He reached back to his desk; taking the great ceremonial gavel and hammering it against the wood, he drove down the smothering noise.

Purcell reflexively turned back to the laughing, almost hysterical fellow senator from California, and somehow he couldn't take his eyes off the great clown smile that seemed to fill the room and mock him. In the pandemonium of voices around him, Purcell heard one rise clear and unchallenged.

"On question of acceptable sexual behavior," the vice president repeated himself with an unsteady voice, "San Francisco, California."

And the smile grew even broader. ✪

PROMISED STAR

by Ira Herman

art: Stephen E. Fabian

A U.C.L.A. graduate, the author is employed as managing editor for Aegina Press. He currently lives on a horse farm near Huntington, West Virginia, with his wife, Claire.

The author's fiction has appeared in Stellar SF Stories, *from Del Rey Books, and he was one of the winners in "The Writers of the Future" contest sponsored by L. Ron Hubbard. The following short story marks his first appearance in* Amazing Stories, *and of this tale, he says, "I doubt that many writers get ideas for science-fiction stories from the Bible, but that's where this one came from — right out of the Old Testament."*

The year was 2060, or 5820 by the Jewish calendar, and Earth's population had swelled to nearly 10 billion. The Federation was moving people to space as fast as it could, but not everybody wanted to go. . . .

Two entire congregations of Chassidim were crowded into the B'nai Yisrael Synagogue in what used to be Brooklyn, New York. Actually, they were in the basement of the synagogue. The upstairs had long since been appropriated by the Federation as living quarters for six Hispanic families, a small tribe of Zuni Indians, and two star performers from the Metropolitan Opera. In one section of the basement, Rabbi Aaron Chaim was leading his congregation's regular Friday evening service. On the other side of a room divider, Rabbi Moishe Solomon and his congregation were watching as the rabbi's son, Svefkel, was attempting to lead *their* Friday evening service. Prior to the Federation's crackdown, the two rabbis had had separate synagogues in different parts of town. Joining the two congregations was out of the question because their rabbis disagreed on almost everything.

Chaim had just finished singing the *Kiddush* and was attempting to dispense wine when a pounding from upstairs shook his arm, spilling wine all over. He looked to his assistant, Mordechai Zlotkin.

"Please continue, dear Rabbi," Zlotkin said, mopping up the wine with a napkin. "It's just those *meshugene* Indians with their rain-dance ceremony."

On the other side of the divider, Svefkel Solomon was in the middle of Psalm 96 when he was overcome by a sneezing fit. The boy was allergic to the smell of jalapeno peppers wafting down from the Spanish kitchens. Svefkel's nose swelled up and turned red as he sneezed. He was unable to continue.

"This is outrageous!" Meyer Gutman screamed. "All we are trying to do is follow our prescribed laws, but there is no room!" Gutman rose and waved his arms to illustrate his point. He knocked over one person on each side, and two in front were pushed away by his considerable stomach.

Rabbi Solomon held up his hand to silence the congregation, but he also sneezed, spraying three rows in front.

On the other side of the divider, Rabbi Chaim had finished the service hurriedly and was attempting to shake hands with the members of his congregation and wish them "Good *Shabbes*." A horrible shrieking began upstairs. Everyone covered his ears.

"It's the opera stars," Mordechai Zlotkin yelled above the din. "They would pick now to practice *Carmen*."

In the confusion, some of Rabbi Chaim's congregation backed into the room divider. It teetered and fell over with a **wham**. Fortunately, no one on the other side was hurt, except for Berel Leib, who lost his upper denture.

"Silence!" Rabbi Chaim commanded. Chaim was a small man with white hair and beard that enveloped his face like a snowstorm. The shrieking from upstairs continued.

On the other side of the room, Rabbi Moishe Solomon blew his nose and comforted his son. "It's all right, Svefkeleh. You were doing very well." He patted Svefkel on the shoulder. "Who could be bar mitzvahed under such conditions?" Rabbi Solomon was a powerfully built man whose black beard grew right up to his eyes.

People from both congregations collided and stepped on one another's toes. Pushing and shoving started. Rabbi Chaim waved his hands. "Listen!" he said. "It's the Sabbath! Have some respect!"

Everyone quieted down. Chaim said to Rabbi Solomon, "This is intolerable. Something must be done!"

"Yes," Solomon said. "We must decide the matter right now."

All were surprised to see the two old adversaries agree. In a moment order was restored, and the two congregations were seated.

The first to speak was Rabbi Chaim. "This is a test of our faith," he said. "When the Almighty gave the Ten Commandments and the laws of daily living to Moses, he must have foreseen this. We must go on with our observances in spite of distractions. Throughout history, our people have had to put up with worse than this for their belief."

Rabbi Solomon consoled Svefkel, who had begun to weep. "Ridiculous!" he said to Chaim. "Some distractions we can do nothing about, but this we can remedy. Ten years ago, when Israel closed its doors to new immigrants, I knew then that something had to be done. No more room may exist on Earth, but in space there is room enough. Right now, twenty man-made worlds circle between Earth and the Moon. We should accept the Federation's offer and move to one of the new space colonies it is opening up."

A murmur of approval rose from the crowd. "He's right!" one of them said. "Just yesterday while I was laying *tefillin*, two families of new neighbors walked right through the apartment!"

Rabbi Solomon continued. "On Earth, we're running out of everything, but in space there are plenty of resources from asteroid mining, free electricity from the sun, and more living room in the colonies than the Federation can fill up. The government has even offered to give Jews an entire colony of our own, with lovely synagogues and study-houses. Just think, a whole Jewish world!"

On the other side of the room, Rabbi Chaim had his hands over his ears, denting in his white hair on both sides. "I can't believe I'm hearing this! I can't believe I'm hearing this!" he repeated. His cold eyes quieted every person in the room. He began to pace.

"The esteemed Rabbi Solomon would have us believe that moving to space is the answer, that it would solve all our problems." He looked at Solomon. "But you are forgetting one thing. Certainly, our lives would be easier in a space colony. Certainly, we would have a bigger *shule* and freedom in our daily observances. Our children would have room to run and play. But the one thing you forget happens to be the central fact of our belief.

Throughout the Scripture, over and over, it says that the Messiah will come to gather the Jews who have been dispersed in all the nations. Then He is to set up God's Kingdom *on Earth*. We are waiting for the Messiah. What happens when He comes to Earth and we're not here?"

A rumbling started as the Chassidim discussed this, but the noise was soon superseded by a louder rumble from above. The Zuni Indians had resumed their rain dance. The tumult grew and the ceiling shook until chunks of plaster rained on the Chassidim from above.

"Go home!" Rabbi Solomon instructed them. "We'll discuss it later!"

In a mad, stumbling rush the room was cleared. Soon the basement was empty except for white plaster falling on a prayer book someone had forgotten.

The next evening, Yudel Blum, the custodian at the B'nai Yisrael Synagogue, was discussing the situation with his wife, Gittel. Yudel was fixing himself a small dinner of whitefish and cheese in the kitchen section of their one-room apartment. Gittel was sewing on a couch on the other side of the room.

"So," Gittel said, "if the two rabbis cannot decide the question, it is up to the rest of us. You, for instance. Why don't you do something about it? You've got connections. Both rabbis depend on you. Every day I have to fight crowds just to get the whitefish you're eating. Here, we're at the mercy of the government for everything. They won't even let us have children. What kind of Jewish life do we have? What future is there for us here?" Gittel whipped the needle furiously through the dress she was sewing.

Yudel turned from the fish. Blum was barely five feet tall, with dark hair and sagging eyes as if from ptosis. His cascading earlocks shook with emotion.

"You blame me for crowds? You blame me for the government? The rabbis should listen to me, a custodian?"

Gittel put down her sewing and burst into tears. "I'm an old woman who has no children. I don't mind about the filthy little hole we're given to live in. I don't mind about standing in line to get our groceries — like a beggar. But what right do they have to limit our families?"

Blum intoned blessings over his food and took a few bites. "Lines or not, still, it's pretty good fish," he said. "Did you hear about Shmuel Trubick and his wife, Chanah? They're getting a divorce, I hear. A good-for-nothing, that Chanah. High-society type."

"You're not listening!" his wife screamed. "Did you even hear what I was saying?"

"Families. The population problem," Yudel said, sliding a bone off the end of his tongue. "What can I do about it? Go to the Federation and tell them it's not fair?"

"Look at this." Gittel picked up a magazine. Pictures of space colonies

showed luxurious interiors with green fields and children playing under a blue metal ceiling. "They're offering free passage for new homesteaders. Look at those houses! With gardens! Entire houses for just one family!"

Just then some Puerto Rican children went by the window, whinnying like horses. They called Yudel's wife "Gittel the horse" because it seemed to them that she resembled that animal from behind.

Yudel stared at his wife. "You want us to leave right away? What about the rest of the Chassidim? A Jewish family is nothing without the community."

"A real man would do something. Talk to the rabbis, and convince them to move us all to space — demand it if necessary!"

"I suppose I could talk with them," Blum said. "But what about the Messiah question? Who am I to decide such a thing? That is up to the rabbis."

"You study the Talmud. You have access to all the books in the synagogue. An answer must be in there. Look it up! Read decisions of the sages! A true Chassid would search until he found the answer. And when he did, he would tell the rabbis — and in such a way that they think it's their own idea. Certainly, we weren't meant to live like two rats in a hole. . . ."

Gittel continued talking for some time while Yudel finished his meal. "It's not right," he muttered. "Poor Shmuel slaves while that gem, Chanah, sits at home thinking of the finer things."

Yudel Blum spent much of the next day cleaning the synagogue basement. He was a dedicated custodian, and he was upset that Saturday services had been conducted with chunks of plaster all over the floor. He even found time to open a few volumes of the Talmud, but they offered no solution to the congregation's predicament. Instead of going home, he fought the street crowds for two blocks to Rabbi Solomon's apartment.

Yudel knocked timidly on the door. "Come in!" the rabbi's voice boomed. Yudel entered. The apartment was spacious by current standards: three entire rooms. The rabbi shared these with his wife, Rivke, and their son. Rabbi Moishe Solomon was an imposing figure. He looked like a mountain capped with black hair and beard. His yarmulke nearly touched the ceiling.

"Blum! Well, what is it? Sit down!"

Yudel sank into a creaking rocker. He placed his hands in his pockets to keep them from trembling. "I came to talk to you about our situation — at the synagogue," Blum said.

Rabbi Solomon sat, not looking up from his newspaper. "Terrible about the plaster," he said. "You'll fix it, of course."

"Of course," said Blum. "But what I really came to talk about is whether we can leave, you know, for space."

The rabbi snorted. "We must go. There's no choice. But we can't leave half our community behind. And that's up to Rabbi Chaim. I know he means well, but a more misguided rabbi I've never met!"

"Misguided, yes," Blum said.

"When I think of the homesteading opportunities available and how terrible things have become for us here, it makes me want to break something!" Rabbi Solomon wrinkled his newspaper in anger.

Yudel sat for a while, saying nothing.

"So when will it be fixed?"

"What?"

"The ceiling! How soon can you have it patched?"

"A day or two, I suppose," Blum said. He got up to leave.

"And see what you can do about those Indians," the rabbi instructed.

Blum nodded and went out. He closed the door behind him and rubbed his sweating palms together.

Several blocks away, Rabbi Aaron Chaim was sitting at his desk, opening his mail. The Federation had appointed him as the local Chassidic liaison with the government. He had to fill out weekly official forms on population statistics, square footage requirements, and so on. He was bent over the forms, fingers buried in his white hair, when a knock on the door interrupted him. He rose and let in Yudel Blum, who had walked from Moishe Solomon's. It had rained on the way. Blum's beard and earlocks were dripping black strings.

"Here, dry yourself off," Rabbi Chaim said. He handed Blum a napkin and went back to his desk. "I'm glad you came by. I was going to call you about putting up a better divider at the synagogue, one that won't fall over."

"Yes," said Blum, sitting down. "That will be no problem, but —"

"But?"

Blum steeled his courage. "Have you spoken with Rabbi Solomon about —"

"Solomon!" Chaim raised his voice. "Can you believe he calls himself a Chassid? He wants to go off to space because of a little crowding. And when the Messiah comes at last to deliver the people of Earth, He'll ask, 'Where are Solomon and the others?' And we'll have to say that things got a bit uncomfortable, so they moved to outer space. It's Jews like that who are a threat to the true belief!"

Blum squirmed in his chair. "A threat, surely."

Chaim continued writing numbers in blanks. "Can you brace it double?"

"What?"

"The divider! Brace it double, and attach it to the ceiling if necessary."

"Of course," Blum said. He stood up and left at once.

Rabbi Chaim put aside the completed form and opened an official-looking envelope from the local representative of the Federation. The letter inside announced a governmental edict concerning the observance of the Jewish Sabbath. From now on, the letter said, because of weekend traffic control problems, the Chassidim would have to hold Sabbath services on Wednesdays and Thursdays, instead of Fridays and Saturdays.

An emergency meeting was called by Rabbi Chaim, and soon the entire

Chassidic community was elbow to elbow in the basement of the synagogue.

"It's embarrassing," Yudel Blum whispered to his wife. He pointed at the still-wet plaster where he had patched the ceiling. He hadn't even begun to work on the divider, so the two congregations mixed together as one.

Chaim came in wearing a somber expression. Those in the crowd stood on tiptoe to see him. Rabbi Solomon looked on expectantly. The diminutive Chaim peered over a lectern and drew a paper from his black coat. In a faint voice he read the letter changing the Sabbath.

A single gasp came from the crowd. Even Rabbi Solomon was speechless. "Perhaps we should worship in our own homes," Chaim said feebly. "After all, the traffic . . ."

"It's too much," Meyer Gutman said. "Tampering with the Sabbath!"

"Surely, the Federation doesn't realize," Mordechai Zlotkin said. "Perhaps if we sent a delegation to explain."

"It's very simple," Rabbi Solomon said. "We'll go to space."

"But the Messiah," Rabbi Chaim began, "when He comes, we'll be gone."

Yudel Blum absently thumbed through a Scripture book as the rabbis argued. Then, all at once, he had the solution to the whole problem right in front of him. A tingling ran up his spine, and his breath quickened. He spoke, and his voice was deep and resonant.

"Does the Blessed One hold dominion over Earth alone? Are the heavens not his also?" Blum said, coming forward. His sagging eyes gave him a distinguished look. Everyone watched him. Blum, with the book still in his hand, felt a strength he had not known before. "The Federation would have us change the Sabbath rather than keep it!" Blum said. "We are Chassidim! Living by the Ten Commandments and the six hundred laws God gave to Moses is our whole life. Strict observance of the laws — this lifestyle — hastens the coming of the Messiah. Anything else delays it!"

"The janitor speaks wisely!" someone called.

Blum found himself facing Rabbi Chaim. Chaim's mouth was open, exposing yellow teeth. "Throughout history," Blum went on, "our forebears sought religious freedom in new lands. We should know that it is much more important *how* we live than *where*. No matter where we live, the Messiah will deliver us all!" Blum declared.

"How do you know this?" Rabbi Chaim demanded with a whine in his voice. "Are we to accept your word alone?"

"Hardly," said Blum. He opened the book to read from it. "I quote from Deuteronomy, chapter 30. 'The Lord thy God will return and gather thee from all the peoples whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee.' " Blum lifted a finger, still quoting, " 'If any of thine that are dispersed be in the uttermost parts of heaven, from thence will the Lord thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee.' "

"The janitor knows more Scripture than the rabbis," someone whispered.

Rabbi Chaim's cheeks shook with emotion. "I was wrong," he said to Rabbi Solomon, "and Blum is right."

"We'll go to space," Rabbi Solomon said, "to seed the stars, and even in the uttermost parts of heaven there will be Jews to follow the laws handed down to Moses."

The two rabbis embraced. All around the room people wept and hugged one another. Zlotkin, Gutman, and Blum said, "Amen!"

Yudel Blum found his wife beside him, her eyes shining. He paraphrased to her from Genesis: "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you can number them. So shall your children be."

Within weeks, the entire community boarded *Ark II* and left for space. Soon, they were settled in a new promised land, a Chassidic colony orbiting between Earth and the Moon. And each night, when the new star shone like a Sabbath candle over all the Earth, voices raised in Chassidic song, and in every house in the colony there was joy.

DARWIN'S ORACLE

Hand on hand and bone to bone,
I hold you, Proteus, and will know
What magic moves in your old god's brain,
No matter the myriad shapes you change.
The scales you wear and the furs you become
Won't shake you free or absolve your tongue
Of the long dream speech you must grant me
Before you slouch down to your seals and sleep.
I feel a vision like smoke in stone,
Of shifting flesh creating my own,
Of years like leaves and leaves so deep
That worlds lie drowned in this flickering sea.
Catch me, Proteus, before breath's wish
Blows us both back into mist.

— Ace G. Pilkington


G.Barr

TOO MUCH LOOSESTRIFE

by Frederik Pohl

art: George Barr

When Solomon Sayre first heard about the Martians, he was driving his big gray battleship of a worn-out Lincoln convertible, ancient gas-guzzler with sketchy brakes and unreliable dashboard gauges, at eighty miles an hour in a fifty-five-mile zone. He had the radio up to full blast. He didn't care much what was playing. He was terrified that he might pass out. He heard the newscaster chattering about how live Martians had been found, and he thought that that was pretty amazing and wonderful with one part of his brain, but only a little part. Most of it was concentrating on keeping him awake and alive long enough to get where he needed to go.

It was four o'clock in the morning. Not counting trucks, he had the highway almost to himself. He needed it that way. He knew he was wobbling all around his lane, sometimes into the next one. He knew that if a cop car saw him, the cops would stop him for certain. As far as he could see, that would have only one consequence. He would die. He would not be able to live through being pulled over, asked for his papers, and held there while the cop called him in and wrote him a ticket. And that was the best he could hope for. It was at least as likely that the cop would arrest him for driving under the influence of an unlawful substance — if only he were! But the cop wouldn't care that it wasn't, technically, true. Then it would be the police station, the holding tank, and at least six or eight cold-turkey hours before he could get out to score.

So Solomon muttered to his foot, *"Slow down! Slow down!"* But his foot just pressed harder on the gas, and the miles fled by.

"— living Martians," the radio was saying, "although scientists have long maintained that no such life was possible there. This incredible discovery, which was reported at eleven-fifty last night, Eastern time —"

Sol slammed on his brakes. He had almost missed the turnoff from the tollway. The huge old car swayed, and the weary brakes were slow to respond, but then Sayre was going up the ramp into the city streets.

Miracle! No cop had turned up, and he had only a few blocks to go. And as Solomon Sayre approached the diner, he saw that the candy man was still there, back to the plate-glass window, scraping burned food off his griddle.

That did it. For the first time in hours, Sol felt almost good. He did not think he was going to vomit in the next minute. The sweat under his arms and in the hair of his temples didn't go away, but it didn't seem to be getting worse either. He slid into a parking space in the nearly empty lot. He leaned back and stretched, actually took the time to stretch, before he reached for the ignition key.

"— first pictures received at the Jet Propulsion Laboratories," the radio chattered on, "show a creature that looks as much like a seal as anything else familiar to human experience. Of course, scientists say, they are not aquatic. That would be impossible on the planet Mars, where no free water is known to exist. This makes the puzzle of their survival even more —"

Sol grinned to himself. He kept on grinning as he pushed through the

door into the diner.

There was a young couple having a bitter whispered fight in one booth; a trucker nursed a cup of coffee in another. Neither was close to the counter. "Hey, Razor," Sayre said, "did you hear about the Martians?" The candy man didn't answer. He looked at Sayre, and then at the other people in the diner. Without being told, he drew a cup of coffee.

"What you want, bro?" he asked softly.

In the same tone, Sayre said, "You know what I want, Razor. I've got the money." And he displayed the folded ten-dollar bills before he slipped them under the saucer of his coffee cup.

Then it was only a matter of waiting while Razor went through his routine. Turned his back. Chipped at the griddle a little. Yawned and stretched and disappeared into the kitchen for a moment. Came back and wiped the counter methodically, starting at the far end from Sayre. Displayed the little cellophane packets for a quarter of a second before he covered them with a plate containing a soggy cheese Danish. Whisked Sayre's cup and saucer away for a refill. When he put them back, the money was gone.

Sayre nibbled an edge of the Danish and took a couple of sips of the second cup of coffee. That was just theater. He didn't want either, but if he departed from the ritual Razor enforced, there would be no deal next time he came around.

Sayre dropped a quarter next to the plates and stood up. The little packets were safe in his coat, and the world looked hopeful again. On the way out he paused to say, "You didn't tell me what you thought about the Martians."

The candy man looked at him without expression. Then he said, "What the hell I need Martians for? You heads is weird enough already."

When Solomon Sayre reported for work the next morning, even Professor Mariano was talking about the Martians, agitated as she always was, angrier than usual. Sayre was still coasting gently down the high slopes of that glorious fix. It was really a nice world, and he hated to see her unhappy in it. "You shouldn't put it down, Doc," he protested. "It's exciting. I mean, *Martians*. It's like all those old movies come true, you know?"

The professor looked at him, her eyes softening. Marietta Mariano was at least thirty years older than Sayre, he guessed. Probably right up against retirement age. He didn't treat her like a scientist or a boss. He treated her the way he treated all women, regardless of age, color, marital status, or physical appearance. He spoke to her and looked at her as though they had been lovers before and probably would be again. She seemed to like it. Women generally did, even though there wasn't any follow-through anymore.

Professor Mariano shooed the volunteers off to their jobs of welcoming visitors to the nature preserve or cataloguing plants and animals so far identified. She waved Sol into her private office. "Martians or no Martians," she

said, "we've still got the wood-chip trails to border and the grass to mow in the arboretum. How's your back today?"

"Fine," he said. A lie. They both knew it was a lie, since Sayre's back would never be fine again, but there was enough junk left in his bloodstream so that, at least, it didn't make him want to scream. "Do I get a cup of coffee first?"

Of course, he did. He always did. She gave him coffee out of her automatic maker every morning, even the mornings when neither his back nor any other part of him was fine at all. And, like every morning, she looked him over carefully while he was drinking it. "Do you want a muffin?" she asked. He started to say no, but she was already putting it in the toaster oven. "You didn't get enough sleep," she charged over her shoulder. "You stayed up all night, listening to that stuff about the Martians, right?"

He grinned, confessing to the false charge. He had never known whether Marietta Mariano suspected the real one. He said deceitfully, "Well, hell, Doc, a thing like that doesn't happen every day."

"It happens a lot too often," she said firmly. "It's the same situation as the water hyacinth and the purple loosestrife. How do we know what pests they will bring back with them from Mars? Now, Sol! You know you've got to get your rest and plenty of fresh air and exercise, or you'll be right back in the hospital."

"Promise I won't," he smiled. And meant it. Because if there was one thing Solomon Sayre was sure of, it was that the Veterans Administration hospitals had had their last shot at him. There was nothing they could do for his "intractable pain" that the candy man couldn't do better, and besides he didn't have to wear those funny-looking bathrobes.

What kept Sayre alive, with just enough left over to buy Razor's goods, was his hundred-per-cent disability. It hadn't even come from a real war. That didn't make it easier. The invasion had been a walkover, tiny, little pukey island that found itself in the way of the American bulldozer. The official description of casualties was "very light." Maybe so, if you just looked at the numbers. But the small number of dead and wounded were just as dead, and just as wounded, as any of the casualties of Shiloh or Normandy. You didn't get a hundred-per-cent disability for nothing. And for some of the things you got it for, a hundred-per-cent disability was nowhere near enough. The burns were bad enough. The lacerations were a lot worse. But the thing that would be ruining Sol's life as long as that life lasted was what the crash of his troop carrier had done to his spine. Six times the surgeons had tried to relieve the pressure on his vertebrae. Six times he'd come out of the whole-body cast, hurting worse than ever. "Doc," he said to Mariano, reaching over to pat the hand with the tendons that lay just beneath the skin and the age spots that seemed to spread over more of it every day, "this job is just what the doctor ordered. Better than that. Working for you makes it a pleasure."

She flushed and withdrew her hand. He had been talking to her bad ear, and she hadn't caught it all, but enough had come through to embarrass her. "The county doesn't pay you to drink coffee," she said sharply. "Take the muffin along, and get the chip spreader out. See if you can neaten up the paths on the west prairie before lunch."

"Sure thing, Doc." Then, rising, he paused to ask a question. "Are you really worried about the Martians?"

She looked suddenly angry — not, Sayre saw, at him. "I'm worried about *everything*," she said. "If you had any sense, you would be, too."

One time long ago, two hundred years and more, this whole part of the state was prairie, endless grasses and streams and, rarely, a clump of woods. It was the flattest country the world had ever seen. There were no great rivers or large lakes. There was a rippling sea of grass from horizon to horizon, and that was all.

The Indians didn't harm the prairie. They set fire to it now and then to drive the buffalo to slaughter, but it was good for the prairie to burn now and then. The buffalo themselves lived off it and fed it with their dung and, ultimately, their decaying bones; the prairie and the buffalo were made for each other, and what little the Indians did didn't upset the balance. It was not until the Europeans came that the prairie began to vanish. It was plowed under to grow corn, cemented over to build condos, paved with freeways and interstates. There was nowhere in Illinois or Indiana or Iowa as much as a thousand-acre stretch of original priarie left.

So the professor decided to re-create some.

As a full professor and department head at the university, she had connections. She used them. She begged eighteen hundred acres from one rich and childless landowner, bargained six hundred more from a real-estate developer who needed a tax break, lobbied some condemnation proceedings from the state to join the parcels together — and wound up with the John James Audubon Nature Preserve. It wasn't prairie, but it was all, for one reason or another, almost unbuilt, two square miles of it to turn back into wilderness.

Well, not all of it.

There was a grove of fruit trees that had to be kept bearing because the crotchety old landowner had picked them as a boy — there went twenty acres. There was an arboretum that some previous philanthropist had created and given to the state, and the state made Dr. Mariano take it on as quid for the quo of decommissioning a two-lane farm road. And there were nature trails and native trees and an old farmhouse with old crops still being farmed by disgruntled tenants who knew they were zoo animals and didn't think they were getting enough out of it — they weren't at all what the professor had had in mind. But they were what the ghetto kids who came out from the core-city schools stared at longest, and without the core-city kids, the professor couldn't have gotten the federal grants that were still not

enough to pay all the bills for all the things she wanted to do.

But what she could do was a lot. Under her orders, savagely the volunteers hacked down the imported English walnuts and the mulberry trees and planted native oak and birch. The remains of old flower gardens were steamed sterile. Prairie grasses and wildflowers were seeded. Within two years, it had begun to look almost as it had centuries earlier, and that was why Dr. Marietta Mariano gave up her full professorship and her tenure, taking early retirement to come to the John James Audubon Nature Preserve.

At noon Sol Sayre came back sweated and bearing bad news. "There are two new stands of loosestrife along the creek," he reported.

She looked up from the glass-sided beehive, where she was trying to poke bubble gum out of the ventilation holes, by which he knew they'd had another class trip in that morning. "Eat your lunch," she ordered glumly. "Then I'll come out with you and look."

"I didn't bring any lunch. I'm not hungry."

"Sol, Sol! You don't take care of — All right, then we go now," she said, giving up. But when they had come out of the West Woods Trail onto the prairie, where he had left the mower, she said, "Let's ride."

For Solomon Sayre the jolting his spine took on the mower and the jolting that walking gave it were a standoff. Both hurt. He debated trying to explain that to Dr. Mariano one more time, but decided against it: if she really knew what riding the power mower felt like for him, she would make him stop. There was just room for the old lady to stand behind him as he drove up the access road, slower than a walk, with plenty of time to look around. "Trees," she said fretfully. "We should put in some trees along the north line, so when they start building their houses there, we won't have to see them." But she wasn't really fretting about possible building outside the preserve. She was gazing off toward the wet prairie, where the whole shore was now patches of scarlet-purple and the same color was beginning to line the stream they were approaching. He felt her fingers dig into his shoulder.

She didn't say anything. She hopped off the mower, slipped out of her sandals, and barefoot, climbed down to the muddy margins of the creek. There were twenty plants in the stand, and they hadn't been there a few weeks earlier. They were rather pretty, actually, Sol thought, chest high, with green stems and narrow leaves, and the reddish purple flowers ascending in the upper parts like a torch.

Professor Mariano snapped off one of the stalks and pulled a blossom apart. "Purple loosestrife," she acknowledged gloomily. "*Lythrum salicaria.* Good for nothing. Nobody eats it, and it drives other things out. Give me a hand."

Sol helped her up the bank. "I've seen bees visiting it for nectar," he said. "Butterflies, too."

"It will probably make them sick. And it doesn't *belong* here, Sol. It's an alien. Comes all the way from Asia somewhere."

"I could spray it," he offered.

"No!" Then, more temperately: "We don't want to use chemical herbicides in the preserve; you know that. Maybe I should get the volunteers out to cut some of it out — But it'll just come back."

She perched on the edge of the riding-mower seat and shook her head. "You see why I'm not happy about the Martians? It's the same story all over the world. People bring in plants or fish or insects. They get to a place where they have no natural enemies, and so they become the enemy of everything that belongs there! Like the Hawaiian islands —"

Sol leaned patiently on the hood of the mower to listen to the familiar lecture. The water hyacinth in Florida. The rabbits in Australia. "And that rusty crayfish, *Orconectes rusticus,* you know what it's done in Wisconsin? You can't even swim in some of the lakes because it nips anything that moves; it eats everything, and then the lakes are dead. The elm trees in England, the American chestnut, the starlings in America — the African killer bees, the fire ants —"

"Don't get so excited, Doc," Solomon coaxed.

She put her hand on his shoulder. At first he thought it was a gesture of affection, but there was a lot of weight behind it. The whiteness of her face told him how close she was to exhaustion. Alarmed, he said, "Should I take you back to the cabin?"

"You might as well," she said, and sat silently for most of the rattly ride back along the access road. He didn't stop at the woods trail but continued around the loop to join with the main driveway. She didn't stop him.

When they were in the parking lot, the color had begun to return to her face. At the cabin steps she shook off his hand. "I'm all right now," she said. "How about you?"

"Oh, I'm fine, Doc," he grinned.

"Liar," she sighed. "But you might as well go back to work." She looked him up and down. "You're a good kid, Sol. I wish you could get a real job."

"I'm fine here, Dr. Mariano."

She nodded, not agreeing, but only showing that she had known he would say that. "I wish you'd meet some nice young women, though. You need a girlfirend, not some old bat like me."

He kept a smile on his face, though it wasn't easy. "I can take care of that when I want to," he said.

It was a partial truth. He could take care of the need, all right, because he didn't seem to have that need anymore. He had a different need, and a lot worse.

When Sayre had been called in to the final conference at the V.A. hospital, the Army doctors gave him the news straight. It was as though someone had

written THE END across the story of his life.

It wasn't just his back. That was only painful. It was the other thing that made it impossible to see, anywhere in the future, anything that made life worth the trouble of living. "You've had," said the resident surgeon, "what we call a traumatic orchidectomy. It doesn't have anything to do with orchids, though." The man was apparently trying to work in some humor. "That means —"

"It means my balls were knocked off," said Sayre, nodding to show he understood. "I already know that. But isn't there some kind of implant, or hormones, or —"

The doctor was shaking his head. "Not in your case," he said regretfully. "You still do have some residual testicular tissue. It's enough for a certain amount of function. You could even father a child, perhaps."

"Oh, sure, *perhaps*," said Sayre. While he was still hoping desperately for a transplant that would put back what would never grow there again, he had been told just what he and any prospective mother would have to do in order for him to father a child. He could not imagine doing that.

"Anyway," said Dr. Hasti consolingly, "I'm afraid that, with your back the way it is, any normal sexual intercourse would be inordinately painful."

"Yeah," said Sayre, knowing that that was true enough because it already was inordinately painful. Only morphine made it bearable.

"In any case," Dr. Hasti said, "the other parts of the prognosis are not very good."

"I've been told," Sayre said.

"Yes. So you know that, although we could prescribe testosterone or some other steroids —"

"Yes, they'd probably kill me with cancer." Sayre was tiring of the conversation. What he wanted was to go off where no one could see his face and think about what the rest of his life would be like. "So I've got this restricted regimen. No weight lifting. I'm going to have all kinds of glandular malfunctions. I'll probably faint if I try hard physical labor. My heart's going to need watching. I'll probably never be able to hold a full-time job."

"Oh, that's not *absolutely* certain."

"Sure it is because nobody's going to hire me with the odds the way they are."

The doctor frowned. "You really should try not to be so negative, Corporal. You'd probably benefit from psychotherapy . . . maybe a few sessions with an analyst. . . ."

"I'll think about it," said Sayre, standing up. He was a corporal and the doctor a major, but he just turned his back and walked out. What could they do to him now? He went back to the ward. The next day he finished his separation papers, put on his civilian clothes, and limped out of the hospital into a very empty civilian life.

The one thing he did not have to worry about was money, he thought. He

had his total disability pension, he had eighty dollars a month from an almost forgotten college insurance policy, and he had more than two thousand dollars in back pay in the bank.

And he had the pain.

Idle days and chronic pain added up to something new. Within the first few months, he had acquired something that changed his life in many ways: a habit.

One of the things that changed was that before very long he did have to begin to worry about money again, a lot.

The job at the nature preserve didn't pay much, but every little bit helped to come up with the money the candy man took. Also it helped to fill the days. Also Dr. Mariano was the best boss in the world to have.

The damaged veteran and the old professor got along extraordinarily well, though the differences between them were polar. Sayre was young. Mariano was past sixty. Sayre had quit college to go into the service. Mariano had three doctorates. Mariano was nearly blind in one eye and totally deaf in one ear. If you spoke to her from the wrong side, she would peer around with the good left eye for a bit, trying to figure out where the sounds were coming from, long before she decided that the sounds were a voice and the voice carried meaning that would perhaps repay the effort of deciphering it. Sayre, on the other hand, had 20/20 vision. He also had the hearing of a bat and a nose that could detect a woman's perfume half a block away. That was one of his problems. He was constantly being made aware of what he couldn't have. If he had needed an extra reason for seeking the pleasures of the needle, that would have been it. He didn't need extra reasons. He had two big ones.

First, there was the unremitting back pain that heroin would, for a while, chase away.

And then, after he had been on the heroin for a while, there was that considerably worse pain that came when he failed to score on time, and so he sometimes went a day too long without any.

That was not precisely pain. It was nastier than pain. It was misery. It was hurtful and obsessive; it involved vomiting and sweating and coughing. Most of all it involved the sure knowledge that if he could just score, it would be only a moment until he was well and happy again.

And then not very much longer until the pain crept back, and the shakes, and the terrible, burning, desperate *need.*

In the summertime the John James Audubon Nature Preserve didn't close until sundown. That was well after eight o'clock, but it was rare for any visitor to come after seven. It was rare for Professor Mariano to come back to the cabin after her quick and lonesome dinner, too, but when she did, she found Solomon Sayre with his chin propped in his hands at her desk, staring fixedly into the portable black-and-white TV she kept for

weather warnings and the occasional major news event. "You're not being paid for overtime, Sol." she scolded fondly. "Go home. Let the volunteers close up."

He said absently, "Lucy's son has a temperature, so I told her I'd take care of it. I'm watching a special on the Martians."

"Martians," she sniffed and turned away. She rummaged through the library shelves for the *Native Taxa of the North American Plains,* hoping that volume six would identify which variant of Queen Anne's lace, *Daucus carota,* she had found in the parking lot of the Burger King where she had had her dinner.

"Everybody says they look like seals," said Sol Sayre from behind her. "I think they're more like that Australian thing, the platypus."

"Ornithorhynchus anatinus," Marietta Mariano said automatically. "No, not really, Sol. They don't have that duck bill, or webbed feet — well, they wouldn't have, would they, on Mars?" But she abandoned the search for the book to come over and stand behind him. She was looking less at the television screen than at her assistant. She didn't like the way he sounded: absent-minded, edgy, depressed. He looked more than ever as though he hadn't had enough sleep. There were circles under his eyes, the pain lines deeper on his young face. She hoped he wasn't going to go through another of those bad times when, she guessed, the pain of his injuries flared up, or maybe just the realization of how bad they were came over him. She wanted to pat his shoulder. Instead, she said, "How much longer before those Martians get here?"

"Oh, a long time yet, I guess," Sayre said dreamily. "Another one died last night."

"Another Martian? That leaves, what, about six?"

"No, no. Another one of the crew died. A lot of them are pretty sick, you know."

Professor Mariano nodded. There had been all too much worry about the problems of the Martians and the astronauts, she thought, and not nearly enough about the problems of the Earth. "Oh," he said, "and the bees' vents were stuck up again. I cleared them out. I think it was a Hershey bar this time."

"Kids," she said, turning to look at the glass-walled, slab-sided hive across the room, where the insects crawled all over each other endlessly. "Serve us all right," she said, "if they interbreed with the African bees and sting us all to death — Sol! What's that?"

She had just noticed the potted, scarlet-bloomed plant by the window that had not been there a few hours before.

"Oh," Sayre said without turning, "I brought in a loosestrife specimen. I thought if I studied it, I could find something it was good for."

"You've been keeping yourself busy, haven't you? But it would be better," she said bitterly, "if you'd find a good way to kill it. It just doesn't belong

here." She sighed, and mused. "Wouldn't it be wonderful if the kids would suddenly decide they could get high smoking it? Sneak in at night, and cut it all down? Get the Feds to spray it with paraquat or something, all over the country?" She laughed, pleased to have found something to cheer Sol up with . . . less pleased, a lot less pleased, when she saw that he wasn't smiling.

There weren't many smiles in Solomon Sayre just then, as he had a problem unsolved. Since he could not see a way to solve it, he tried to forget it. He kept himself busy with things that weren't his job or didn't need doing; when that didn't work, he plumped himself down before the television set and tried to let the Martians take his mind off his problem. He watched the film clips and the panel of experts — Carl Sagan and Ray Bradbury and some Russian named Shklovski, speaking by satellite. He didn't always hear what they were saying, but he kept on watching. He watched even when the Martians were long gone and the station picked up the baseball game of the week in its fourth inning, with the Mariners leading Chicago five to nothing.

Baseball was not the answer to his problem. The problem was that the Lincoln's brakes had finally gone out altogether, and fixing them had taken his dope money. He had three dollars and forty cents in his pocket, and his next check not due for two days.

Two days was an impossible length of time to wait.

Sol couldn't force himself to sit still any longer. Three dollars wasn't enough to score. It was just about gas money to get to his pusher. Sol wasn't even sure that he trusted himself to drive all the way into the city, the way he was feeling. But if he did, he thought, maybe Razor would just this once be reasonable.

He needed to get himself calmed down. . . .

Well, of course, that had just been a joke of the professor's, he told himself. All the same, he began stripping the leaves off the scarlet-flowered weed. He put them into the toaster oven Professor Mariano kept for heating up her hot dogs for lunch; when they began to smell toasted, he crumbled them into his hash pipe.

They did burn, at least. That was all. They tasted terrible and made him cough raspingly. When the pipeful was gone, his throat felt as though he had swallowed barbed wire, and of any sort of high, there was no sign at all — and the problem remained.

Sol had never, ever stolen anything from the nature preserve. It was his source of pride: he had never stolen at all for his habit, and never intended to.

Still, if he borrowed something and paid it back before anyone noticed it was gone. . . . And there was, he knew, a petty-cash box in the bottom drawer of Professor Mariano's desk.

It was locked. Patiently, Sol poked into the lock with a paper clip. It

wouldn't open. Not that way, at least; when at last he forsook subtlety and stealth in favor of prying it open with a screwdriver, what was in it was twelve pennies, a Kennedy half-dollar, and an I.O.U. in the professor's handwriting for $25.00.

So there was no solution there.

There was no solution anywhere that Solomon Sayre could see. If there was even a hope, it lay in the compassion and human decency of a dealer in drugs.

Sol drove with great care in the heavy traffic, late commuters coming out of the city, suburbanites heading in for a night on the town. He took the long way, for he had no extra change for tolls, and his body was beginning to shake.

Fate was kind to him. There was no one in the diner but Razor, hunched over a cup of cold coffee at the end of the counter.

Razor was less kind.

"No credit, man," he said, not even looking up from the coffee.

"But I'm a good customer, man. You know I'm good for the money. The day after tomorrow —"

"Day after tomorrow you can come see me if you wants to," said Razor to the coffee cup.

"I can't wait till then," Sol explained. He was being very reasonable about the thing, he was sure, if only the dealer would see it. "Understand, man? The thing is, I can't make it till the day after tomorrow, you know? I'll just fall apart."

Razor looked at him at last. "Go get you some bread," he advised.

"Ah, no," Sol pleaded. "If I try mugging somebody or anything like that, they'll get me, sure. I'll be cold turkey in jail, you know? I'll die! I'll — I don't know what I'd do," he said desperately. "But what's going to happen if I just can't keep my mouth shut? I mean, like if they offer me a deal —"

The counterman stood up. He looked swiftly through the window at the empty parking lot. "What you sayin'?" he demanded softly. "You turn me in?"

"I didn't say that! I don't want to make any trouble, but — *Please,*" he said abjectly. "Look, I'll pay double. I swear I will."

The candy man studied him appraisingly. "Let's see that watch you got on," he said at last.

Sol could not force himself to drive all the way back to his room. He turned the Lincoln in at the nature preserve driveway, ran to unlock the gate, drove through without bothering to relock it behind him. In the cabin he switched on all the lights and flung the restroom door open. He rolled up his shirt and wrapped his arm in rubber tubing. The veins stood out like the ones on Professor Mariano's hands.

He had trouble finding a clear spot, but when the rush came, he slumped down beside the toilet bowl to welcome it.

All the colors of the world had changed around him. The stark little washroom was warm and loving; even the pink plastic toilet seat was a prettier shade than he remembered. Even his back didn't hurt anymore — oh, sure, he corrected himself, smiling, it *hurt*, but the pain certainly wasn't anything you could call *bad.* He sat there for some time, letting the warm numbness seep through him. Then he got up and walked, stiltlike, into the nature preserve office.

He caught a glimpse of the old Lincoln outside with the lights still on, and grinned; if he left it that way, he'd have a dead battery when he got in. It was also amusing that he had left his works in the washroom, where the first person to come in the next morning would find them. He reminded himself to take care of those details pretty soon. He laughed out loud, or thought he did, when he passed the poor bald loosestrife in the pot next to the beehive. Stripped the leaves off to smoke! What a dumb thing to do!

Then he stopped smiling. There was something new and very wrong.

The red-purple blossoms that climbed the stalk hadn't changed. The lowest part of the stem was still bare. But just under the flowers, something different had appeared. It was a tangle of green, lush and dense, almost like a bird's nest or a woven basket. And he could see, inside it, faintly writhing, something that had not been there before.

It was alive. It had the head of a rat, the slim, supple body of a weasel, the spindly legs of a newborn racehorse.

"A Martian," Sayre whispered, blinking. The professor had been right. He scrabbled through the litter on her desk until he found a pair of shears. He fell on the plant, hacking it off at the roots. He could feel the tiny thing writhing in its nest as, shuddering, he bore it to the toaster oven. Grinning like a berserker, he crammed it inside and set the control to BROIL. Fire would kill it! As it seared and popped inside, he could see the creature dashing itself against the smoky glass of the door.

Solomon Sayre, panting, took thought. If there was one, there might be more. He leaped to the window.

Sure enough, there was a whole new stand of purple loosestrife along the algae-green pond, just yards away — near enough so that he could see that each of them, too, had a swelling below the blossoms, swellings that pulsed like the belly of a pregnant woman.

Fire would kill them, too.

The only problem was technical, and he solved it at once. A flamethrower. What could he improvise to do the job? Inspired, godlike in his power, Sol dumped liquid fertilizer out of the sprayer, filled it with kerosene, plunged out into the night. He pumped the pressure high, ignited the spray with his cigarette lighter, hosed flame at the stand of vegetation.

It crisped and smoldered. He could hear the tiny infant Martians shriek-

ing their despairing fury as he torched them. When they were cinders, he hurried back into the cabin, certain of what he must do next. The world must be warned!

Professor Mariano had come in while he was outside, sitting at her desk, gazing at him with love and admiration. "I want a conference call," he snapped. "I want the heads of the Fish and Wildlife Service in every state — right away! Yes, and you'd better get the White House in on it, too!"

"Right away, Sol," she whispered, picking up the phone. He sat down, calm and confident, regarding her while she dialed. "You look wonderful," she said, and blushed as she began to speak into the phone. She looked wonderful, too, he saw, and he could not remember why he had ever thought she was really old. She had loosened her hair and put on a white dress with a red sash. The age lines were gone from her pretty, tender face.

"They're ready, Sol," she said, handing him the phone.

He knew exactly what to say. "This is a nationwide alert," he said. "Exotic species have been taken over by the Martians. The only defense is to burn them at once. All of them! All of the introduced species — water hyacinth, exotic birds and insects, anything that doesn't belong where it is. Burn them! There's no time to delay; start organizing flamethrower crews at once!"

He didn't ask if there were any questions. He didn't need to. These were resourceful, well-trained people. They understood at once, and there was no discussion. "At once," they said. Or: "Right, Mr. Sayre!" He could hear them all hanging up, click, click, clickety.

Then he heard one final voice: "Mr. Sayre, I won't keep you, but this is the President. I just wanted to say I think you're doing one heck of a job."

"Thank you, Mr. President," Sayre said, deeply moved.

"Oh, Sol," whispered Marietta Mariano, lifting her lips to his. "You've saved us all."

But even as he reached out for her, he stopped. Something was wrong. He could hear it.

Yes! The bees! The buzzing in the glass high-rise held a new and ominous note. He gave the woman a reckless grin. "Hold that thought," he called as he turned and leaped to the hive.

There was no doubt of it: the bees were turning into Martians, too. He could see them, tiny little stilt-legged rat-things among the crawling, seething insect mass. Sol laughed out loud. For this he wouldn't even need fire; he clenched his fist and, with one sharp blow, shattered the glass. Furious insects flew out in all directions. More stayed inside, buzzing ominously, dangerously, as he reached in. He scooped the tiny bodies out by the handful, tossing them into the air regardless of stings. The important thing was to get at the tiny newborn Martians. They writhed away, but they could not escape. One by one he caught them between thumb and forefinger . . . and squeezed, *pop.*

When the last horror was dead, he wiped his fingers on the edge of the table and turned, smiling, to Marietta Mariano.

Her blue eyes were brimming with tears. "My poor darling," she whispered. "They've stung you a million times."

Godlike and triumphant, he reached out for her. He could see the angry red spots covering his arms, but he felt no pain at all. . . .

Not then, and not ever again.

When the first volunteer arrived to open the cabin the next morning, the first thing he noticed was that someone had been burning trash against the side of the building. There were scorch marks. The second thing was that the inside of the cabin was full of buzzing bees.

The third thing he saw was the body of Solomon Sayre.

By the time Professor Mariano arrived, the old face had aged worse than ever with bitter weeping. The police had been there, and the coroner.

"It wasn't the bee stings, ma'am," said the policeman. "The medical examiner says they might have killed him, but he was already dead. Heroin. An overdose."

"Heroin!" Professor Mariano gasped. "Oh, my God! What a terrible accident."

The policeman shook his head. "The M.E.'s calling it homicide, ma'am. It was the pure stuff. Somebody didn't like him, so they gave him uncut, and he o.d.'ed on it." He hesitated, then: "Look at his face, though, ma'am? He's still smiling. It killed him, all right, but you can see he really was feeling fine when he died."

THE LITERARY CAREER OF FREDERIK POHL
Current Directions . . .

When asked what I've done over the years, my simplest answer is to say, "I've done science fiction." I've done it as a fan, as an agent, as an editor, and (concurrently with most of the other things, and outlasting them) as a writer, which is what I like to do best. I suppose I would have turned out to be a writer of some kind or another even if I had never discovered that first science-fiction magazine when I was ten years old. After all, I do write other things. I've written nonfiction of various kinds, like the handbook of the American political process, *Practical Politics*, and some historical works (which is how I happened to become the Encyclopedia Britannica's authority on the Roman emperor, Tiberius). I've written other kinds of fiction in fairly copious amounts, as well — for example, my latest novel, *Chernobyl*, is fiction but unfortunately not science fiction, being about the terrible nuclear accident in the Soviet Ukraine in April, 1986. But science fiction is what I always come back to, since I like it best; and if I'd missed discovering it, I'd

have missed an awful lot of fun.

Part of the fun, I admit, is in finding that other people enjoy what I write. It is really nice to hear from people who've read my books (even if I can't answer all the letters as fully and relaxedly as I wish), to meet them at science-fiction conventions (a dozen or more every year), and above all to pick up an award now and then. (Six Hugos, two Nebulae, two Campbells, and an American Book Award, among others — but who counts?) I concede it would be a lot less pleasurable if my books were panned, or ignored, or (horrors!) maybe not even published at all. But a good deal of the enjoyment comes from just the writing. Writing a science-fiction novel is a lot like designing a grand new building, solving a really tricky problem in mathematics, and winning a hard-fought game of chess, all rolled into one. It takes all the skills I have, and always demands more . . . which is the best description of a really rewarding hobby.

How wonderfully lucky it is for me that my hobby turns out also to be a way of earning a living!

This issue of *Amazing Stories* is stated to mark my fiftieth anniversary as a professional science-fiction writer, but I think I should come right out and confess that there could be some argument about that. That first professional sale is in this issue. It's a poem rather than a story, to be sure, but that's not the arguable part. What is a little fuzzy is the date. I wrote the poem in 1935. It was accepted (by T. O'Conor Sloane, Ph.D., then *Amazing*'s editor) in 1936. It was published in 1937 . . . and paid for in 1938; so at some point in that three-year period I did become a pro, but it's hard to say exactly when.

Nevertheless, I've now completed just about fifty years of doing what I like best to do, namely writing science fiction. I see no reason for wanting to stop. I don't suppose that it's statistically likely that I can go on doing it for another fifty years, human mortality being what it is . . . but I won't voluntarily stop trying!

. . . and Past Achievements

The Space Merchants, with C. M. Kornbluth. Ballantine, 1953.

Gladiator-at-Law, with C. M. Kornbluth. Ballantine, 1955.

Preferred Risk, with Lester del Rey. Simon and Schuster, 1955.

Alternating Currents, short-story collection. Ballantine, 1956.

The Case Against Tomorrow, short-story collection. Ballantine, 1957.

Wolfbane, with C. M. Kornbluth. Ballantine, 1959.

Drunkard's Walk. Ballantine, 1960.

The Man Who Ate the World, short-story collection. Ballantine, 1960.

Turn Left at Thursday, short-story collection. Ballantine, 1961.

A Plague of Pythons. Ballantine, 1965.

The Age of the Pussyfoot. Trident Pess, 1969.

Day Million, short-story collection. Ballantine, 1970.

The Best of Frederik Pohl, short-story collection. Doubleday, 1975.

Man Plus, Nebula-award winner. Random House, 1976.

Gateway, Nebula-award winner. St. Martin's Press, 1977.

Jem: The Making of Utopia. St. Martin's Press, 1979.

Beyond the Blue Event Horizon. Ballantine, 1980.

The Cool War. Ballantine, 1981.

Heechee Rendezvous. Ballantine, 1984.

The Merchants' War. St. Martin's Press, 1984.

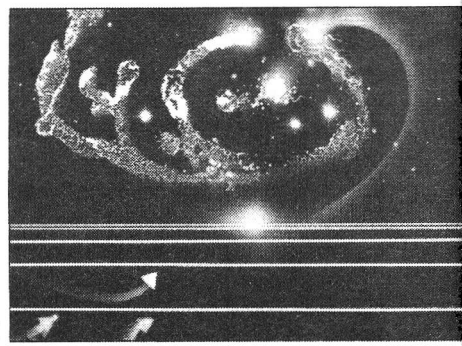
The Years of the City, linked stories. Simon and Schuster, 1984.

Black Star Rising. Ballantine, 1985.

Annals of the Heechee. Ballantine, 1987.

On Exhibit

Peter Botsis



"Self-Portrait," 1986

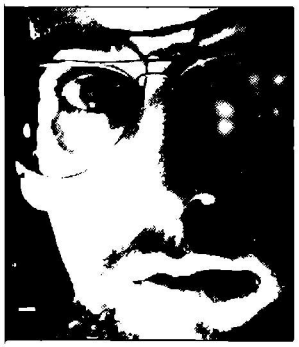
"To me, the most interesting aspect of SF and fantasy has always been the sense of individual creation," claims artist Peter Botsis. "Each writer, reader, and artist creates his own interpretation of the future, aliens, whatever the story involves. This allows me, as an artist, to develop new architecture and hairstyles, as well as creatures and spaceships. This endless opportunity to design, create, and explore is common only in SF and fantasy."

Peter Botsis is currently employed as a full-time commercial art instructor at a state-run vocational center in New York. He received his bachelor's degree from State University of New York. Afterward, he attended Rochester Institute of Technology, where he received a Master of Science for Teachers; then he studied at Graphic Careers, a graphic-arts school run by a large advertising art studio.

A large portion of Peter's two-dimensional work is comprised of colored pencil blended in layers to achieve a "painterly" look. He then airbrushes highlights or subtle blending into the main elements, to create a more cohesive finished product. Peter also works in 3-D and has just begun to explore the possibilities of applying this craft to the SF and fantasy fields. Basically, when working in 3-D, he constructs a model of chicken wire, clay, or plaster. He then airbrushes the model, adds teeth, places in the hair, etc. This finished figure is photographed and often retouched for special effects.

Peter's current projects include negotiations with a toy manufacturer to sculpt a series of heads based on the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® cartoon characters. He is also discussing the possibility of adapting a Roger Zelazny novel into a limited-series graphic rendition. And for the future, he hopes to become more involved in SF and fantasy book cover illustration, where he believes the most creative freedom and artistic rewards exist.

For more information, write to: Peter Botsis, 1239 University Ave., Rochester, NY 14607.



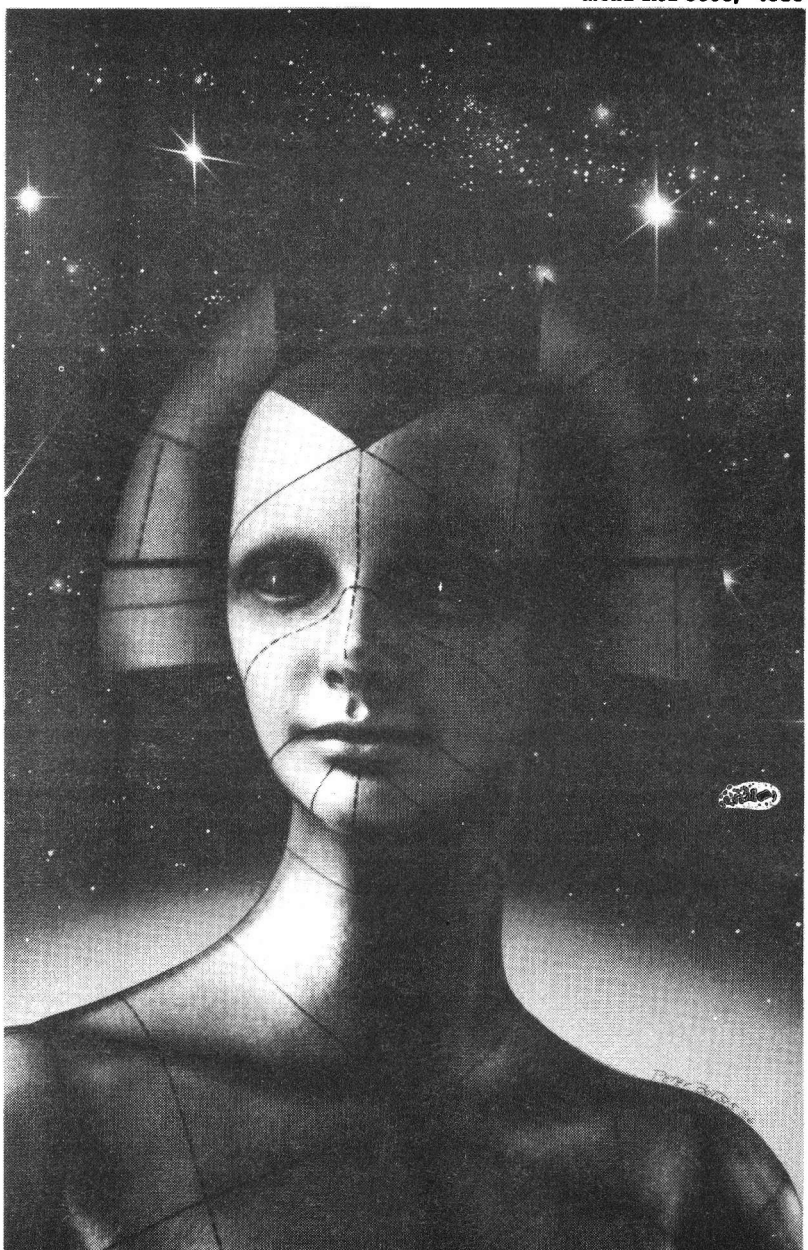
"My Lady," 1987

Exhibit

Peter Botsis

"Mr. President"

"Mona Lisa 3000," 1986



FOR GENERATIONS CANCER PLAGUED THIS FAMILY. THEN WE CAME INTO THE PICTURE.

It's a tragic coincidence that cancer has taken so many members of this family over the years.

It took Frank Domato in 1961. Patricia O'Hara Brown in 1974. And Serafino Gentile in 1982.

But the fact that the chain of tragedies has now been broken is no coincidence at all.

Over the last 40 years, research programs supported by the American Cancer Society have made increasing progress in the treatment, detection and prevention of cancer.

In 1985 alone, the Society funded over 700 projects conducted by the most distinguished scientists and research institutions in the country.

So it's no coincidence that in 1986, cancer did *not* take Debra Gentile—Frank Domato's great-granddaughter. Just as it didn't take hundreds of thousands of others who have been successfully treated for the disease.

You see, we are winning.
But we need you to help keep it that way.

AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY
Help us keep winning.

IMPROBABLE BESTIARY: The Bandersnatch (*Frumius Carrollii*)

You cannot catch a Bandersnatch
With cages, traps or snares,
Or nooses, knots, or lobster-pots
Or other such affairs.
The plan you need that's guaranteed
To lure them from their lairs —
To catch a batch of Bandersnatches —
Catch them UNAWARES!

Any physicist would lack words
To explain how this takes place,
But the Bandersnatch goes *backwards*
Relative to Time and Space.
From the Future, its location
Changes yesterwards so fast
That its final destination
Is three Tuesdays in the *Past.*
Thus the Bandersnatch migration
Is a strange phenomenon:
It arrives before it gets there,
And it leaves before it's gone!

You cannot match the Bandersnatch
For doing what it doesn't;
It hides behind the yesterdays
And pops out where it wasn't.
You cannot catch the Bandersnatch
With handcuffs, gun, or warrant
Unless you know a way to go
And meet it where you aren't.

Bandersnatches may astound one;
All the same, I must insist
That the fact nobody's found one
Is the proof that they exist!
You may sneak up right behind one,
But it's gone before you've blinked.
Ah, but if you ever *find* one,
Well, that proves it: they're extinct.

— F. Gwynplaine MacIntyre

FAKE-OUT
by Andrew Weiner
art: Bob Eggleton

Born in England in 1949, Andrew Weiner took up permanent residence in Canada in 1974. He currently lives in Toronto with his wife and his four-year-old son. He works as a full-time free-lance writer, although only an occasional writer of science fiction. His first short story appeared in Harlan Ellison's anthology Again, Dangerous Visions *(1972), and he has since published more than twenty short stories in various magazines and anthologies. In addition, the author has been a nominee for the Canadian Fantasy & Science Fiction award and the British SF awards.*

1

I was down at the docks, checking out a tip on a shipment of phony Louie DiBee jeans. A not very hot tip.

"We released that shipment yesterday," the customs clerk told me. "The papers looked in order."

"Terrific," I said. "Don't you think they can fake the papers, too?"

"What's the big deal?" the clerk asked. "I mean, who's it really going to hurt?"

"Louie DiBianco for starters," I said.

Even as I stood there, talking to the clerk, those counterfeit jeans would be hitting the racks in the discount designer clothing outlets. And our client would be out another couple of thousand bucks.

"Poor Louie," the clerk said. "My heart just bleeds for him. I mean, what did he make last year — ten, twenty million?"

Yeah, poor Louie. It was a common enough sentiment, but it certainly didn't make my job easier. Neither did the fact that I largely agreed with it.

"According to Louie," I said, "the money is the least of it. Getting ripped off, he can handle that. But what he can't stand is being defiled. Seeing his name attached to inferior goods."

"Oh," the clerk said, "the horror of it all."

The odds, in fact, were pretty good that the kids who bought those phony jeans would never notice the difference, except maybe in the pocketbook. Not if the fakes were good enough. And when you're copying a mass-market designer item like the Louie DiBee jean, it isn't terribly hard to match the quality.

We had run tests in the past, and typically, there was no statistical differ-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ence. The fakes stood up just as well to regular washing and wearing as the genuine article. Or to put it another way, they were just as shoddily made and disintegrated just as fast, but not a moment faster.

Nonetheless, the honor of the agency, such as it was, demanded that I stand up for our client.

"Nice shirt," I told the clerk. "What is that, a Ramon Meliere?"

"Right," he said.

"Wrong," I said. "It's a ringer, and not a very good one." I grabbed his sleeve. "That isn't 100 per cent cotton, and the weave is back-to-front."

"You're kidding," he said. "I bought it at Bloomingdales."

"Maybe from a van parked behind Bloomingdales," I said. "What did you pay — $39, $49?"

"$59," he said. "It retails at $139."

"A *real* Ramon Meliere retails at $139."

I was just about to start in on his tie when I got the beep. A triple beep at that. Urgent business.

"Excuse me," I said.

I turned my back on the clerk, raised my wrist to my face, and voice-activated the cellywatch. "Lyman," I said, or rather whispered. I had only been wearing the thing a few weeks, and I still felt faintly ridiculous talking into it.

"This is Boone. Drop whatever you're doing, and get back here right now. We're in the lab."

End of message.

Terse even for Boone. And she must have been very agitated about something to call me direct rather than ask her secretary to get me on the line.

It was cool and breezy down by the docks; stifling, back uptown. And urgent business was the last thing I needed on a Friday afternoon. On the other hand, maybe it would be something interesting this time. I was tired of chasing down copycat clock radios and fraudulent designer snow tires.

I turned toward the door, hoping to get out of there before the clerk got in a Dick Tracy crack, but I wasn't quite fast enough.

"Your shoes," I told him, as a parting shot. "Obviously not leather. Some sort of plastic. And definitely not Pouti, whatever the initial on the buckle says."

"But I bought them in a regular store."

"Ah, well," I said. "Who does it hurt?"

"My feet," he said.

2

I didn't bother to tell the cabbie, but his cab was obviously a cheap Far East knockoff. You could tell just from the upholstery. You could tell even

better in a front-end collision, which I sincerely hoped we weren't going to have.

You get tired of pointing out this sort of stuff after a while, tired and cynical. Nobody really wants to hear it, after all. And you get to the point where everything around you looks fake. There are days when I find myself looking suspiciously at the sun, as though it might have been replaced by some artifact with inferior candlepower.

Boone was pacing up and down in the lab, puffing away vigorously on a cigarette, when I got there. She was wearing her white lab coat, the one she always wore for the newsvid clips. Laurie Boone, scientific detective, tireless defender of intellectual property. Actually, I had never seen her touch a lab instrument. She wore the coat to keep her designer suits clean when she came down to the lab to harangue the technicians. Real designer suits, too. Or at least, I had no reason to believe otherwise.

Boone was my boss, the founder and president of Boone Counter-Counterfeit. She held degrees in law and engineering as well as a Harvard M.B.A. She was brilliant, she was gorgeous, and she was merciless.

"You took your time," she said by way of greeting. "Look at this."

She motioned toward the machine bench. It was littered with watches in various stages of disassembly.

"I saw those already," I said. "Fake Bunheim. Nothing special."

"These are special."

The Bunheim gold watch was one of the most exclusive and expensive men's watches in the world, and therefore one of the most widely knocked-off. The real ones had a solid gold case and handmade-in-Switzerland works. The fakes usually had as little gold as they could get away with, and the mechanism from a $10 watch.

The people from Bunheim had brought in this batch for analysis the other day. Remarkably good fakes, they had said, but not quite good enough. They lacked the 24-digit serial number microgrooved into the back of every real Bunheim watch, having only a meaningless scrawl instead.

"Special how?" I asked.

"Gruber tested scrapings from the casing this morning," Boone told me. "Pure gold."

"Unusual," I said.

"More than unusual," she said. "When I say pure, I mean purer than Bunheim. I mean a few thousandths of a point purer than any refined gold has any right to be."

"Sampling error," I suggested.

"There's more," she said. "Gruber opened one up. He had a hell of a time getting it open, too, as it was completely sealed up. Had to cut his way in with a laser."

She held up a watch with the back removed. Inside was another casing, this one shiny black.

"And what's inside that one?" I asked. "Another casing? A rubber band?"

"We don't know," she said. "It's impenetrable."

"Nothing is impenetrable."

"It is to anything we can throw at it."

"Strange," I said. "Very strange. Like that business with the Eleni dresses, only stranger."

I hadn't worked on the Eleni case myself, but I'd picked up the buzz around the office at the time. Eleni gowns were pure silk, very high fashion, and sold through only a handful of authorized distributors. A few months ago, a batch of phony Elenis had shown up in one of the Jersey discount malls, a superb knockoff job. The design was accurate down to the last stitch, and the fabric looked and felt just like silk.

On analysis, that fabric had turned out to be a synthetic. But what a synthetic: stain-repelling, stronger than silk, machine washable. Whoever dreamed it up could probably have made a fortune on the open market, but some people like to do things the hard way.

We had got the fake Elenis pulled off the market. But we never did find out who was behind them.

"This Bunheim ringer," I said, "it keeps time like the real thing, right?"

"Better."

3

Edelweiss Jewelry was a run-down dump, its display window full of cheap pendants and digital watches. It was an unlikely sort of outlet for Bunheim watches, even fake ones selling for a third of the price of the real thing.

The owner of the store, a short greying character somewhere in his sixties, had been less than cooperative with the Bunheim people, but I hoped to do better.

"I'm with BCC," I told him. "Boone Counter-Counterfeit. We're a private detective agency specializing in intellectual property."

"Intellectual what?"

"I'm not talking the *New York Review of Books*," I said. "I'm talking trademark, industrial design, patent, copyright. I'm talking images, ideas. The kind you ripped off when you sold those phony watches."

"I only sold three of them," he said. "That's such a big deal? Anyway, how was I to know they were fake?"

"I would have thought it might have crossed your mind," I said. "Given that the wholesale on a real Bunheim is less than you were charging retail."

"I'm trying to give people a break," he said. "Is that such a terrible crime?"

"It's a crime for sure," I said. "Trademark infringement, maybe passing-off as well — whatever Bunheim's lawyers can make stick. How terrible?

We'll have to leave that up to the judge to decide."

"What judge?"

"The one who's going to try your case when Bunheim presses charges. Which I can assure you the lawyers are going to do unless I get a little cooperation around here."

"I'm just a little guy," he said.

"Right," I said. "What are you? Five feet four? Save it for the judge. Or tell me about the big guy."

Long silence.

"What is it?" I asked. "Mob stuff? We're talking crime org here?"

He shook his head. "I don't think so. They didn't threaten me or anything. But they were spooky all the same."

"How spooky?"

"I don't know," he said. "Nothing you could put your finger on. They just weren't like regular people, you know? All business, not so much as a *how are ya.* Cold, real cold. The woman as much as the man."

I took down the description, for whatever it was worth.

"I suppose you've no idea where I can find these people?"

Another pause.

"They left a card," he said, finally. "In case I wanted to reorder."

He showed me the card.

PETERS IMPORT/EXPORT
Norman C. Peters
Senior Sales Representative

There was no address. But there was a local phone number.

"Amateur city," I said.

I turned to leave, then turned back to the jeweler.

"Incidentally," I told him, "that alligator on your shirt is the wrong dye color. But then again, who's going to notice, right?"

4

It was after six by the time I got back to the agency, but Hendricks, as I had expected, was still down in the lab.

Hendricks was our top computer specialist. He was working late on a reverse engineering job on a microchip from a cheapie clone of a best-selling business computer. The chip mimicked the operating instructions of the other computer, and it was in all probability an exact knockoff.

Of course, proving copyright infringement was only the beginning. We still had to track the clone to one of half a dozen third-world countries, and to persuade the appropriate government to throw a bunch more of its citi-

zens out of work so that our client could keep its overpriced product overpriced and squeeze out a few million more bucks. All in a day's work for BCC.

"Hendricks," I said. "I need you to track a phone number."

He looked up from his screen and glared at me.

"How many times have I told you not to smoke in here?" he said.

I took the cigarette out of my mouth and looked around Hendricks's cubbyhole for an ashtray. There wasn't one, so I stubbed it out on my shoe and shoved it back in the pack.

"Sorry," I said. "What about this number?"

"Track it yourself," he said, intent once again on the graphics display on his monitor.

"You know I can't keyboard the way you can. You're the best there is."

Hendricks was not immune to a little flattery, but he was a stubborn bastard all the same.

"For chrissakes," he said. "Can't you just bribe someone at the phone company?"

"On a Friday night? Besides, you know the boss thinks that bribing people is tacky. Bad for the agency's image. Expensive, too."

So Hendricks tracked it for me, weaving through the phone company's puny defenses and into their customer files in the time it would have taken me to sign on.

It was a residential line, disconnected two days before. There was no new listing for the subscriber. But the address at least gave me a starting point.

5

The cab carried the logo of the cab company I had called, but there was something just a little off about the design. And from the conversation between the driver and his despatcher, it became clear that they were running a private operation, scalping calls to the real cab company.

But then again, what did I care, as long as it took me from A to B?

"Who does it hurt, right?" I asked the driver.

"Who does what hurt?"

He had six inches and fifty pounds on me, and I no longer carried a gun. So I kept quiet the rest of the ride.

I used to carry a gun back when I was a real private detective, before I got into this intellectual property scam. But Boone had made me give it up. Definitely not in keeping with the image of the agency, and besides, what did I need it for, anyway? Copyright infringers and the like tend to be a fairly mild-mannered bunch. I could just see myself down at the central library, terrorizing high-school students over the photocopying machine.

The address Hendricks had got me from the phone company computer

was an apartment on the tenth floor of a midprice high-rise building. Lots of vidcam eyes in the lobby, but a five-year-old could have jimmied the lock on the apartment itself.

The place had been stripped to the bare walls. Not so much as a matchbook cover, although in my experience matchbook covers are pretty overrated as clues. Usually, if you can find them at all, they just invite you to earn big money as a chemical engineer, or something like that.

I went back down to the ground floor and found the super. I had to bang on his door for five minutes before he heard me. He was wearing headphones, with one of those new laser-slug personal disc players strapped around his neck. The player was a knockoff, and when he pulled out the slug, I could see that it was a bootleg, too. They'd fudged the record company trademark, but not enough to make any difference if it ever came to court.

The super was initially unhelpful; his resistance weakened, though, after I dipped into my expense budget and used his terminal to flash some points to his bank account.

"Never saw them before yesterday," he said. "Quiet, you know. Moved out in a big rush."

"Forwarding address?"

He shook his head. "Maybe you could get it from the moving company. Rapid? Flash? Something like that."

He hit the terminal for the videotext directory, scanned the moving company listings.

"Mickie Quickie," he said. "That's the one."

Mickie Quickie advertised round-the-clock moving services. But what I got when I called was an answering service. After a few minutes negotiation, I flashed a bribe and got the home phone number.

"Mickie?" I said.

"Arthur," he said. "Can't this wait until Monday? They got mud-wrestling on the sports channel, and anyway, my schleppers are out getting buzzed."

"I just need some information."

Out came the card again. Boone was not going to be happy when she saw my expenses claim. But Bunheim could afford it.

"Sure," the moving man told me. "Some job. You should have seen the crates they had in there. Hernia city."

He gave me the address of a midtown town house.

6

Clearly, I was dealing with amateurs here. Amateurs who left business cards, used a commercial moving company, and believed in the confidential-

ity of the relationship between mover and client. They might as well have chalked arrows on the sidewalk, the way we used to do back in Boy Scouts.

Not that I lasted long in Boy Scouts. Authority issues.

What I should have done at this point, of course, was call Boone, get her to call the Bunheim lawyers, and get them to find a judge and get a warrant. If they could find a judge who wasn't in the Hamptons or glued to the mud-wrestling on the sports channel, and who didn't take too narrow a view on civil liberties issues.

I should have done that, but I was dealing with amateurs, and I was overconfident. So what I did instead was take a cab to the town house and ring the doorbell. The bell played an old Neil Diamond tune. I wondered if he was collecting royalties.

No answer. No lights on in the house. I skirted around the back and climbed over the fence. There was a brick patio, and a big sliding glass door leading to the living room. There was just enough moonlight to see that the living room was piled high with crates.

The sliding door was a little easier to force open than the crates.

What I expected to find in the crates, of course, was fake Bunheim watches. And I did find some, in the third crate I opened. But the first crate was full of carefully packaged art deco lamps, all different, all signed. If they were the real thing, and my guess was that they were, they were worth a great deal of money. The second crate held what looked like museum-quality Chinese ceramics. The third had the watches. The fourth was oil paintings, and if they were fakes, they were faked beautifully. It would take lab tests to tell for sure. But you develop a sense for these things after a while. What I was looking at, in the beam of my flashlight, was almost certainly a real, if minor, Turner. And behind that was a Van Gogh.

"Perhaps you'd like some more light?" said a voice from out of the darkness.

The lights came on, and I saw the woman standing in the doorway, holding something that wasn't a gun. It was an almost-flat metal box that in itself didn't look particularly menacing. But she was pointing it at me just like a gun.

The woman holding the thing that wasn't a gun was blonde, thirtyish, wearing a pink silk dressing gown over what looked like a very elegant nightdress.

"A Miranda Marchant?" I asked. "Eight hundred bucks at Saks. Or is that another one of your lines?"

"You're not a burglar," she said.

"Sure I am. You want to see my union card?"

"You're some kind of private investigator."

"Hey," I said. "No big deal." Hands raised, I started to back toward the sliding door. "I'll go quietly. No need for guns, or whatever that is. In fact, you should thank me. I've probably blown the case."

Boone, I thought, would be furious. But I was not altogether confident I would see Boone again.

"This way," she said, motioning through the other door, the one that led into the rest of the house.

"You can even call the cops if you like," I said. "B and E. Dead to rights."

"Move," she said.

I threw a last glance at the crates.

"Those paintings . . ."

"Real."

7

The dining room was almost completely undecorated. A single anonymous glass-and-chrome table and four chairs sat on the bare wood floor. On the table was a square, copper-colored metal box, about the size of a portable TV. It was almost featureless, but for a series of depressions on the top.

Still pointing the not-gun at me with one hand, the woman placed three fingers of the other into the depressions on top of the box. She held them there for a moment. Then she took her hand away. She motioned for me to sit at the table.

"What is that?" I asked. "Some new kind of microwave oven?"

"Quiet," she said, waving the not-gun at me.

I wondered if I was being held captive at the point of a can of sardines. Something in her expression told me not to check it out.

"Mind if I smoke?" I asked.

"Yes," she said. "I do mind."

We sat in silence for what seemed like a year but was probably more like an hour. Then I heard the front door slam.

A man came into the dining room. Thirtyish, well dressed, stiff.

"Norm?" I asked.

He shrugged. "Tiresome," he said.

"What's tiresome?"

"You."

He came over and pulled me to my feet, looked me over.

"Easy," he said.

"What's easy?"

I never did get to hear the answer because suddenly I was lying in the bushes by the side of a road. A perfect jump-cut. I couldn't even remember blacking out.

It was still dark. My cellywatch told me it was four in the morning. The street sign told me I was a long way from the town house. Not that I had any immediate plans of returning.

I used the cellywatch to buzz Boone at her home.

"It's four in the morning," she told me.

"I know," I said. "I've been working. I cracked the Bunheim case. Or it cracked me."

"We're off the Bunheim case."

"Now you tell me. Why?"

"They didn't like the lab report. They didn't like my fee estimate. And they especially didn't like the fact that the jeweler you talked to is suing for mental duress. He claims that you roughed him up, psychologically speaking."

"That's a crock," I said. "I didn't even get that sarcastic with him."

"Go home, Lyman. We'll talk about this on Monday morning."

"Don't you want to know where these fakes are coming from?"

"What difference does it make? Taiwan, South Korea — what's the difference?"

"Try Mars," I said. "Or maybe Alpha Centauri."

8

I made one stop on the way over to Boone's, but I was there within half an hour.

Laurie Boone lived in a luxury condo overlooking the waterfront. She lived there alone. She had been married once, to some sort of merchant banker, but it hadn't taken. Her personal life, if she had one, was a mystery to her employees.

I had never been in her home before. It was like stepping into a design magazine.

"Real Breuer chairs?" I asked.

"That's between me and my decorator."

She was wearing jeans and a sweater. It was the first time I had seen her out of uniform, and she looked almost human.

She was also being unusually friendly.

"You want a drink?" she asked. "Or is it too early?"

Dawn was breaking outside her picture window.

"I wouldn't mind a beer," I said. "This is still yesterday, the way I see it."

She went through into the kitchen. I heard her opening the refrigerator.

I sat back on the couch and reached into my jacket pocket for my cigarettes. I seemed to have lost them somewhere.

I remembered that Boone was one of the few other people left in the world who still smoked.

"Do you have a cigarette?" I called after her.

"In my purse," she said. "On the armchair."

I crossed over and picked up her purse and took out the cigarettes. Right underneath the cigarettes was a thin metal box. I was still standing there,

staring at it, when she came back into the living room. She was holding a glass of beer in one hand and an identical box in the other. The box was pointed at me.

"Snap," she said.

"Snap?"

"Kid's card game," she said. "Match the card and win the deck. I used to play it with my mother. Or at least, Laurie did. Put that down."

I put the purse down.

"This is getting repetitive," I said. "What do you mean, 'Laurie did'?"

"That was very dumb of me, telling you to look in my purse," she said. "But at least it brings us to the point."

"The point?"

"I was hoping to talk you off the case," she said. "And if that didn't work, I was going to try sleeping with you."

"That would have been nice," I said. "Maybe we could still try that."

"I'm not Laurie Boone," she said.

"You're from Mars, too?"

"It isn't Mars," she said. "I don't know where it is, actually. There was no reason for me to know that. I'm not from there, anyway. I'm a bioreplica, a simulcra of Laurie Boone."

"That figures," I said. "Watches, jeans, cabs. Why not people, too?"

She sat down on the couch opposite me, still holding the not-gun pointed at me.

"They did a nice job," I told her. "In fact, I think I like you better than Boone. What did you do with her, anyway? Kill her?"

"We don't do that," she said. "We have to operate under certain rules. Mrs. Boone is in storage until we finish our business here. And I'm afraid that's where you're going, too."

"Wait a minute," I said. "At least tell me what all this is about."

"It's simple enough. Import-export. We sell marketable products, and we use the revenues to purchase certain native artifacts."

"Stolen artifacts," I said.

"In some cases," she said. "If something is for sale and we want it, we buy it. But we don't steal ourselves."

"Very moral," I said. "But why go to all this trouble. Why not just counterfeit the cash?"

"We like to stay clear of native security forces. And there's too much risk of detection in replicating monetary units, whereas no one worries that much about a few counterfeit products. It's seen as a largely victimless crime, after all. Except that Mrs. Boone was hitting a little too close to home, with the watches and with some of our other product lines. And now we have to take you out of the picture as well."

"This storage," I said. "Is it painful?"

"You won't feel a thing."

"Maybe I could have that beer first. I'm sort of thirsty."

She reached over to hand me the beer. I grabbed her arm and pulled her toward me. The not-gun slipped out of her hand and skidded across the floor toward me. The beer cascaded down on my trousers.

I scooped up her not-gun and pocketed it. Then I pulled out my own gun, the one I'd stopped off at my apartment to collect on the way over to Boone's, strictly as a precautionary measure. I hadn't seriously expected to use it, least of all on her.

And then the door of the apartment opened, and a very familiar stranger walked in, followed by Peters and the woman from the town house.

It took me a moment to recognize the stranger. I'd seen him in the mirror often enough, but never with a different suit on.

They stood and stared at me.

"Don't move," I said, holding Boone in front of me like a shield and pointing my gun at the back of her neck, "or I'll blow her away."

Not terribly original, I'll admit, but it had been a long night.

"So we'll make another," Peters said. "Easy come, easy go."

"All right," I said. "I'll kill you instead."

"Same applies," Peters said. "I'm just another reploid. You think anyone would come to this rathole of a planet in person if he could avoid it?"

He took a step toward me. So did the woman, and the guy who wasn't me.

"You can't shoot us all," Peters said.

"Yes, I can," I said. "And I will. You're not putting me in storage."

"Actually," Peters said, "I already did. Although obviously you don't remember that. The real Matt Lyman is in a tank in a warehouse down by the docks."

"What are you talking about?" I asked. "What kind of bullshit are you giving me here?"

"You're saying you already replaced him?" the fake Boone said. "Then why is he acting like this?"

Peters shrugged. "Like they say in the vernacular here, I screwed up. I was in too much of a hurry, and the conditioning didn't take. But it's okay. I made a better one."

He nodded toward the fake me.

I stood there listening to this exchange, feeling my heart pounding in my chest and the air rushing in and out of my lungs.

"You're bluffing," I said. "I can feel my heart pumping away. I'm the real Lyman."

"Feel her pulse," he said, indicating the fake Boone. "She's as human as anyone else on this planet. Bioreplication is one of our specialities, although we don't get much call for it around here."

It was true. She had a pulse. She breathed. Her skin was warm to the touch. Just like me.

"Don't fight it," Peters said. "You're one of us."

I shook my head in confusion.

"No," I said. "That can't be."

I don't know what I would have decided in the end, but they made the decision for me. Seeing my apparent disorientation, they chose that moment to rush me.

Peters was wrong. I nailed them all, all except the fake Boone, whom I was still holding in front of me.

The blood looked awfully authentic.

9

Later, the real Laurie Boone came to visit me in the police holding cell. She brought with her another fake Lyman.

"Christ," she said. "That's really amazing."

The ringer said nothing. He just stood there and stared at me through the bars.

"You better call the guard, Mrs. Boone," I told her, "because that guy standing next to you is not who you think he is. They pulled a switch. I'm the real Lyman."

There was a long pause.

"I'm sorry," she said, finally. "You're wrong. They found him with me, in the tank next to mine. I'm afraid that you're the counterfeit in this instance. Although you did some very nice work."

"It's a double fake-out," I said. "They put a ringer in the tank."

"Why would they do that?"

I had no immediate answer.

"I'm sorry," she said, again.

And then they left.

10

The police released me in a few days. They had no law on the books against killing alien-made reploids.

I was picked up immediately by government security types. I was interrogated at great length, but there was very little I could tell them. I insisted throughout that I was the real Matt Lyman. I still insist that.

Doctors poked and probed and concluded that I was absolutely identical to the ringer, whom, of course, they believed to be the real thing.

Finally, everyone lost interest.

"Just stay away from Matt Lyman and the Boone agency," they told me. "As long as you don't pose as Lyman, you'll be in the clear. There's no law against being identical to another human being."

"How about copyright infringement?"

"A human being," they told me, "is not an artistic work."

And then I was out on the street. Literally. I had no job, no apartment, no prospects. They did at least give me a new social security number. I got a job washing dishes in a greasy spoon and a room in a cheap hotel, and I studied to take my investigator's examination all over again.

Then the fake Boone looked me up. I knew it was the fake, because the real one wouldn't even return my calls. Also, she'd cut her hair shorter and was wearing eyeglasses. And she really was nicer than the real Boone — I hadn't been kidding her about that.

"How did you get out of jail?" I asked.

"I cooperated with the authorities. I told them everything I knew, which wasn't very much, and they had the charges dropped. Nobody gets that excited about counterfeiting."

"But you're an alien fabrication," I said.

"So are you."

"No, I'm not."

"We needn't get into that," she said. "If you want to think you're the real Lyman, who does it hurt?"

"What do you want from me, anyway? I'm the one who killed your buddies, remember?"

"They weren't my buddies," she said. "And anyway, you didn't know any better. The point is, I have a proposition. A business proposition."

Her proposition made a lot of sense.

11

So these days I go by the name of Rick Sanders, and the Laurie-double is called Sheila Frame. And I've grown a moustache, just in case anyone should mistake me for the phony Lyman. It itches sometimes, and it still irritates me to have to wear it, and to have to use that stupid new name. But otherwise I would have to say that things have gone down pretty smooth for me.

In the end it didn't turn out to be strictly business between me and Sheila, although the business side of things worked out pretty good, too. We live in a fifteen-room brownstone, now. We also have a country place in Vermont, and the way things are going, we're looking very seriously at a yacht. So really, I have no reason to envy the fake me. While he still sweats for slave wages over at Boone Counter-Counterfeit, I'm a full partner in Frame Sanders Anti-Fake. Also, I would bet that his personal life is nothing to write home about, and I should know.

As Sheila put it to me in that crumby hotel room: Who could be better at detecting fakes than we? Already we're going neck-and-neck in billings with

Boone, and next year I think we're going to pull ahead. It's a growth market, in any case, and we do good work.

Boone did her best to stop us when we first started out, but the judge laughed her out of court.

After all, who does it hurt? ✪

ELEGY FOR CYGNUS X-1

Once there were planets basking in the red glow
as they fell about the volatile anchor
of Cygnus X-1, and cities that rode
the airy hemisphere of worlds.
For a thousand revolutions
there was the thought
that the sun would continue to burn
throughout the cold centigrade
and interstellar night. Ah, how cleanly
the combusting apparatus worked!
There was never fear of failure
or the vision of a black sun,
but mass was too great to allow
a vaster shell
and so the core exploded
at a speed faster than pain.
And the ruins collapse
and press to a point
that continues in some other space.
Out beyond the horizon I watch
the red inhalation of Cygnus X-1,
and think of those Chinese astronomers
of 1054 who found a second sun one night.
Could they feel the coldness,
the draft into another universe blowing?

— Shelton Arnel Johnson

CLARION AND SPECULATIVE FICTION
by Kristine Kathryn Rusch

HISTORICAL ESSAY

Kristine Kathryn Rusch is a 1985 graduate of the Clarion Writers' Workshop, and she was also one of the original twelve attendees at the first Writers of the Future Workshop held in Taos, New Mexico, last year.

She has sold a couple of stories to Amazing® Stories. *The first, "Skin Deep," was also her manuscript submission for entrance into the Clarion Workshop; this story will appear in out next issue (January 1988).*

I survived Clarion. *Survived* is the correct word: Clarion shredded me and then gave me the tools to glue myself back together again. For six months after the writers' workshop, I wrote and buried stories in drawers. Then I crawled out into the world and discovered that it had become a different place.

My experience is not unique. Essentially, what happened to me has happened to all Clarion graduates. Clarion is, for most of us, a highly personal experience that has become a turning point in our lives.

Now, as the Clarion Writers' Workshop celebrates its twentieth anniversary, we must look beyond the personal and see what the workshop has accomplished. Clarion has been part of the speculative fiction field since the late 1960s. Well-known writers, including Octavia Butler, George Alec Effinger, Vonda McIntyre, and Lucius Shepard, have attended Clarion. Gene Wolfe, Kate Wilhelm, Harlan Ellison, and Joe Haldeman, among others, have taught there. In one way or another, the Clarion phenomenon has touched nearly everyone who is currently writing speculative fiction.

But has that phenomenon made a real difference in the field? Would Vonda McIntyre or Lucius Shepard be writing if she or he had not gone to Clarion? Or, conversely, has Clarion stifled voices that should never have been stifled?

Tough questions, and ones that cannot be answered without examining Clarion and its history.

Michigan State University offers the Clarion Writers' Workshop as a six-week, for-credit course every summer. Six speculative fiction writers teach the course, which is administered by a member of the MSU faculty. This year's instructors were Algis Budrys, Lucius Shepard, Suzy McKee

Charnas, Karen Joy Fowler, Damon Knight, and Kate Wilhelm.

Applicants must send a sample of their writing with the application. About 25 students are picked on the basis of the writing sample. The workshop costs about $2,000, plus any lost wages for those who would have worked during this six-week period. If only 17 applicants qualify, then only 17 attend. Students spend the mornings critiquing manuscripts in workshop, the afternoons writing or socializing, the evenings attending lectures or spending time with visiting writers, and the nights reading. Students concentrate on writing — and writing only — for six weeks. The world outside of Clarion does not exist. Sleeping and eating are optional.

Thomas Disch once called Clarion the literary equivalent of boot camp. He was right.

The Clarion format creates a professional attitude. Most of the instructors follow the workshop style developed at the Milford Science Fiction Conferences. Critiquing is done in a circle. The person next to the manuscript's author begins. The critique continues around the circle. When everyone is finished, the author has a chance to rebut. After the rebuttal, the floor is open for discussion. Sometimes an instructor will choose to critique after all of the students have finished. Often, however, the instructor will take his turn in line.

Although each instructor teaches for a separate week, Saturday workshops and special events present situations wherein more than one professional writer may be in the dorm. They all attend workshop and often offer contrasting opinions on the same story.

Each instructor's week focuses on a different aspect of writing. That aspect is determined by the manuscript turned in that week, the instructor's particular bent (be it plot or characterization, science fiction or fantasy), and the questions that the students ask.

At first, the varying opinions of the six writers can confuse the student. One of Kate Wilhelm's strongest Clarion memories is of Glen Cook sitting on a porch at Clarion College. He had a typewriter in front of him and five marked-up versions of the same story scattered about him. He was attempting to incorporate everything each of the professionals had told him — and, according to Wilhelm, he was failing.

Often, though, by the end of the session, the student has learned that, in Knight's words, "There are no chiefs, only Indians."

The unique format makes Clarion an anomaly among writing workshops. But, from Clarion's very first summer, the main difference between Clarion and other workshops has been one of attitude.

That attitude originated with Robin Scott Wilson. Wilson, then a professor at Clarion College in Clarion, Pennsylvania, had to teach summer school. Since he didn't want to teach the standard fare, and since he had had some success (under the name Robin Scott) as a science-fiction writer, he decided to teach a science-fiction writing workshop.

Wilson then attended a Milford Science Fiction Writers' Conference to get ideas. Milford, by that time, had been in existence for nearly a decade. In the mid-50s, Damon Knight and Judith Merril had started Milford as a conference for professional science-fiction writers.

"At science-fiction conventions, writers were expected to talk about sports or agents — anything but science-fiction writing," Knight recalls. "So we set up a format where everyone was expected to talk about writing."

And talk they did. By the time Wilson appeared at the workshop, some of the best-known writers in the field had gone through Milford — and had come back for more. Wilson studied the Milford method and chose his first Clarion instructors: Fritz Leiber, Harlan Ellison, Judith Merril, and Damon Knight. Wilson planned to teach the first and last weeks of the six-week course.

But some things never follow a plan. Wilson did manage to teach the first week, and he established the pattern. He applied the Milford method to Clarion. Then he stepped back and allowed the individual instructors to handle their own weeks. Knight brought his wife, Kate Wilhelm, along, and together they taught the fifth week. The couple did not want to leave when the sixth week arrived, and so a Clarion tradition was born. Knight and Wilhelm have taught the last two weeks of Clarion for the past twenty years.

"There were things that we took for granted at Milford," says Knight, "things that we had to figure out and teach at Clarion — things like, 'What is a plot?' "

Over the years, Knight and Wilhelm discovered their own answers to those questions. Knight then compiled the answers into a Clarion handbook, which he later published as *Creating Short Fiction* through Writer's Digest Books.

Although repeat instructors gradually learned how to explain the basics of writing, each new class had at least one instructor who groped for the language of education. Even after Clarion had moved from Clarion College, spent a year at Tulane in New Orleans, and finally found a permanent home at Michigan State University, instructors still found themselves grappling with ways to teach fledgling writers. Gene Wolfe wrote an essay about his difficulties at Clarion 1975 in *Clarion SF*, edited by Kate Wilhelm.

". . . halfway through the second week of the course and my own week as an instructor," Wolfe wrote, "I had seen much originality, some wit, and even a little polish. But I had seen nothing that could be depended on to sell on fingers-of-one-hand submissions. To put it another, less philistine way, I had seen nothing successful.

"Then, *that* was what [the students] had come for — the thing that would turn brilliant failures into successes.

"Which was just too damn bad . . . if there was one thing I knew, it was: There is no Royal Road. No secret handclasp. No magic ring."

What then, Wolfe wondered, could he teach? He finally decided that he could teach one thing. *Professionalism* — "a conscious appreciation of the nature of the narrative, coupled with a professional's pride in doing every aspect of the work well."

In other words, an attitude. An attitude toward writing that most college composition professors do not have. The instructors' attitudes rub off and cause most students to leave Clarion changed. But Clarion attendees also have a different attitude than the average composition student. Clarion students want to be writers.

When Orson Scott Card taught at Clarion 1982, he — in the words of one student — "expected an English 101 course." Instead, he found, as Wolfe did, stories with promise and writers with talent. Card then moved from his instructor's quarters in another dorm to where the students resided, placing himself literally as well as figuratively on an equal footing with them.

Michael Bishop had a similar experience at Clarion 1985. Bishop arrived in time for the infamous fourth-week dry spell. He spent his first few workshops lecturing on grammar and then, because no one turned in a manuscript to be critiqued, he turned in one of his own. The students analyzed "Close Encounters with the Deity" as harshly as they would have analyzed a classmate's manuscript. When the critique ended, Bishop seemed stunned. He too had placed himself on equal footing with the students and found, much to his surprise and pleasure, that they had done the same with him.

The professional attitude on the part of the instructors and students and the total-immersion format create the intensely personal Clarion experience. Ask Clarion graduates who are still in the field about their Clarion summer, and most will spend several hours talking about the workshop. The stories are similar to mine in their basic parameters: I attended, my mind was opened, and I survived. But each story has personal twists and turns that have nothing to do with the critique sessions every morning or the lectures occasionally held at night.

Vonda McIntyre attended one of the first Clarions where she wrote her Nebula-winning novelette, "Of Mist, and Grass, and Sand," in response to an assignment. In an essay about Clarion titled, "Can *Anything* Be Taught?" she analyzed her experiences as a writing student.

McIntyre came from a school tradition where learning was passive: if she followed a teacher's instructions, she would get an A. She said she had received useful feedback only at Clarion.

"The workshop," she wrote, "made me *think* about what I was doing: whether what I had been doing was worthwhile, whether I could be good enough, honest enough, strong enough to do anything worthwhile in the future. . . . No one had ever said to me before that my individual experience and integrity were more important than someone else's conception of what was a 'proper' topic for a Real Author, or a 'proper' lifestyle, or 'proper'

opinions. The writers in residence said that as if it were not even radical."

As McIntyre learned, good writing takes more than an understanding of plot, setting, and characterization. It takes a willingness on the part of the writer to dig deeply and explore the self. Clarion forces students to examine themselves and then decide if they want to continue such intense examination as part of their profession.

When Harlan Ellison announced, at an early Clarion, that he would assess the students' talents, telling them, in essence, whether they had the ability to become professional writers, one of the students, Bruce Taylor, left. Taylor didn't want to hear Ellison's assessment. But, after a week of soul-searching, Taylor returned and finished out the session. For two years after Clarion, he says, he suffered from a deep depression and did very little writing. During that period, he realized that no matter what else happened, he wanted to write. And so, he began the long, painful process toward becoming a professional.

Taylor's experience is not unique. Students who graduate often find themselves unable to write for a period of months or years.

"It is because the critical voice has overtaken the creative voice," Elizabeth Lynn says.

In other words, Clarion does not teach students how to write. It teaches them how to identify what works and what fails in a manuscript. After Clarion, students look at their own work and see only the failures — the poor sentence structure or the weak story line. Gradually, the ability to see the successes returns, and students will look at a manuscript they had previously discarded with a more balanced eye.

"We're trying to teach students in six weeks what we have learned over a period of years," says Algis Budrys. "Students can apply some of the advice the teachers give immediately, but usually the advice takes months to sink in."

That "sinking in" period is often the time in which students decide whether or not to continue on the path to a writing career. For some students, there is no question.

"I got a taste of what being a professional writer was," says Dean Wesley Smith (1982) whose short fiction has appeared in *Night Cry* and a number of other publications, "and I geared all my efforts toward making that dream a reality."

Others, like Bruce Taylor, vacillate. And still others simply stop writing.

"When I look over old lists," says Knight, "there are a lot of names whose faces I can't remember."

The students stop writing for a variety of reasons, often unrelated to talent. Sometimes, the students give up trying to balance the critical voice with the creative voice. Other students find that "real world" pressures will not allow them to write much, if at all. And still others decide, after the total immersion in writing, that they do not want to follow that path.

Many of the students who "vanish" take writing-related jobs. Some editors, television critics, and screenwriters are Clarion graduates. A few students disappear only to reappear later.

Michael Armstrong, whose first novel, *After the Zap*, just appeared from Questar, speaks of Clarion with both bitterness and appreciation. When he attended Clarion in 1975, he was one of the youngest students there. Kim Stanley Robinson attended that same year. Robinson had applied the year before, had been accepted, but for some reason, could not attend. In the meantime, Knight bought Robinson's submission story for *Orbit*. Robinson applied again — and this time, he attended.

According to Armstrong, Robinson was the shining star out of a year that included Alan Brennert and Marc Scott Zicree. Armstrong believed that he could not compete with Robinson. Armstrong also suffered another private ego blow. Wilhelm was buying stories for the *Clarion SF* anthology from Clarion's 1975 student class. Armstrong's story was not chosen for the volume.

But Armstrong kept writing, and his persistence is paying off. He feels about Clarion as does Lori Ann White (1983). White, whose first story has just been published in *Writers of the Future*, Vol. III, says of the experience, "I came out of it still wanting to be a writer. That's saying a lot."

And then there are the students who blazed out of Clarion with seemingly no hitches at all. Ed Bryant sold his first story *at Clarion* to Harlan Ellison's *Again, Dangerous Visions*. Vonda McIntyre's novelette, "Of Mist, and Grass, and Sand," became *Dreamsnake*, and won Nebulae in both forms. Lisa Tuttle was up for her first John W. Campbell award within a year or so of her graduation from Clarion. Kim Stanley Robinson sold a submission story to *Orbit*. Lucius Shepard's stories were all over the magazines four years after his summer at MSU. The list of Clarion successes within the SF field is long, and includes names like George Alec Effinger, F. M. Busby, and Octavia Butler.

But these success stories are only meteoric on the surface. Ed Bryant's first sale — and the very first sale ever to come out of Clarion — happened during Harlan Ellison's week. Bryant wrote the story, "The 10:00 Report Is Brought to You by . . . ," during Fritz Leiber's week. Leiber didn't like the story, but Bryant had nothing else to show Ellison. Ellison loved the story and bought it outright.

The story didn't appear for four years. It took two years for Bryant to sell another story. That story, however, opened the field to him, and, as with so many other "instant" successes, his backlog of stories began to sell. By the time *Again, Dangerous Visions* appeared, Bryant's stories had appeared in a host of publications from *Universe* to *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*.

Lucius Shepard's rise was equally slow and equally meteoric. Shepard made one of his early sales to Knight's *Clarion Awards* anthology. The story

was purchased in 1983, but didn't appear until 1984. Shepard's first novel, *Green Eyes*, appeared in late 1984, when his short fiction began to receive critical acclaim. Yet all of this was happening four years *after* Shepard had attended Clarion.

When I made my first professional sale (my Clarion submission story — "Skin Deep" — to *Amazing Stories* in early 1986), I sent a note to Knight and Wilhelm who had been very supportive of me and of the story. Knight wrote back with a congratulations and this caution: "Don't be discouraged if you have to keep submitting stories over and over again. Lucius Shepard was getting rejections all over the place for a year or more after Clarion, who knows why? I think the system tends to discourage writers until they demonstrate that they are not going to go away."

Clearly, from these varied experiences, Clarion creates results unlike any other university-sponsored writing program. Clarion changes the people who participate in it. But are those changes important to the speculative fiction field? Would Ed Bryant be an award-winning SF writier without Clarion? Would Lucius Shepard have received rejections for decades instead of years? Would Vonda McIntyre have written *Dreamsnake*? Would one of Damon Knight's forgotten names have won a Hugo?

Unfortunately, we do not have an alternate universe in which to test these questions. The only way to answer them is to ask the writers themselves. And when you do, you get testimonials.

"Speaking personally," Shepard once wrote, "Clarion changed my life."

"I would not be here right now if it weren't for Clarion," said Ed Bryant. "I would still be writing, but Clarion speeded up the process by a number of years."

"Clarion did not teach me to write," wrote McIntyre. "Rather, it allowed me to learn to write."

But for purists who are not satisfied with the testimonials, there are ways to show what Clarion has done. Someone could take the class rosters from all twenty years, track down every student (since no one officially keeps track of Clarion alumni), and see who happens to be working in a writing-related field. Robin Scott Wilson used to keep track of Clarion alumni back when the numbers were small, and the figures he came up with are impressive. Over 75 per cent of all Clarion graduates at that time were working in a writing-related area, be it fiction free-lancing or writing advertising copy. The remaining 25 per cent either stopped writing or stopped leaving forwarding addresses.

Another, less formal method would be to ask members of individual years what their classmates are doing. I attempted that and became boggled with the wealth of information. Consider, if you will, my own Clarion class of 1985. From that group, several have taken honorable mentions or higher in national contests. Two of the submission stories have been sold. At least three stories written at Clarion have sold. Two students have taken jobs edit-

ing within the field, and many others have quit their "real" jobs in order to write. These results have come before any of us had the time to become "instant" successes. Now, assume that each Clarion class has had similar experiences, and the enormity of the job becomes apparent.

Suddenly, the question changes. Instead of examining how many students have become successful, we must decide what success is. Is every student who has made a fiction sale successful? Or do only the ones who sell repeatedly matter? Does work in advertising equal Clarion success? Radio? Television? Or do we count only those who work within the SF field? And what about the 25 per cent who stop writing? They could be considered Clarion success stories — people who weren't meant to be writers and found out before they wasted years of work.

I opted for yet another method in researching this article. I searched the best-of-the-year anthologies and the Nebula, Hugo, and John W. Campbell ballots for names of Clarion graduates. But for every George Alec Effinger, I found a John Varley — someone who had not and would not attend Clarion (or, in Varley's case, any other workshop).

Yet, as I combed the volumes, I found statements like this one by Algis Budrys (in his essay: "Science Fiction in the Marketplace," in *Nebula Twelve*): "Milford and its lineal descendant, the famous Clarion SF writing course, have been greatly and cumulatively influential since the mid-1950s. Their alumni are the most critically appreciated new SF authors."

The new writers that Budrys refers to are not part of any particular movement. Clarion has never formed a distinctly marketable school of SF writing, one easily identifiable, like cyberpunk. Octavia Butler's startlingly serious prose can't be confused with the zaniness of George Alec Effinger. Clarion does not create a bunch of Damon Knight clones ("Would that it could," Knight said to me when I mentioned the idea). In fact, Clarion encourages students to use their own voices and shows; as McIntyre noted, there is not a "proper" way to write anything.

"Clarion does give people a standard of excellence," Wilhelm says. "Some students have said to us, 'I have waited all these years for you to like something.' Or 'If I can please you, I can please Satan.' "

So perhaps, in some ways, Clarion has created a standard by which the rest of the field is measured. And perhaps, by placing people like Ed Bryant and Vonda McIntyre into the field earlier than they normally would have appeared, the field has changed. But none of these changes are measurable.

Yet Clarion has a perceived influence in the field, whether someone can or cannot measure that influence. In the 1970s, SF writers argued about a Clarion "clique" that exerted its influence to get Clarionites Nebulae or Hugos. Clarion graduates supposedly voted on the basis of friendship instead of merit. But, as Knight has pointed out, that debate has died. Clarion graduates are too numerous to form a clique these days. Now, Clarion grads and Clarion instructors are a majority in the field.

Clarion's measurable impact does stem from the social side of the workshop. One of the biggest benefits of Clarion — and one of its most controversial features in the early years — is the contact between professional and neophyte. Some professional writers complained, twenty years ago, that Clarion gave away the secrets to writing. But, as Gene Wolfe stated, there are no secrets to writing — only ways to develop a professional attitude. And Clarion cut down the time it took to acquire that attitude.

Clarion graduates, once they made the contact with other writers, continued that contact. Some Clarion graduates sought out would-be writers in their own communities and formed a Clarion-style workshop. Of the 17 graduates of Clarion 1985, at least half have joined or *started* workshops. Local workshops have proliferated since Clarion began. Ed Bryant belongs to a monthly workshop in Denver. A strong workshop exists in Texas as well as in Boston and in Chicago.

Anyone with an evening to spare can get information on writing. Most of these workshops (unlike Clarion) are free to anyone who cares to participate, and most are run by former Clarion graduates and Science Fiction Writers of America members.

A good example of a Clarion-spawned workshop exists in a small Northern Idaho community. That workshop, held weekly in Moscow, Idaho (population 15,000), held its first meeting in 1982. Three of the four founders attended Clarion (where the workshop earned its nickname, The Moscow Moffia), and all three are now SFWA members. Five members have appeared in *Writers of the Future* anthologies and have had stories published in many of the major magazines. The workshop has a scholarship fund designed to assist students attending Clarion, Clarion West, or the new Writers of the Future workshops held in conjunction with the awards. The Moffia sponsored a workshop on novel writing in April and will hold another week-long, Clarion-style workshop with Algis Budrys in September of this year.

Other workshops have started because of Clarion. Clarion West formed in Seattle in the early 1970s. The new Writers of the Future workshops have become the next step — Clarion techniques taken to a graduate-course level. Even workshops held at science-fiction conventions have changed. In the past, those workshops ran like lecture classes, with the professionals using a student's story as an example. Now most convention workshops follow Clarion format.

Clarion has made it easier for young writers — whether they attended the MSU-sponsored workshop — to gain the tools necessary to enter the speculative fiction field. A constant influx of good, new writers keeps the genre healthy. The increased knowledge has made competitions stiffer. Clearly, in the area of assisting new writers, Clarion has changed the field.

So Clarion is much more than a personal experience. It is an experience that has had repercussions all through speculative fiction. And those reper-

cussions might now be just in assisting new writers. If, as Ed Bryant insists, workshops like Clarion speed up the time it takes for a new writer to break into the field; if, as Damon Knight suggests, it takes persistence for a new writer to get the attention of an editor; if, as Algis Budrys believes, some of the best new talent comes out of Clarion; and if other workshops based on Clarion have a success rate like that of the Moscow Moffia, then Clarion has had a significant role in creating the SF field of the 1980s.

SOUND AND THE ELECTRIC EAR DREAM

at the crest of a gentle slope,
hours before dawn,
there is a radio telescope
poised in slow anticipation,
gazing into night's infinite yawn.

> The sky rotates with effortless grace
> Above a cool curve tracking
> The rhythm of God's voice
> Through empty space.

with sound, by digital reproduction
the big dish probes
the heart of some alien construction
where BEM's squint at stray images
of old earth shows, "The Lost Episodes."

> Dawn comes in a wave of radiation
> That pushes the universe west;
> The dish plots a course through the stars
> By electronic navigation.

atop a low slope,
deflecting sunlight at the seams,
the radio telescope strains to hear a voice of hope
in the deep blue bowl of random signals;
it monitors man's dreams.

— S. A. Kelly

RAGS FROM RICHES

by Christopher Anvil

art: George Barr

Christopher Anvil's first stories sold in 1952. He has since sold some 250 short stories and several novels, the most recent of which is The Steel, the Mist and the Blazing Sun *(Ace). He currently resides in upstate New York.*

Lost Bear Jct., Alaska 99731
Wednesday; Fog, No Snow

Mr. William T. Whittaker
626 Campus Drive
Blickweiler U.
Sandrigham, Illinois 60054

Dear Bill:

As you know, I have trouble writing letters. Why, I don't know — after all, I write stories for a living. But anyway, Margin Books just paid for that spy opus, and the bank tells me the check cleared all right, so you can count on my answering letters a little sooner.

The reason? You may not be aware, in your ivory tower, that your old roommate is up to the latest technological marvels and prepared to take full advantage of them at the first chance that offers. It takes effort, but it is worth it. What I have done is to take advantage of the current little downblip in the computer industry — sales off forty per cent, 16,000 laid off, four major manufacturers bankrupt — that sort of thing — to buy myself, at fire-sale prices, a completely new Vectrosupermax Business System, with all its bundled software (16 different programs: total value, if bought individually, $6,472.89).

As you may know, before the market took its downturn, Vectrosupermax was probably the leading manufacturer of hardware using the KBCDOS operating system and the 99Q processor. Two years ago, Vectrosupermax was a comet lighting the sky both day and night with new sales records. Today, they're selling them out the back of a truck down in Mosquito Forks, and very grateful for a sale. Well, that's high tech, for you.

But to get back to what this means from my viewpoint, the fact is that the Vectrosupermax may be a drug on the market, but it works as well today as it did two years ago. This calamity in the marketplace means it is possible for me to make this initial comment on the old manual typewriter, connect the Vectrosupermax plug to the outlet (I mentioned we got electricity in my last letter), hit IO on the keyboard (a special command so it will just print what I tell it to, and not reproduce the commands themselves), and then I simply reel

this length of paper into the Vectrosuperprinter's maw, and you have a vivid record of technological progress as applied to the art of letter writing:

sdfl;ksdkasdgf ;saasdfiuas8u 235]¼

SYNTAX ERROR 66

Memory munged

1234567890-= °!@#$%²&*()__+ QWERTYUIOP¼¶ qwertyuiop[]
1234567890-= °!@#$%²&*()__+ QWERTYUIOP¼¶ qwer-
tyuiop[]
1234567890-= °!@#$%²&*()__+ QWERTYUIOP¼¶ qwer-
tyuiop[]

WARNING! DIVISION BY ZERO!

EITHER YOU OR I HAS MADE A MISTAKE. I CAN'T FIND THIS FILE.
PLEASE GO BACK TO THE BEGINNING AND TRY AGAIN.

(Buffer Overflow)

SYNTAX ERROR 96

Well, I have to admit, that was
n't much fun. I suppose I should have reread the manual, but tha
t wasn't very attractive either. There are sixteen different man
uals, and Now, what the —

00001 Well, I have to admit, that was
00002 have reread the manual, but tha
00003 There are sixteen different man

*##?a...ᶻᶻ%!...2..C###!
...$.opy..E..@@#..cC..?
.X..18.p..6ro,,1982.tt.
.....righj..4.##..7.##.

Vetrosuperwriter is protected by a sophisticated lockup program keyed to your individual computer and its included hardware and software. If you attempt to use our proprietary DEBUGG utility to crack the copy-protection, our built-in safeguards will lock up your computer every time you use the software, and we will be automatically notified at once when you try to use the modem. Just take this as a friendly warning and GET YOUR GUMMY LITTLE FINGERS OUT OF OUR CODE BEFORE WE CHOP THEM OFF!!

(Use VDUMP for non-ASCII.)

WARNING! SQRT OF NEG NUMBER!

gods and little fishes!
this is "user friendly"?

re's the stuff I typed?
ll with all this! What
o now? This son-of-a-
ch squeezes everthing
o a narrow column and
nts it out with letters
sing on the left. The
trosupermax Quikcard
mand summary is around
e somewhere. Ah, yes,
e we are. "Escape-LM"
t could be simpler?

x Error 111!

W
e
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,

w
e
l
l

!

So

here

we

go

now

!

Easy

does

—

H'

m

...

Vectrosupermax Elapsetime Clock
This session: 02H29M14.7S

Vectrosupermax Elapsetime Clock
This session: 14H46M11.9S

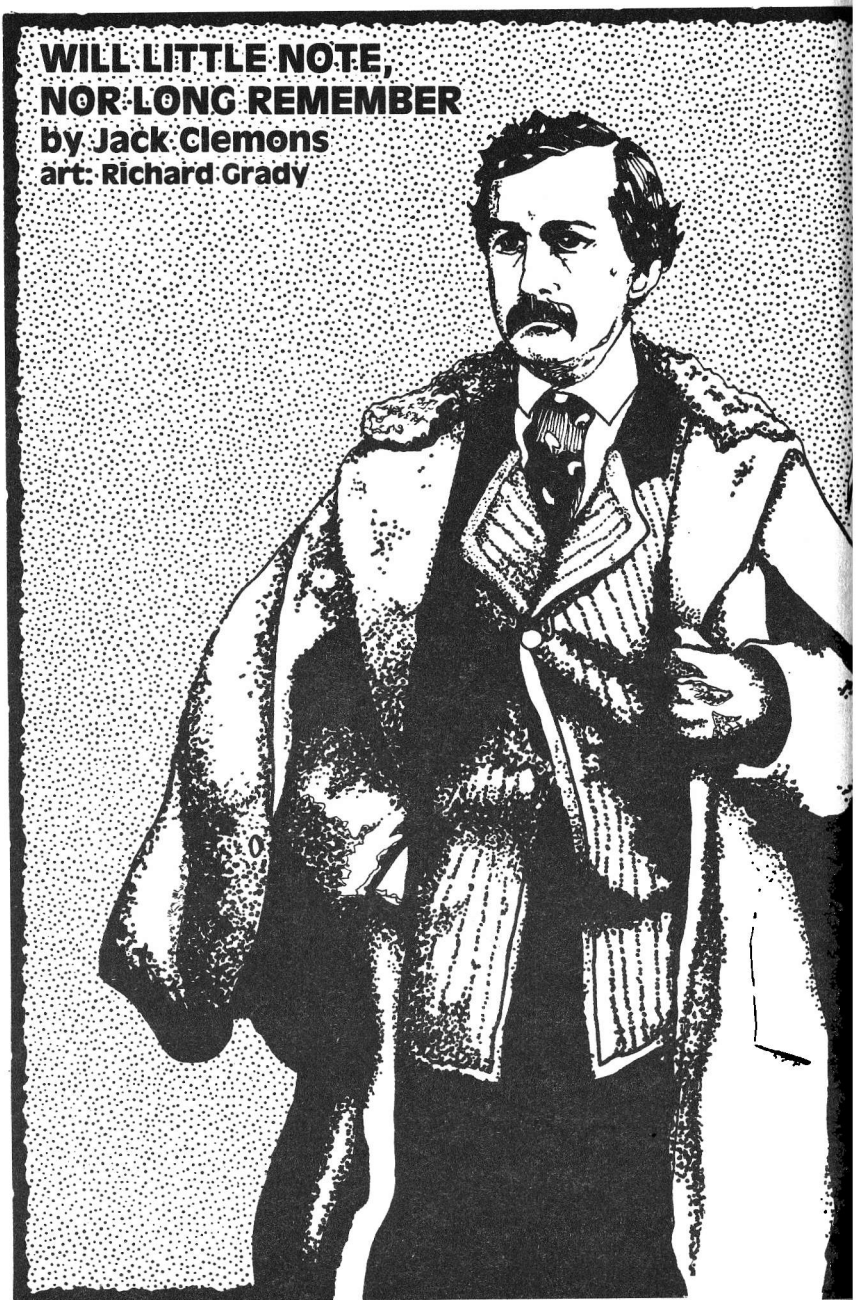
Vectrosupermax Elapsetime Clock
This session: 42H21M38.6S

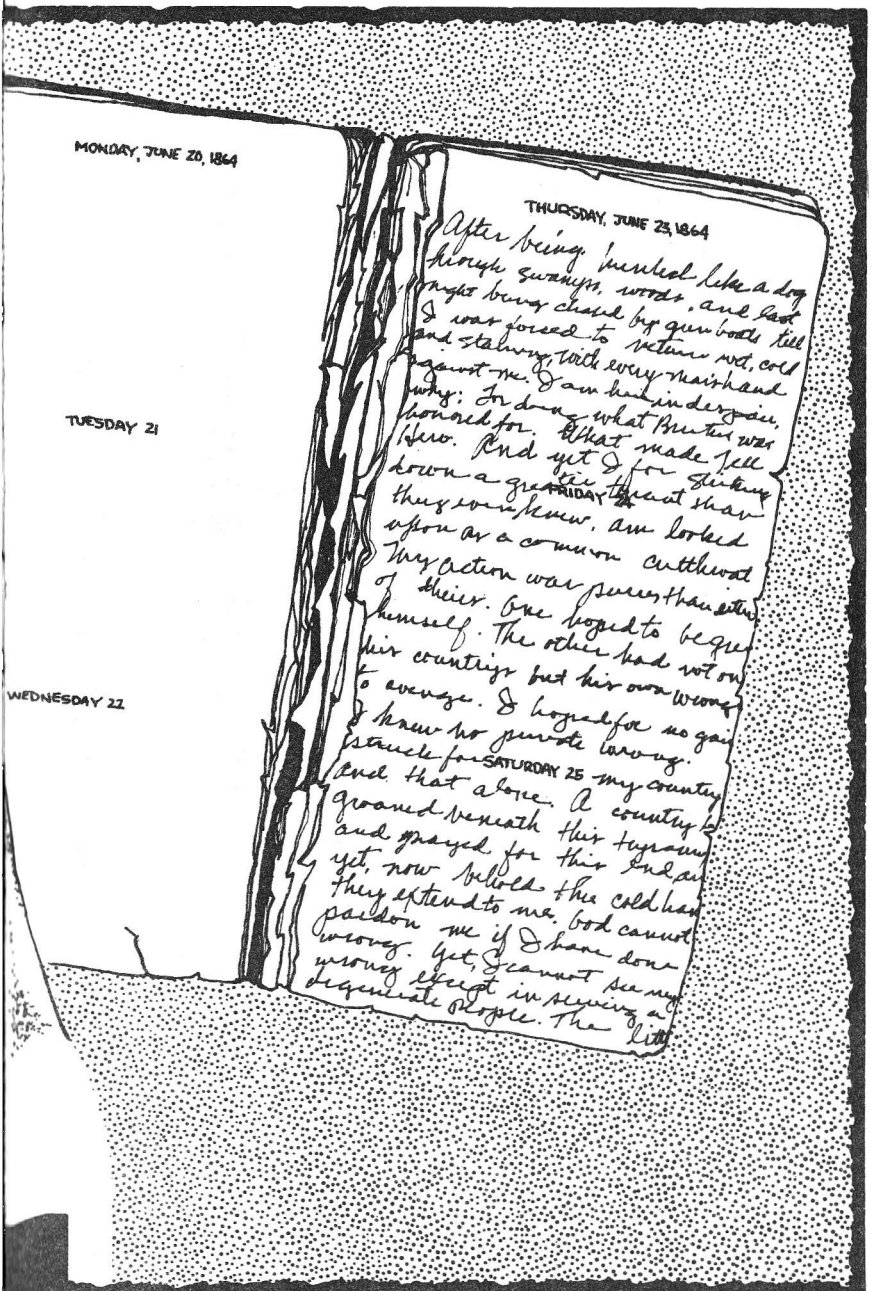
Bill — As you may notice from a close inspection of the typeface and the unevenness of the print, we are back to the old manual again. It is Friday now, and there really was a pretty good length of letter there on Thursday, but it sort of disappeared when I hit the x on the keyboard instead of the s. It seems that x is the easy mnemonic for "eXpunge," and I was reaching for the s but got the x by mistake. Oh, well. My error, of course.

There's a kind of long scratch across the top of the machine, where I only just managed to catch myself in time — I all of a sudden had the axe in my hand, and must have let out a yell because it was the middle of the night and out back the rooster started to crow. I see the dog just crawling out from under the bed now, and there were two cats in the room when I started, but I haven't seen them since I read the Vectrosupermax "Easy-Does-It" manual. It has a lot of cute pictures in it. Heh-heh. And a sheet of last-minute corrections and changes that aren't noted anywhere else. Heh-heh-heh.

Well, Bill, I guess progress has its price, so it will take me maybe just a little longer than I expected. But if I have this thing really mastered before I go in for next month's groceries, count on me to add a few good long pages after this paragraph.

All the best,
Jim


WILL LITTLE NOTE,
NOR LONG REMEMBER
by Jack Clemons
art: Richard Grady


MONDAY, JUNE 20, 1864
TUESDAY 21
WEDNESDAY 22
THURSDAY, JUNE 23, 1864
FRIDAY 24
SATURDAY 25

Jack Clemons claims that he has been an SF enthusiast since his preteens. While in college, he was faced with the choice of dreaming or doing, and chose the latter. Having obtained a Masters of Science in aerospace engineering, he went on to work for the U.S. space program. Most recently, he managed the folks who programmed and tested the on-board software for the space shuttle.

He has slowly and persistently pursued his writing career during these years as well, since the urge to speculate has never subsided. "Will Little Note, Nor Long Remember" is his first professional story sale.

The entropy lines of the time-transporter field bowed outward above the receiving platform, distorting the small, dusty room, as in a carnival mirror, into a grotesque reflection of itself. The field lines collapsed, sending miniature dust devils dancing over the hardwood floor. They fluttered the fringed hem of a hand-sewn quilt that was draped carelessly over a small bed.

Geoffrey Wilson stepped down from the platform and focused his eyes in the soft, natural light. The sulphurous glow that radiated from the brushed-metal surface of the receiver faded rapidly, yielding to the obsolete surroundings. The sparsely furnished room regained its rectangles.

An unupholstered wooden chair stood beside the hand-carved bed. Next to the chair bulged an oversized chest of drawers, crowned by a smoke-stained oil lamp and a white ceramic bowl and pitcher. A threadbare braided rug, which softened a small oval of the floor, was the only other furnishing that the room boasted. A few nondescript paintings, suspended from long cords, were scattered over the quiet brown wallpaper. A single door, capped by an open transom, led from the room.

A window opened into the room, and sunlight spilled through it, settling into a bright, angular pool on the floor. A brisk spring breeze followed the sunlight and billowed a pair of sheer cotton curtains.

A man stood in the room, silently facing Wilson with hands folded, waiting for the field effects to subside. He was short and moderately built, and he wore a dark grey suit of a nineteenth-century fashion. The ruddy skin of his face was drawn into cobweb wrinkles at the corners of his eyes. His matted hair was lightly woven with silver.

Wilson felt suddenly uncomfortable. He brushed awkwardly at the hem of his knee-length toga. The man stepped forward, hand extended.

"Professor Geoffrey Wilson?" His voice was strangely accented.

Wilson returned the handshake. "Yes. And you?"

"Alex Foucheaux. Field Representative for Time-Energy Resources Management Agency. Welcome to 1865."

"Thank you," Wilson answered. This was one of the few times he had

heard someone refer to TERMA by its full, proper name.

Wilson turned to look at the receiving platform, which lay squatting at the doorway of a narrow closet. The air above it still shimmered like summer heat over blacktop.

"This is an incredible device," he said. "I feel as though I have just stepped here from the next room."

Foucheaux's lips parted in a thin smile. "*Device* is a much too simple term, Doctor Wilson. This receiver is only a small component of an extremely complex system. The bulk of the hardware resides in the laboratory which you 'stepped from,' as you put it." He gestured with his open hand in the general direction of the closet. "But I'm sure you are already aware of all that."

He stepped around Wilson, bent over the small platform, and removed a section of baseboard in the closet wall behind it. A dark space opened there, of the same dimensions as the platform.

"Forgive me. I must dispense with the formalities," he said. "I'd rather not leave the receiver out in the open for very long."

He gently pushed the metal box with the toe of his boot until it disappeared beneath the wall.

"I can't imagine what my acquaintances here would make of it." He bent forward again and snapped the baseboard back into place. As he straightened, he gave Wilson a brief inspection.

"Or of you!" he added.

Wilson felt uncomfortable again. For the first time he could remember, he was faintly embarrassed by his exposed legs. He shifted uneasily as Foucheaux turned toward the closet again.

"If you'll pardon my saying so, Doctor, we must do something about your dress." He smiled at some private amusement. He selected one dark suit from among several and handed it to Wilson.

"Change into this, and then we'll talk."

Wilson accepted the clothing and sorted it onto the back of the wooden chair. As he loosened his braided belt, he glanced at an anachronistic city street, visible through the open window.

"It's hard to believe," he said aloud.

Foucheaux had settled on the edge of the bed. He looked up briefly as Wilson spoke, then continued to study a leather notebook he had removed from his vest pocket.

"Yes, I suppose it is," he said politely.

Wilson struggled to remove his pantyhose and waited for Foucheaux to continue. But the man sat silently, making small printed entries in the book. Foucheaux's reticence irritated Wilson. He had dozens of questions he was impatient to ask, but he felt confined by the other man's formality. He tried again.

"How long have you been here, Alex?"

Foucheaux answered without looking up. "Twenty-three years."

Wilson was startled. "Twenty-three years?" He reflected on the implications of that answer. "Do you mean that TERMA has transported you back and forth across this period of history?"

"No." Foucheaux still did not look up. "I have lived in this age, continuously, for nearly a quarter of a century, subjective time."

Wilson pulled his toga off over his head and reached for the slightly rumpled cotton shirt draped on the chair.

"I didn't realize that the traffic to this era was heavy enough to require an Agency man here full time," he said.

Foucheaux rested the notebook on his knee and turned his face upward. "Doctor Wilson. Are you forgetting how you arrived here? You must appreciate the need for the Agency to establish a permanent persona in this time to provide a place of arrival and departure for you and your colleagues."

Wilson nodded and finished buttoning his shirt. He had at least started a conversation and was anxious to know more about this man who had given up half of his lifetime to the past.

"However," Foucheaux continued, "escort duties for visiting historians are only a part of my responsibilities. You are aware, I am sure, that this particular period of history has been officially designated a Time Node by the International Science Law Court. I believe you yourself have contributed several important papers concerning the historical influences of this period."

Wilson nodded. He felt no false modesty in the admission. He had spent his adult life in the study of Lincoln, and he knew this era well. But for the last fifteen years he had fanned his study into an all-consuming passion, the weapon he chose to exorcize the shadows that had inhabited his soul since he lost Colleen.

"I am aware of the Agency's caution concerning the Time Nodes," he said.

"*Caution* is hardly strong enough," Foucheaux said. Wilson found Foucheaux's habit of correcting his vocabulary mildly irritating.

"The consequence for interference," the other man continued, "in any significant way, with the events of these times would be pervasive and catastrophic."

"That seems a heavy responsibility for one man to carry." Wilson lifted the trousers from the chair and held them, legs dangling, before him. He balanced on one foot and stepped into them.

"I suppose it would be," Foucheaux said, "but the Agency —"

"Ow! What the hell?" Wilson dropped the trousers into a crumpled pile around his feet. He rubbed his hands violently along the length of his legs, which felt as though they had been pricked by thousands of tiny swords. Foucheaux delivered a short laugh.

"I see you have made your first personal acquaintance with wool, Doctor

Wilson."

"Wool? It's barbaric. I feel like I've stepped into a hive."

"You'll get used to it. Time travel puts us a bit closer to history than we would sometimes desire. However, you can't go marching around in that outfit you arrived in."

"Oh, Lord. Three hours in that?"

He looked uncertainly at the dark, bristly cloth, then back at Foucheaux. He had returned once again to his notations, the conversation apparently ended. Wilson cursed silently and scratched his thigh. He stepped back into the trousers and slowly pulled them around his knees, stopping every few inches like a bather testing the water.

Foucheaux volunteered nothing further while Wilson finished dressing, so Wilson preoccupied himself with the view through the window. A fresh breeze, swept clean by spring rain and dusted with aromas, danced with the delicate curtains. There was an unfamiliar hush to the noises drifting up from the street — the laughter of young people, the *clop-clop* of hooves on a dusty thoroughfare, a distant puffing from a brass band — the sounds of living things. Missing were the competing hums and clatters of the ubiquitous machine, the metronomes that forced the frenzied tempo of his own time.

How softly the days fall, he thought. *I have arrived in the Age of Innocence on its final day.*

He smiled at the thought. How frequently over the years had he used that phrase to describe this day?

The final day! he reflected. *And where is Wilkes at this moment? In spite of all the seminars and classwork that the Agency has subjected me to, it still cannot answer that question.*

Wilson had resented the lectures. He was more knowledgeable on this time in history than those the Agency chose to instruct him, but the instructions were nonetheless compulsory. In providing its unique service, TERMA left little to chance.

The waiting period between application for a travel grant and admission to candidacy often took many months. Competition for use of the facility hardware was substantial and highly qualified; the prejump screening was compulsory and tedious. To those few persistent scientists ultimately selected, the Agency granted three consecutive hours in any of the periods accessible to the time-transporter field. Wilson recalled the period of his candidacy with something less than fondness.

He had applied for April 14, 1865. The purpose he stated on the lengthy application form was to resolve a historical mystery associated with the death of Lincoln. He requested entry to John Wilkes Booth's apartment on the day of the assassination, in an attempt to recover the murderer's diary. The diary had been removed from Booth's body shortly after his death on April 26, and it had subsequently vanished. It reappeared several years later during the impeachment trial of Andrew Johnson, in the possession of Lin-

coln's former Secretary of War, Edwin M. Stanton. All of the pages leading up to the day of the assassination had been removed. What remained in the notes were Booth's self-confession to the crime, and two enigmatic references to some "evidence" that the government possessed which would "clear his name."

Historians for three centuries had argued over the content of those missing pages, and of their possible relevance to a supposed conspiracy to the assassination by members of the Lincoln cabinet.

Reports of rediscovery of the missing diary pages had surfaced in later years — the most publicized occurring in the late 1970s, when some Stanton family descendants uncovered what they claimed were eighteen of the missing pages, long misplaced among some historical artifacts. Although the discovery had generated a flurry of popular interest at the time, professional historians remained skeptical. In his own time, Wilson himself had authored a professional paper which openly challenged the authenticity of the Stanton heirs' find.

In any event, more pages had been torn from the Booth diary than had been discovered in the Stanton family's possession, and it was to examine the content of all of the original missing pages that Wilson had come to 1865. Examination of the intact diary, Wilson had convinced the Agency, would not only represent a significant item of historical research but also finally lay the issue to rest.

Since Booth had carried the diary with him from the night of the assassination until his own death twelve days later, Wilson's best hope for recovery of the document complete and intact lay in a search of Booth's quarters earlier on that fateful day.

The Agency had spent several months in final consideration of his request. When the reply came, it imposed many restrictions on the method and timing of entering the apartment, and on the handling and subsequent dissemination of the information he might obtain. Although publication restrictions were an affront to his professional integrity, he ultimately conceded them, as had other of his colleagues, in the face of TERMA's insistence as an unconditional term of time travel. In the end, his application was accepted, the appropriate legal waivers signed, the transport platform facility scheduled — an achievement that now found him uncomfortably dressed in an ancient dark suit and barely controlling an urgent desire to scratch his legs.

He silently finished dressing and waited for Foucheaux's attention. The Agency man paid him no notice, so he cleared his throat. Foucheaux looked up and slowly let his eyes drift over Wilson's clothing. He *hmm*'ed to himself, which Wilson took as an expression of dissatisfaciton.

"Doctor Wilson, you look very ill at ease. Try to keep from scratching with both hands like that." He stood, undid the knot in Wilson's string tie, and retied it to fall more gracefully onto his shirt. "But, I believe you will

get by. There are many out-of-towners in the Capitol for the victory celebration. I'm sure that most of them will look more disheveled than you." He tugged at the edges of Wilson's coat and straightened the upturned shirt collar. Wilson endured the man's attentions silently. He was willing to permit the Agency its final rituals, if he could but be on his way.

Foucheaux stood back for a final inspection. Wilson found a gold pocket watch in a coat pocket and withdrew it.

"Twenty minutes to three! Is this watch correct?"

Foucheaux nodded.

Wilson glanced anxiously at the window. "Mr. Foucheaux, could we please finish the preparations? I've used over a half-hour of my time already."

The grey man nodded again. "We are almost through." He turned to the dresser and withdrew a long wallet from the top drawer.

"Here is some money, and your identification. You are Geoffrey Wilson, a Maryland businessman, in town to purchase several horses for your personal carriage. The identification will withstand a reasonably thorough background examination. Understand, I don't anticipate your needing this, but we must be prepared."

Wilson took the wallet, flipped through its contents, and slipped it into his pocket.

"Businessman? And how am I to explain my presence in Booth's apartment if I get caught?"

"Doctor Wilson, you would not be here if the Agency thought there was any real danger of that. The time chosen for your entry to Booth's room was brought under the most intense consideration, given the available data. We believe the danger has been minimized."

Wilson nodded. It was well known that Booth had spent most of the afternoon hurriedly soliciting the support of his co-conspirators and feeding his courage with liquor. He would not return to his room until dinnertime. But — there was always the possibility.

"Why haven't you sent a team to visit this day and record Booth's movements? What are the probabilities of my finding the diary in his apartment?"

Foucheaux shook his head. "We are fundamentally technicians, Doctor, not historians. In spite of your evident enthusiasm for this document, it is of little practical importance to the Agency. We deal in events. The mathematics of time travel are full of singularities, Wilson. The Agency dares not strain the delicate fabric of time by repeated and unnecessary visits to the same instant. It is a zero-sum game we are playing. When we have finished, the flow of history must be left unchanged."

"But then, how can you be sure —"

"I will protect you," Foucheaux interrupted. "While you perform your academics in Booth's apartment, I will remain in the lobby to intercept any

visitors."

Wilson's face fell. He had expected, hoped, to be free to roam Washington at will for his allotted minutes. Foucheaux's denial of the expectation, now pronounced so casually, made him feel foolish for not anticipating it. Foucheaux read his expression.

"Oh, come now, Wilson. Do you think we would entrust the future to the whims of an amateur?" Foucheaux's voice had lost its tone of polite courtesy. Wilson began to feel a mixture of irritation and mild apprehension toward the short, dark man.

"Yes, I'll be coming with you," Foucheaux continued. "But don't worry, you will have Booth's room to yourself." He locked eyes with Wilson and held his gaze. "But keep this in mind. Whatever you do there, you must leave everything as you find it. Nothing must be added or removed from that room. That is the single, inviolate rule of the Agency, and the consequences for noncompliance are quite severe."

He pressed hard on the last two words and let them hang in the air between them. Wilson felt his throat tighten, and he tried not to shy from the lead-grey eyes. *It would not do to cross this man,* he thought. There was something that bothered him about what Foucheaux had said, some pieces to this puzzling man did not fit together well. Something he had said? It was difficult to think clearly in the presence of the raw power he had briefly glimpsed.

Foucheaux regained his smile and gestured toward the doorway.

"Shall we begin, then?"

Wilson frowned as he followed Foucheaux outside, into the recaptured memories of a long-dead afternoon.

Foucheaux said little as he walked the narrow flagstone sidewalks in the early afternoon sun. Wilson paid him scant notice. They were walking westward from Foucheaux's apartment along Capitol Street, in what seemed a magically animated Matthew Brady photograph. Wilson could concentrate on little else. The city looked smaller than the one he knew, scaled to manageable proportions by the startling absence of all but a few of the marble-facade government buildings that choked the skylines in his own time.

For all its importance to the Union, Wilson thought, *Washington in this age is still a simple city.*

It bragged of low, frame homes and unpaved, dusty streets; of modest boarding houses joined shoulder to shoulder in rows of dark red brick; of many small shops and livery stables, perfumed by odors unknown to Washington three centuries later. It was an unassuming town, by Wilson's standards, that held the future in a fragile shell.

Today, it was dressed for celebration. Red, white, and blue bunting decorated the gas lampposts that lined the streets, and Union flags fluttered in the brisk breeze. A small brass band trumpeted a concert from a street corner.

Wilson and Foucheaux reached the Capitol building and skirted it. Its familiar, majestic rotunda stood incongruously amid the hundreds of lower-middle-class lodging houses. A large banner swept across the Capitol's western facade, proclaiming, THIS IS THE LORD'S DOING. IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES.

Wilson looked westward from the marble edifice toward the Mall, in this time a stretch of young trees, green with spring buds, and grassy fields that extended to the distant sparkling waters of the Potomac. The flat parkland was mounted by the red sandstone towers of the Smithsonian and, beyond, by the unfinished Washington monument, truncated at a quarter of its planned height. The Lincoln Memorial and most of the other landmarks familiar to Wilson were, of course, missing. The Mall was busy with people, collected in small groups, talking, singing, and laughing. The air was lively, blending the gay flirtations of young women, the raucous croaking of soldiers in varying degrees of drunkenness, and an occasional victory salvo of gunfire. An enterprising huckster had seized upon the conviviality to turn a quick profit. He was standing on a chair, hawking pictures of Lincoln and other war heroes. Two small boys ran by, chattering excitedly over a photograph of General Lee.

Colleen would have loved this, Wilson thought. He fondled the memory of walks they had taken over this very ground, on the long summer afternoons of his younger years. His daughter had held tightly to his hand as he transformed for her the cluttered landscape of modern Washington into this bygone city molded from his knowledge and imagination. They would pretend that she was his beautiful lady, and he her handsome colonel, returned in triumph from Appomattox. They lived in his dreams, the vision now shimmering before him.

How many ages ago that seems. He could almost hear her laugh again, and call his name. He blinked several times as the grassy Mall misted in his eyes. It had been a time of innocence for them both, when a father's hand was a young girl's strength, and a father's dreams her reality. He wanted to stand quietly, to absorb the moments of renewed time, to savor the miracle that had been molded anew from the vapors of history and that had returned him to a world yet unstained by the blackness of deeds to come. *If only Colleen could see this.*

Foucheaux nudged him gently across the Mall, toward the Old City Canal. Its sluggish waters, congested with sewage, trickled slowly along the north edge of the park toward the Potomac. Wilson could see the bloated carcass of a large animal floating amid the small boats moored near the bank. A fetid odor was lifted from that direction when the breeze shifted, and Wilson felt his anxious stomach turn mildly nauseous. The Old Canal, thankfully, was not preserved to modern times. It reeked, as John Hay once phrased it, of "the ghosts of 20,000 drowned cats."

The city bells returned Wilson's purposefulness. Three o'clock. He had

already lost an hour of irretrievable moments. He quickened his pace and silently approached the high bridge that spanned the death-choked canal.

Foucheaux spoke again when they crossed Pennsylvania Avenue toward the broad, brick facade of the National Hotel. He pulled Wilson aside next to the wooden steps leading into the building.

"Listen carefully, and do exactly as I tell you." He locked his hard grey eyes on Wilson's. Wilson felt again the razor edge of restrained power in Foucheaux's voice.

"The hotel clerk has been taken care of. Approach the desk, and show him the business card you will find in your wallet. Say exactly these words: 'Will Mr. Booth return before dark?' He will answer, 'I should expect him by dinner.' Remember those words. If he answers in any other way, even a slight difference, you must return outside immediately. Your investigations will be terminated. Do you understand?"

Wilson stood in stunned silence. He had not expected the arrangements to involve such elaborate intrigue. The fulfillment of a life's ambition now hung in the subtle phrasing of a poor desk clerk. He nodded his consent.

"All right. If the clerk responds properly, you say, 'I will wait in his room, then.' The clerk will give you the key. Proceed directly to Booth's room. It is on the second floor, third door on the right down the hallway." He paused until Wilson nodded again that he understood. "If you have all that, let's check the time."

Wilson fumbled for the gold chain in the coat and retrieved the antique timepiece. Foucheaux glanced at it and reset his own watch.

"You will have exactly twenty minutes from now to complete your investigations."

Wilson's eyes widened as he looked in disbelief at the other man. He felt genuine betrayal. His voice pleaded, "Twenty minutes? I was promised three hours. I'll barely —"

"Wilson!" Foucheaux made the name sound contemptible. "In exactly twenty minutes I'll come up to Booth's room. We'll inspect it to insure it is left as you found it, and then we will leave. Those are the only conditions under which you may enter the hotel. Now, are you ready?"

Wilson grudgingly agreed and slipped the watch back into his pocket. He fingered it anxiously through the coat fabric. He hadn't felt this pressured since his doctorate orals.

This is unfair. Booth's movements are known well enough to allow me at least an hour. I need that time. To expect anything of historical value to be discovered under such conditions as these is insane.

He stared back into the unflinching grey eyes, then uncertainly up the stairs. He knew he'd find no sympathy here.

"What if Wilkes returns while I'm in there?" he asked quietly.

"I'll station myself outside for ten minutes, and in the lobby for the remainder of the time. If Booth comes, I will detain him. The desk clerk will

come to signal you, and you must stop immediately. Return the room to its original state, and then follow the instructions the clerk gives you. Do you understand?"

Wilson nodded again. Foucheaux returned the nod and abruptly backed away. He took up an apparently relaxed stance by the dark red wall. Wilson stood uncertainly a moment, then turned and ascended the wooden steps. He felt that he was now acting out an empty role, but the slim chance for success still tantalized him. He had come so far. Just to tread this vanished stage exhilarated him, and it was this that impelled him forward.

The hotel lobby was dark and smelled of mildew. The floor was fully carpeted with a dark, elaborate weave, threadbare in the areas of heavy use. A small dining room was visible through a doorway that opened beside a staircase leading to the upper floors. Wilson approached the desk clerk, a middle-aged, balding man, whose name he recalled was Merrick. He recited the litany he had memorized and held his breath. The man studied him and the card he had presented.

Is he suspicious? What did Foucheaux do to "take care" of him?

To his relief, Merrick replied with the prearranged phrase. Wilson completed the ritual and accepted the room key with a silent thankfulness. He ascended the stairs, one hand clutching the key to Booth's secrets, the other fingering the pocket watch. He felt some of the tension dissolve from his shoulders as he cautiously entered the assassin's small apartment.

The room had the look of a carefully arranged museum exhibit. Wilson stood at the doorway, immobilized by the somehow familiar surroundings. He was still having difficulty accepting the reality of his experience. It was as though he had entered into a kind of imaginary land, an amusement park constructed for his personal entertainment. He shook himself out of his reverie and set to search for that which had brought him to this place.

Wilkes's belongings were compulsively tidy. A set of riding clothes were laid carefully on the bed, and a pair of boots and spurs were arranged neatly on the floor.

Wilson withdrew the watch again. Fifteen minutes — he would have to hurry. He fought down a surge of outrage at Foucheaux; this was no time to indulge himself. He closed the door and crossed quickly to a brown, wooden chest of drawers. If he were to have any success, he must at least examine the obvious. He pulled open the top drawer and searched carefully through it, cautious to leave no trace of his presence.

Booth's clothes were arranged in neat stacks. The man exhibited an orderliness in his personal affairs that had not been previously suspected.

It seems incredible that the Agency has a man like Foucheaux stationed permanently in this era, and yet its Agents did not trouble to collect such historical data on their own.

He meticulously sifted the contents of each drawer before closing it and moving to the next. He felt the tenseness return as he replaced the contents

of the third drawer.

If Wilkes is carrying the diary around with him, the whole endeavor here is pointless. Or perhaps he has hidden the book somewhere else.

Wilson glanced at the bed, the closet, a second dressing table. It could take half an hour to exhaust the possibilities in the room. He turned back to the bureau and cheerlessly pulled open the bottom drawer. Half was filled with several large jars of stage makeup in a box, a hand mirror, a long red wig, and two false beards. Wilson sorted through the tools of Wilkes's trade, lifting each carefully aside and as carefully replacing it. A dark riding coat was stuffed into the other half. Wilson gently lifted a corner of the folded garment and discovered beneath it a small rectangle of frayed, black leather. He had found it!

The instant of discovery flashed, strobelike, over his senses. He felt his hand tremble as he reached to lift the small book from its hiding place. He half-expected it to crumble to ashes at his touch. He let himself rock backward until he was sitting, legs sprawled, on the floor. He clasped the precious artifact gently between his hands.

The diary! He had hoped against hope, and he was not to be denied. He gave thanks for his outrageous good fortune. Booth had had no reason to suspect a search of his room *before* the bloody act he was to perform, and he had chosen to leave the incriminating document in the supposed safety of his dresser.

Wilson remembered the time and tugged the pocket watch from his coat. The discovery had taken less than five minutes. He would still have barely enough time to examine his find and possibly chip away some new nugget of insight into the long-hidden circumstances of the assassination.

He swallowed once and opened the diary. His heart jumped as though shocked. It was complete — *complete!* No pages had been removed. Wilson sat, trembling, and read through several passages.

What he found there sobered him. The powerful *had* conspired, and Booth had been their tool. The suspicions of those "conspiracy"-minded historians of three centuries were confirmed. There, in the damning script of Booth's own hand, were the lists of connections to the influential, the late evening meetings with staff members from the War Department, the agreements for aid and misdirection of the search for the killer in the crucial first hours following the deed. There was all the evidence, paving a trail of collusion from the assassin directly to the doorstep of the War Department.

Wilson turned the pages grimly, like a man unearthing a long-interred corpse. *Mr. Secretary, how the web of conspiracy enfolds you.*

He had skimmed past a familiar name entered there when a crest of realization broke over him like a whitecap. He flipped back to the page and studied the small script letters again. He had not been mistaken, and the truth of what he read jolted him. Booth had named his contact with the War Department, and Wilson felt tiny beads of perspiration on his neck as he

read aloud to himself: "Alex Foucheaux!"

He glanced quickly toward the closed door, nervously expecting his companion to burst in upon him.

Foucheaux! The Agency man, involved in the conspiracy against Lincoln? It doesn't make sense.

He looked again at the plainly lettered name, staring at him in silent argument from the pages of the diary.

But they are so cautious about time travel. His disbelief raged through him like fire. *They are scrupulous about noninterference.* For a third time he examined the small book. *And yet this man . . . one of* their *men!*

His astonishment turned to sudden terror. *Foucheaux must know what I'll find here. He knows about Booth's diary — he must! He's waiting down there, a man who plots against the president, and he knows that I share his secret!*

Wilson's mind reeled. Why had the Agency agreed to his jump? What would they do with him now that he knew?

He tried to collect his thoughts, to devise a plan. But a single, primal urge trumpeted at his emotions — escape! He folded the small book and tucked it back into its hiding place in the drawer. He stood and glanced hastily around the room. He was struggling to maintain his composure while he satisfied himself that he was leaving the room undisturbed. One part of him screamed that none of that made any difference now. But he was frightened, and he wanted time to think things out. He couldn't risk making things worse.

He stepped back into the hallway and edged to the top of the stairway. Alex was seated with his back toward him, facing the hotel entrance. As Wilson watched from the shadows, Foucheaux withdrew his pocket watch, consulted it, and turned in his chair toward the stairs. Wilson leaned back out of sight. In a few minutes, Foucheaux would come for him. He glanced behind him at the hallway. There was a window at the end, open against the warm spring air. Wilson knew that the roof of a small single-story building lay beneath that window. He crept silently down the hallway toward it.

Wilson wandered for hours along the reborn streets of Washington. He needed time to clear his head. *What is history if men like Foucheaux can change it? These hypocrites! These guardians at the gates of time, who husband the past so carefully, lest a single, crucial event be changed. These are the men who dabble with history like gods. And for what? For their private amusement? Foucheaux has aided Booth! Oh, God! How would time have recorded Lincoln's last day if these villains from the future had not meddled? Would Lincoln have been sacrificed on the altar of Booth's ego if not for Foucheaux?*

Wilson wrestled with dark thoughts as the hours wore on. He stayed off the main thoroughfares, away from public gathering places. He knew that Foucheaux would be out there, searching for him. The city about him celebrated, but the gaiety only punctuated his growing despair. As he wandered,

he found himself drifting westward, being led inexorably along F Street. Finally, he stood in the rutted dirt carriage tracks at the corner of 10th and F, staring moodily at the tall white arches and imposing red face of Ford's Theater. It's massive, blocky structure dominated the low, frame buildings that surrounded it.

He had made his decision. He had not willed it; it had come of its own volition, taking substance from the ebb of conflicting emotions that drifted like vapors through his thoughts. But it was now fully his own, if he had the courage and will to act. He retreated down F Street and turned into a darkening alleyway that reeked of stable odors.

He entered through a stage door behind the theater and stumbled across the great, darkened stage. It was after six o'clock. The large room and its several hundred wooden chairs were cast in heavy shadows. The sky had grown increasingly overcast with the passing of the day, and only a few rays of late afternoon sunlight filtered through the theater's high front windows.

Wilson tried to move quietly. Historians were in disagreement as to the exact time of Booth's last visit to Ford's during the afternoon of the fourteenth of April. It would be a mistake to arrive too early or, worse, to find the assassin at work. The theater was empty of stagehands. Most were out for an early dinner before beginning the evening's final preparations.

Wilson moved swiftly up the main aisle, then cautiously opened one of the tall doors leading to the lobby. It was empty. He slipped through the door and crept up the carpeted stairs to the dress circle. From the back of the balcony, he could look down past several fluted, white columns that supported the ceiling toward the varnished pine stage. To his right lay the presidential box, decorated with flags and tapestry for the evening. The theater was still. He moved along the long semicircular aisle that led behind the last row of seats, the same path that Wilkes would follow just four hours later. He arrived at the white door that opened into a small corridor behind the president's box, and listened quietly. There were no sounds or rustlings from within. He twisted the broken knob and pushed the door open. The narrow passage was empty and dark. He closed the door from inside and struck a match from a box he had found in his clothing. Booth had come and gone.

Behind the door a short stick was standing, the broken pedestal of a music stand. In the wall next to the door, a small hole had been gouged into the plaster. Later that evening, after Booth had slipped past the guard into the secluded passageway, the assassin would use the stick he had concealed to wedge the door shut.

The match burned down, and Wilson lit another. He turned away from the door and took three steps down the corridor toward the presidential box. In one of the two doors leading to the box, Booth had bored a small viewing hole. Wilson crouched to peer through it. He could see the back of the red Victorian rocker that Harry Ford had thoughtfully placed there for the pres-

ident.

Wilson had a sudden sensation of déjà vu. Once, many years yet in the future, he had visited the fully restored Ford's and crouched in just this manner to squint through this same hole. He felt then, as he felt now, a strange vicariousness of experience. He could almost see the president's angular head and unruly black hair nodding above the back of the chair. He could see the rocker move, back and forth, back and forth, in the slow rhythm of a funeral dirge, while his own pulse and breath beat with the staccato of a nervous march. He could feel the cold metal of the derringer slipping in the sweat of his palm while he waited to burst in upon the tyrant and strike a blow against the hated Union.

The match burned down again. Wilson turned away in the darkness and hurried out of the corridor, taking the music stand with him. He stood, gasping beyond the door, and pulled reality back around him. He fingered the broken pedestal as he started back toward the stairway. Booth would be due a mild surprise when he entered the passage during the play and found the wedge missing. But Wilson could not accommodate the obstruction in his own plans for the evening.

He reached the small landing, midway down the stairs, when he encountered Foucheaux again. The Agency man entered the dark lobby from the street, pushing through the great entrance doors. The fading daylight painted grey silhouettes on the plush red carpet. Wilson froze in terror when he saw him.

Of course, Alex would wait here! He had no need to search for me, not while the theater lay like a great magnet. This is where I would inevitably come, and he need only be patient.

Foucheaux had not spotted him. Wilson watched as Foucheaux took the few steps toward the inner lobby doors, pulled one open, and silently watched the deserted stage. Wilson pressed his back to the stairwell wall, hoping to be concealed by the shadows. Foucheaux stood for long minutes. He seemed to be watching for activity on the stage, waiting for some telltale motion, an unexpected noise. Finally, the grey man turned and walked out of the lobby. Wilson waited to be certain he had gone, then descended the rest of the stairs. He hurried again toward the stage and climbed upon it. He crossed to the rear and dropped the music stand behind some scenery.

As he turned to leave, he heard the lobby door open again, and wheeling around, he saw Foucheaux. This time he was also seen. He began to run toward the wings. A shout barked behind him, and he heard the clatter of feet approaching.

"Wilson! Stop!"

Wilson kept running.

"You're a fool. You don't know what you're doing — you could ruin all future time with your meddling!"

Wilson was outraged. He stopped and suddenly turned to face the other

man. The action also halted Foucheaux, but only momentarily. He began slowly moving forward as Wilson stared at him.

"You talk of meddling! You! The assassin! You accuse me!"

"Wilson! What the hell are —"

"I read the diary. I know about you and Booth."

Foucheaux stopped completely. His face twisted into a deep frown. "The diary? I don't . . . no, no, Wilson. You've made a mistake. You don't understand."

"I understand! How does the saying go? 'Who guards the guardians?' Do you deny that you work for Stanton?"

Foucheaux had recovered. He began inching forward again. He glanced nervously around at the empty theater. "Will you please keep your voice down? If someone should overhear us." Wilson only stared at him, fists clenched. "Yes," he finally replied in a hushed tone, "I am with the War Department. It's a persona that allows me the most effectiveness in this time."

"Effectiveness? You hypocrite! You've used your position to help Booth escape tonight."

Foucheaux glanced around again. "You don't understand about that, Wilson. I have to help him. It's the only way to keep history unchanged."

"Unchanged? Your interference will cause what's to happen here tonight. Have you thought of that? Did you consider that Booth might fail without your help, or turn away a coward for fear of being caught? You talk of preserving history! It is the history of your making that will be preserved."

Foucheaux had reached the edge of the stage. He looked around uncertainly, then back at Wilson. Wilson began a slow movement backward, toward the stage door. Foucheaux extended both arms and leaned against the stage. He softened his voice when he spoke again.

"Wilson, I know what you're planning tonight. Believe me, you can't carry it through. Think of the future generations, man. Think of what changes society will feel if Lincoln lives. Nothing will be the same."

Wilson dropped his head slightly. "But he is needed. Who knows the good our country would have achieved if he had lived to direct its first steps toward the future?"

"I know, Wilson. It's not easy for me either. Remember, I have lived here for most of my adult life. I love him, Wilson, and I must measure my days by the approach of his death."

"You?" Wilson was startled. "But you have helped arrange his murder."

"Not his murder. His murderer's escape. The murder will be Booth's act alone. He neither sought nor required assistance. It was done, will be done, whether I come here or not. No, not his murder. Booth's escape." There was a sadness in his voice. A heaviness that Wilson had not heard before.

"But why?" was all Wilson could ask.

"My dear, arrogant professor, do you imagine that you are the only man

from the future to visit these events? To try to write their private solutions to the destiny of man? There are many — many. And not just from our time, but from all the times before us since time travel was discovered, and I suppose from all the ages beyond ours as well. And I must work against all of those who come to change the outcome of these critical years."

"But how can you? One man?"

Wilson thought he could receive no further shocks. He was mistaken.

"I am not alone. We are more than a thousand stationed in this time. We are placed in all levels of society and government. And we must wait — to watch for the telltale clues that there is an unauthorized one from up-time among us. And we must stop him. We have thus far been successful. For a generation we have labored, but the most crucial time is now only hours away. It is almost over."

Wilson's mouth hung open. "A thousand? But you have spent your time today escorting a visiting professor of history on a search for a worthless document." Wilson was openly disturbed.

"Worthless? Yes, I suppose if you were seeking evidence of a cabinet conspiracy. Although a conspiracy existed, it was not as you suspected." Foucheaux sounded weary. "However, the escort was necessary, and it should have been confined to a relatively safe period. A bungling amateur on a legitimate mission can be as grave a danger to history as a scheming intruder."

"But you are helping Booth escape. Why?"

"I cannot discuss it in detail. Suffice to say that it was done to counter the interference of another from up-time. We must mete measure for measure, balance for balance, so history will close upon itself."

Wilson was battered with emotions. His head reeled at each new revelation.

"But Booth's diary stated that he had only *today* decided on assassination instead of abduction. *You* must have been the catalyst that spurred him to action. *You* provided him with a guarantee of safe passage. Without your support, he might not have acted at all."

"That is exactly the point! Wilson, how many times must I tell you? Booth *will* assassinate Lincoln tonight. That was historical fact when time travel was still a science-fiction dream. We have only preserved what has happened."

"But how can you know that for certain? A thousand of you, mingling, interacting, and carrying the terrible knowledge you possess?"

In an easy motion, Foucheaux vaulted onto the stage. Wilson, startled by the move, suddenly realized that he had allowed himself to drift dangerously close to the other man. He bolted toward the back of the stage. He heard the hard *rap-rap* of Foucheaux's boots behind him. He pushed open the stage door and tumbled into the alley behind the theater. The cobblestone was dark, shadowed by the press of buildings on both sides and by the

now-heavily overcast evening sky. He knew the alleyway as though raised upon it. It had received extensive attention by the popular press, and by later historians, because it was Booth's first path of escape after the murder.

Wilson ran down the narrow concourse, hugging close to the wall of a livery stable. The air was suffused with the pungent odor of straw and manure. He heard the door of the theater bang open behind him, and he did not stop. He raced past the first exit to the street leading off to his left, knowing that this would be the route a pursuer would expect him to take. He slowed his pace, muffling the sounds of his boots on the stone underfoot. It was dark, and he was sure he could not be seen.

He heard the footsteps behind him slow to a jog as Foucheaux reached the first exit from the alley. The boots shuffled uncertainly, stood for a moment, then clattered off toward the street.

Wilson ran in earnest. He came to a second exit leading to the right and hurried down it, stumbling once and nearly falling in the darkness. He reached the safety of the thoroughfare, sparsely filled with people hurrying home from work. A covered hansom moved slowly down the well-rutted street. Across the street, a lamplighter was removing some colorful streamers from a lamppost so that he could fire the gaslight inside. Wilson turned down the street and ran. He weaved between the pedestrians, dashed across the street, dodging the large spoked wheels of a carriage, and ran on.

He finally stopped only when he was many blocks from the theater. Wheezing heavily, he leaned against the brick facade of a boarding house. He stared back along the flagstone sidewalk. His mind struggled with confusion while his body fought for breath and self-control. The casual glance of a passerby set him on edge. His thoughts raced wildly, fanned by desperation.

Where are you, Alex? Are you out there, searching? Or will you just wait? You know I'll be back, Alex, but I've got to stay away from you until tonight. I must be in that audience, Alex. Oh, God, I must be there. Can I right your wrong by becoming like you? Do your actions justify mine, or will the crime be shared? I have already sinned. The small change I made may already be echoing down the hallways of history, destroying all it encounters.

He collapsed against the building, and sobbed.

No. I can't risk it, Alex. Am I a murderer? An assassin of history — an evil greater than Booth? He brushed at his eyes with his coat sleeve. *But I must be there, Alex. To have come and not to witness it? There will be no second chance.*

He straightened again and glanced around self-consciously. The street was now nearly deserted. Only the long parallel rows of decorated lampposts stood vigil, like silent mourners at a funeral of state, and two soldiers wandering in the yellow light, in search of a tavern.

The sight of the soldiers gave him an inspiration. He could not return to the theater the way he was dressed. He would need a disguise, and stumbling down the street toward him came a perfect one. If one of the soldiers could be persuaded to part with his uniform . . . Wilson's "horse" money

and the festivity of the victory celebration might be sufficient to persuade them. Wilson stepped out of the shadows to meet them.

Wilson fidgeted in the hard wooden chair. He withdrew the pocket watch, now tucked beneath a red-trimmed blue belt. Seven-thirty. He put it away again and drummed nervously on his lap with white-gloved fingers. A woman sat beside him. She wore an evening dress, white silk and lace, cut modestly over her bare shoulders. She sighed noisily.

"How long before this play-actin' thing starts?" she asked.

"Another half-hour," he told her, not looking in her direction.

She sighed again, and also fidgeted in her chair.

"You sure you wouldn't rather just go back to the house and be alone?" she asked.

Wilson sighed.

"Listen, Lieutenant, I'm really very good. The men say I —"

"Please, please, just sit quietly." He turned to look at her. Her face had seemed youthful, almost innocent, in the dim lighting of the bordello. Now he could see eyes pinched by crow's-feet, a neck drawn and wrinkled. The heavy makeup she wore couldn't conceal her age in the theater's gas houselights. When she smiled, she showed the ragged blackness of a broken tooth. She was pouting.

Wilson felt the anxiety and fatigue of the last several hours overcome him. He directed his anger at her.

"Look, it's my money and my time," he snapped. "Lord knows I've paid you more than enough. So just sit there and be quiet. And quit fidgeting."

She dropped her eyes and folded her hands, childlike, in her lap. He started to apologize, but the words stopped in his throat. He turned back to look at the theater.

It was nearly half-filled. Most of the crowd was composed of soldiers and women. In his newly acquired uniform, and with his companion, he blended in like a chameleon on a brown rock. *If only time would pass more quickly,* he thought. He was drumming again.

"Listen, Lieutenant." She leaned forward to rest her head on his shoulder. He resisted the urge to pull away. There was a squeaky, apologetic tone in her voice. "Don't think I'm not grateful for this beautiful dress you bought for me. I mean, I don't know when I've felt so much like a lady."

He turned toward her again. *And I had to nearly break the shop door down to get the owner to open up and sell it to me.* He saw the broken tooth bobbing over her face. *This was a mistake. There was so little time to think through a change of plans.*

The idea of attending the play as an officer and his lady had seemed perfect. He had gone to a brothel that the soldiers directed him to, seeking the first woman to enter his life since his daughter. When he saw her there, all the painful memories came rushing back, to rip open scars he had believed

long-healed. She had the same long, dark, gleaming hair, petite frame, large brown eyes. He had even called her Colleen twice during the ride to Ford's theater.

"It reminds me of when I was a little girl," she was saying. "My momma used to get me fixed up all nice and pretty, and we'd go out walkin' on the Mall. Why, we'd be just prancin' and smilin' and flirtin' with the fellas. My momma was the loveliest thing in this city. I was so proud that she'd want me to go walkin' with her. Least until Pa got home. He'd come get us, stinkin' and swearin' at Ma and me. I'd just run home and go up to my room to get away from him."

She was looking at Wilson now, but he knew she wasn't seeing him.

"He came home one night and found Ma with one of the boys from the park. Shot them both. I ran away, and I ain't never seen him again."

Wilson was staring at her.

"Ma sure was pretty. Sometimes I kinda wish we could walk together like that again."

Wilson lowered his head and turned away. She continued to talk softly, but he tried not to listen, to force his troubled thoughts to clear. He had to stay alert, to think. He looked around the theater.

They were sitting in the hard-backed chairs, several rows back, and far down to one side of the dress circle. The balcony was actually semicircular in shape. It spanned the rear and two side walls of the theater and extended over half of the lower-level seating area. The seats in the balcony followed the semicircular pattern so that, from where Wilson sat, he had a good view of both the stage and of the comings and goings to the dress-circle seats. The only stairway to the balcony lay opposite him on the far side of the circle, behind the last row of seats. To his right, and behind him, was the small white door that led to the president's private box. The box opened over the stage itself, and it was flanked by several American flags and a portrait of Washington, in honor of the evening's special guests.

Another flag, that of the Treasury Department, was draped over the balustrade. Wilson looked at it. This flag, Wilson knew, would be the single, and fatal, flaw in Wilkes's plans. Booth, wearing spurs in anticipation of his hasty escape, would snag one of them on the flag during his leap to the stage, and a splintered ankle would result. This fracture would severely slow Booth's flight to the Confederacy so that those inside the government who were attempting to thwart the search for the assassin would be unable to prevent his capture. Or at least, that had been the theory of some students of history. But then Foucheaux certainly already knew about the broken ankle — Wilson shook his head in confusion.

He squinted past the flag toward the inside of the president's box, now brightly lighted by the two large gas chandeliers that hung over the stage. Because of his angle, he could not actually see inside. He knew, however, that the box was empty. The president would not arrive until after the play


FORD'S THEATRE
TENTH STREET ABOVE N
Friday Evening April 14th 1865
BENEFIT
AND
LAST NIGHT
OF MISS
KEENE
DYOTT
AND
MR. HARRY HAWK
TAYLORS CELEBRATED EGOCENTRIC COMEDY
THOUSAND NIGHT
OUR AMERICAN
COUSIN
BENEFIT of Miss
MS

had started, about eight-thirty.

The theater was filling rapidly. The laughter and conversation were now competing with the voice of his companion. A large crowd had turned out on Good Friday evening, unusual for a holy day. But revelry was in the air. The angry war was over less than a week. Those who came were less interested in Laura Keene and the cast of *Our American Cousin* than in catching a glimpse of the president, now a lionized hero, and especially of his expected companion, General Grant.

Wilson knew the audience was to be disappointed. Grant would not attend. He had been warned by Secretary Stanton to stay away from the theater because of the risk of assassination. This warning came from the same Stanton who, later in the day, would refuse Lincoln his personal choice of bodyguards and would send to attend to the president a Mr. John Parker, a man with a prior record of negligence to duty. Parker's neglect of the president's welfare on this night would allow Booth to enter Lincoln's box unmolested.

How much of this is your doing, Alex, and how much is indifference, or worse, on the part of the secretary? You have polluted these times, Alex — we shall never know.

Wilson jolted upright in his seat. A familiar face had appeared at the top of the dress-circle stairs. A dark man, in a grey wool suit and string tie, stood, slowly turning his head to examine each face in the balcony audience. Foucheaux! Wilson turned toward his companion so that he presented only a partial profile to the man. He smiled warmly at the girl. She had been talking continuously in his direction for several minutes, and this sudden attention caught her short. She stared at Wilson, mouth frozen in mid-sentence.

"Don't stop now, please," he said, trying to maintain a smile. "This is the moment I've been paying you for." He watched the grey man at the edge of his vision, still standing, still searching. The girl hesitated, then giggled noisily.

"Lordy, you're a strange one," she said. "Are you ready to go back to the house now?" She fluffed her hair. "I knew you couldn't hold out all night."

"Just sit still. Keep smiling and keep talking." Wilson shot back. His voice was coldly menacing, though his face continued to grin. The girl shook her head and began to frown. Wilson casually laid his hand on hers and squeezed hard.

"Smile!"

"Hey, you're hurtin' me!" she whimpered through clenched teeth. "All right, all right, I'm smilin'."

Foucheaux was looking in their direction. His gaze stopped on them for a moment, and he frowned. Wilson could see him move to one side to get a better view. Wilson propped his chin on his open hand and tried to hide his features. He suffered several anxious seconds until the man turned to study other faces. After several minutes he appeared to be satisfied, and he disap-

peared back down the stairway.

Wilson released the girl's hand and turned to face the stairway. Had Foucheaux recognized him? He couldn't be certain.

"Look, mister. I don't know what you are up to here, but money or no money, I don't have to put up with this." The girl was glaring at him. "If you want to sit in this dreary place and twist people's arms off, that's your business. But it ain't gonna be mine no more!"

She gathered her skirt and started to get up. Wilson caught her arm, gently this time, and pleaded with her.

"Look, I'm sorry, but I may be in danger here. It's got me a bit nervous. Ellen. That's your name, isn't it? Ellen, I need you here with me now very much. I can't really explain, but I promise there is no danger to you. Just stay with me, please. Trust me. Before this night is over, you'll have a lifetime's worth of stories to tell your friends back at the house."

She studied him for a moment, then sat down. Her face showed concern, and she looked apprehensively at the theater guests around her.

"What do you mean, *danger*?"

"Someone is looking for me. You are part of my disguise."

She started to protest, but he quieted her. He fumbled with an explanation, but was rescued by the first appearance of an actor on the stage. The gaslights were dimmed, and the theater grew hushed. What was to be the last performance in Ford's for more than a century was beginning.

Wilson glanced again at the stairway, but it was empty. He relaxed somewhat and turned his attention toward the stage. He gave only passing notice to the unfolding of the broad farce. Because the play was so tightly embroidered into the fabric of this fateful night, it held a certain historical fascination for him. But he had been immersed in the study of Lincoln and his times for most of his professional life, and by now he knew the words and actions by heart. How queer it seemed to watch Laura Keene and her company acting through the familiar lines. They appeared awkward, even amateurish, compared to several of the Lincoln's Day performances he had seen at the restored Ford's in his own time.

Disconnected thoughts, like wind-driven clouds, raced across the landscapes of his mind.

Alex, I must avoid you just a little longer. Just long enough to see it happen, to see the assassin leap, perhaps to help bear the dying president's body across the street to its final sleep. Oh, God, why do I torture myself? I will see Booth, but I will be powerless to act. I must let it happen. The future, my future — what will become of it if I interfere? God, my future! What is my heritage from Booth's act? Would Elenor have loved me if Lincoln lived? And Colleen — would one man's act left undone tonight have allowed me more time with you? Colleen, Colleen, you grew up so fast. I had to send you away. Those goddamn drugs destroyed you, Colleen; you weren't my little girl anymore. You had to leave home — until you came to your senses and knew what you were giving up.

Oh, God — Colleen, why suicide? I'd have taken you back! I'm sorry. Oh, God, I'm sorry! Goddamn you, Alex — you and your goddamn god-playing!

A sudden chattering about him dragged Wilson's thoughts back to the audience-filled theater. He glanced at several people who were talking in hushed tones, their attention diverted from the stage. The actors were fumbling with their lines, distracted by what was becoming a noisy commotion in the audience. Wilson could see that a few people on the main floor were standing, while others had turned in their seats toward the rear of the theater. There was a great deal of pointing and murmuring.

The orchestra director, plainly annoyed, turned to face the audience and strained to locate the cause of the disturbance. The players now stood motionless on the stage, squinting with raised hands to shade their eyes from the gas footlights. Abruptly, the conductor turned back to the musicians and called something to them. There was a rapid shuffling of sheet music, and on the conductor's command the orchestra struck the electrifying first notes of "Ruffles and Flourishes." With this as a cue, a great roar went up from the audience, most people applauding, many standing on their seats, whistling and cheering. The houselights came up, and the play was temporarily forgotten.

Wilson could see people in the dress circle leaning far over the railing to the stairway, trying to catch a glimpse of the late-arriving president. Shortly before he came into view, these people pulled back, as though pushed like the sea from the bow of a great ship. They fluttered and smiled knowingly to one another as he ascended the stairs.

As the familiar shock of unruly hair came into view, the murmur in the dress circle swelled to a crescendo. Wilson found himself caught up in the excitement, and a loud cheer rose from his throat. Finally, he saw the tired face break through the waves of people straining to see him.

Lincoln stood almost a head above those who surrounded him, and Wilson could see the craggy features, worn by years of anguish and by the terrible toll of a sensitive conscience embroiled in a fratricidal war. He was smiling, but his eyes were weary. The heavy lines of his cheeks were drawn downward into gaunt slashes that made him appear almost disfigured. His eyes were dark, heavy-lidded, and surrounded by folds of wrinkled skin. His smile was merely an upward twist at each end of the firm lips. He held his ubiquitous stovepipe hat in one hand and reached out with the other to squeeze some of the hands outstretched toward him.

He made his way along the aisle behind the dress-circle seats, pausing frequently to speak a few words to one or another of the acquaintances he saw there. Mary Lincoln, plump, homely, and smiling proudly, trailed to one side of her husband. Behind them were their guests, Henry Rathbone, dressed in Union blue, and his fiancée, Clara Harris. Finally came John Parker, of the Metropolitan Police, on special assignment to the White House.

Lincoln moved slowly past the outstretched arms. *It is as though he senses it,* Wilson thought. *This great outpouring of emotion is a catharsis for the frustration, anger, fear, and sorrow that the Great War, so recently ended, has wrought upon his beloved nation. He sees that the people need to touch him, to say, "Thank God, it's over," and he cannot deny them.*

As the presidential party made its way closer to the small white door, Wilson found himself on his feet. The theater faded from around him. The cheers of the audience, the stirring rhythms of the orchestra, became a faint whisper on the edge of his consciousness. The universe was filled to overflowing with that gaunt, tragic face. Each movement, each gesture, each twitch of the mouth or nodding of the head was slowed to a dreamlike stillness and amplified as though projected on a gigantic screen. Wilson was lost in the face, in the very immensity of the moment he had lived in his imagination for more than thirty years. His thoughts were adrift on the confluent tides of love and impending loss that rushed over him.

"Oh, Captain! My Captain! Our fearful trip is done." His thoughts reached out to the face before him. *Have you borne us through the fire only to lose the dream to this wretched night? Oh, how your beloved nation will suffer for Booth's ignoble deed. If you could but live, to gently shepherd those stray sheep back to the Union, to hold in check the unreasoning forces of hatred and revenge that even now profane the sacred halls of Congress with cries of retribution. If you could but stay to win the peace for us, as you have so lately won the war.*

Will a lone assassin's bullet end forever your country's last great hope for leadership and moral council? The degeneration of our national will, the rise of pettiness, the subjugation of our brothers beyond the bloody conflict that was to have settled the issue, and all of the decay of our once-proud civilization will spread through time, like your blood upon the carpet, if Booth performs his hideous deed tonight.

Wilson allowed the man and his presence to close about him like the sea, to submerge his own personality in the sublime sensuality of the event. He was helpless before the undercurrent that drew him to the face, that drained him of energy and momentum, save that derived by nearness to the man. *Lincoln! Alive!* He now throbbed with a single, irrepressible thought, *I cannot let him die!*

When at last the president gave a small bow and disappeared behind the white door, Wilson's eyes were blurred with wetness. He stood transfixed, staring at the spot where Lincoln had been, until Ellen, plainly embarrassed, tugged gently at his trouser leg. He glanced around, allowing the theater and its people to flow back into the great vacuum left in his awareness. He didn't know how long he had stood there, but everyone was now seated, the theater darkened, and the play resumed.

He dropped slowly to his chair, and for a long while could only stare at the fluted gothic column and bit of tapestry that blocked his view into the president's box.

A roar of laughter brought Wilson's attention back to the play. He felt a sudden shock of disorientation. The actors were walking through the third act. Harry Hawk was convulsing the audience with his portrayal of the outrageous American backwoodsman. How long had he sat, daydreaming? He must be alert. He pulled out the pocket watch and glanced at it. Ten o'clock. He looked at his companion. She was now totally involved in the comedy's broad humor. *Enjoy what little amusement is left you tonight,* he thought.

He looked toward the stairway. In a few minutes Booth would appear and begin his silent journey around the dress circle. Wilson twisted to see where Parker had positioned himself. The wooden chair provided for the president's bodyguard was empty. The man would later testify that he had moved down a few rows to get a better view of the play. Wilson glanced around, but found no evidence of the man.

He turned back toward the stairway. The timing must be perfect. If he moved too early, Booth could accuse him of assaulting an innocent theatergoer. Too late, and the president would be dead. Again!

The thought struck him that perhaps what he did here tonight could make no difference. Perhaps his role in this event was like that of the audience of *Our American Cousin.* He could watch it unfold, involve his emotions in the outcome, but the event itself was foreordained. He was merely viewing the replay of what was once reality, but was now only re-creation, a piece of film cycling endlessly through the projector of history.

No! He knew that was not the case. He could — he *would* — change the outcome of this dreadful night.

A strong hand gripped his left shoulder. He turned toward Ellen, but she was staring, hypnotized, at the stage. Slowly, he turned his neck to see the intruder. The steely, grey eyes of Foucheaux were staring into his. He was squatting behind Wilson's chair, and Wilson gave a start that turned several heads in his direction.

"Come with me." Alex whispered the command, but it came out threatening.

"Pardon me, sir?" Wilson forced a gruff voice. "Are you addressing one of your country's officers in that tone?"

Several people turned annoyed faces toward him. Ellen sat stiffly in the chair, staring wide-eyed at the dark man. She said nothing.

"We've finished talking, Wilson," Foucheaux shot back. "Let's go!"

Wilson was paralyzed. He could not leave now. Booth was due any minute. He thought of the French Perrine revolver tucked beneath his coat. He had bought it from the officer along with the uniform, grudgingly acknowledging its need, but fearing its use. He glanced down at Foucheaux's hands. One was hidden in a coat pocket, where an angular object bulged. He was defeated. He nodded once at the other man and stood. Ellen sat frozen in her chair, but Foucheaux ignored her.

Alex backed toward the aisle, and Wilson followed. Onstage, the actors

were leading into the final lines of scene two. Downstairs in the lobby, Booth would be beginning his move. He would time his deed with a particular line from this scene. Wilson looked desperately at the other man.

"Please," he begged, "I —"

Foucheaux cut him off with a short angry shake of his head.

"No! You must leave now."

Wilson led the way around the dress circle toward the stairway.

I cannot save him now, he thought. *I must be content to have seen him on his final day, to return to my time with his face before me. I must get out of here before it happens.*

He turned his head slightly, and whispered, "Let's hurry, Alex."

They began to descend the stairs.

"I'm sorry, Alex. It seemed so —"

He was interrupted as a dark man in a black riding coat bumped into him. The man was ascending the stairs and stopped suddenly, angry at the intrusion into his preoccupations. The man glared at Wilson, the young, handsome face drawn back in a scowl. The stranger stared first at Wilson and then at Foucheaux. Wilson saw the young man's eyes widen when he saw Foucheaux, but he turned back and continued up the stairs. As Wilson listened to the soft jangle of Wilkes's spurs ascending the stairs, the despair and doubt left him. He was thinking desperately as he and Foucheaux descended to the lobby. There was a crowd of men standing to one side, engaged in animated conversation. Two of them were soldiers.

Wilson wheeled to face Foucheaux. He shouted at him in a loud voice. "You dare to insult a Union officer, sir? Are you yourself a traitorous rebel?"

Foucheaux was off guard. He stared blankly at Wilson. Realizing his intention, he glanced around, saw the two soldiers glaring at him, and smiled. He threatened Wilson through bare teeth.

"So help me, if you do that again, I'll drop you right here. Let's move."

Wilson continued to play his hand. "Is that a threat, sir?" The group of men drifted toward them. "I believe you are up to no good here tonight, sir," he added loudly. "I may be forced to have you arrested."

Foucheaux was seething. He had dropped the smile.

"Wilson —" His words were snipped off as one of the burly soldiers, a sergeant, reached out and grabbed his arm.

"Is this reb bothering you, Lieutenant?" the sergeant asked. His eyes were bloodshot with whiskey, and he looked like he'd be mean even sober.

"Sergeant, take this man into custody. I believe he is one of Jeff Davis's personal agents, and he just made a threat on my life."

Foucheaux was staring hard at Wilson. His nostrils flared, and he spoke through tight lips.

"Take your hands off me, soldier, or I'll have you court-martialed. I am with the War Department."

The group of men now surrounded Wilson and Foucheaux. Wilson let the men flow around him, and suddenly he was standing outside the circle.

"And I wipe the president's arse," the sergeant growled. The circle tightened.

Wilson knew he must move quickly. He glanced at Foucheaux, who had disappeared behind an ever-widening crowd of spectators. Several of the theater employees had joined the confrontation. He turned to the outside lobby door and threw it open to the chill night air. Behind him, Foucheaux shouted his name once in desperation. Wilson pushed by a doorman and jumped into the gas-lit darkness.

Once outside, he reentered the building through a small door that separated Ford's from the Star Saloon next door. He slammed the wooden door behind him, plunging the narrow corridor he had entered into blackness. He fumbled for a match, struck it, and raced down the passageway. The corridor ended in a pair of doors. The one directly ahead opened onto the stage. He was directly below the president's box. He turned to the door on his right and threw it open. A flight of stairs led down to a level beneath the theater.

He jumped down the stairs and reached the first of several interconnecting storerooms. He pushed through them quickly, pausing only briefly to relight his matches. He protected them with a cupped hand as he ran. The rooms were cluttered with crates and stage props. He tripped once and sprawled in total darkness. He was quickly on his feet and struck another match.

He came to a very narrow corridor, dimly lighted by gaslight filtering through the floorboards above him. He was beneath the stage, and he could hear the boards creak as the actors moved through their impersonations. Their voices sounded hollowly through the passageway, and the audience laughter peeled like distant thunder.

"What, no fortune?" a woman's voice was saying.

"Nary red." That was Harry Hawk. "It all comes to their barking up the tree about the old man's property."

The thunder rumbled softly.

Wilson felt a surge of terror. These were the lines just before John Wilkes Booth's self-determined cue. Wilson scrambled through the corridor and found a flight of stairs. He raced up and threw open the door at the top.

"Augusta, dear, to your room," the woman was saying.

"Yes, Ma. The nasty beast!" came a younger girl's voice.

Wilson rushed toward the stage wings.

"I am aware, Mr. Trenchard," the older woman spoke again, "that you are not used to the manners of good society." The woman turned to leave the stage.

Behind her, Harry Hawk was thinking aloud to the audience. "Don't know the manners of good society, eh?"

Wilson bumped into a stagehand, who tried to restrain him. He pushed him aside.

"Well, I guess I know enough to turn you inside out, you sockdologizing old —"

Wilson burst from the wings opposite the president's box into the full light of the stage. He pointed directly into the darkened box and screamed at the top of his voice. "Mr. President, behind you!"

There was a commotion in the private box, and a larger one in the audience. Wilson saw a wrestling of shadows in the darkness, then suddenly heard a single shot. It reverberated through and above the shocked stillness of the audience like the tolling of a great bell, and it was followed in a heartbeat by a scream so anguished that he knew it to be that of Mary Lincoln.

The audience at first gasped collectively, and then as a wave of realization washed over them, there came a cacophony of shouts and screams. Wilson kept his eyes locked on the curtained box, raised ten feet above the stage. His heart tightened, and he sucked in a breath and held it.

The shadows scuffled in the darkened box, and a handsome man in a dark riding coat appeared at the balustrade. In a moment he was over the edge. During his leap to the stage, one of his spurs caught in the blue Treasury Department flag, and he fell with his full weight onto his left foot. His face twisted in pain. He pushed himself up and shuffled awkwardly across the stage, pushing the actor Hawk aside. As he reached midstage, he turned to the audience and raised both arms in a gesture of defiance.

"Sic semper tyrannis!" he shouted, arms uplifted like a romanticized statue of the black event.

The orchestra leader reached out to grab his leg, but Booth slashed wickedly at him with an already bloody hunting knife.

The action shook Wilson from the frozen stillness that had immobilized him. As Booth turned toward the wings, Wilson fumbled with the long military coat. Booth was now staring directly at him, and Wilson was terrified by the madness in the wild eyes. He pulled the Perrine free as Booth hobbled toward him, the knife gleaming horribly in the gaslight.

Wilson held the pistol with both hands and fired. Booth's eyes opened in disbelief, and he took a few halting steps. Wilson fired again, and again. The assassin fell, the full length of his body dropping at Wilson's feet. Wilson was now screaming uncontrollably, and he continued to fire bullets into the unmoving figure until at last only the soft clicking of the hammer and the hollow echoing of the gunshots punctuated his sobs. He dropped the pistol. It landed on Booth's back with a thump and then clattered onto the wooden stage.

The theater was in bedlam. Most of the people were scrambling for the lobby doors. Some were hurrying up the dress-circle stairs, and others were still in their seats, staring in unbelieving horror at the now bloodstained stage.

But Wilson's eyes were raised toward the president's box. A strong hand was moving there, gripping the balustrade in an effort to lend support to a gangly body. Finally, the hand became an arm, then a chest, and finally a face. Lincoln was standing. *Standing!* He was leaning heavily on the rail. A wet brown stain was enveloping the left sleeve of his coat, but his face was clear.

"We are all right," he called above the confusion of the crowd in a throaty, backwoods accent. "We need a doctor up here for Major Rathbone."

The dark eyes drifted across the stage to where a Union Army lieutenant stood, shoulders slumped, above the body of a dead assassin. The president and Wilson locked eyes, and Lincoln smiled grimly. He nodded uncertainly at Wilson's uniformed figure and gestured with his right hand. Wilson's own hand raised without volition, and the president disappeared back into the box.

Wilson suddenly became aware of the commotion around him. Actors and stagehands were hurrying onto the stage, all of them giving Wilson a wide berth. When he sought their eyes, they looked away fearfully. He looked down at the body at his feet. Booth was dead. He had died by Wilson's hand and now lay in a widening pool of blood. A young woman stood near the body, tears streaming down her heavily caked makeup.

"My God, you have killed him," she said aloud. Wilson stared at her, then at the still figure; the outstretched hand just inches from his boot.

"Murderer!" she screamed. "Assassin!" Once again, a wail echoed in the nearly deserted theater.

He turned away from the body, hesitated, then turned back. He crouched over the prostrate Booth and reached uncertainly beneath the red-stained coat. He groped for a moment, fumbling, then withdrew his hand. In it, he clutched the leather diary. He slid the book into his pocket, but couldn't remember why. He could see only the moist smears of blood that streaked the fingers of his white gloves.

He wheeled and ran to the rear of the stage, then out through the stage door. Outside, in the alley, a young boy was lying on a bench, holding the reins to Booth's horse. Wilson grabbed the reins from him and swung himself into the saddle. He was sobbing as he shouted at the boy.

"Get back inside, and forget you saw this horse — or me, tonight!"

He kicked at the horse's flanks and turned it in the alleyway. The hooves beneath him clattered on the cobblestones as he raced down the narrow side passage and out onto F Street. He had the horse in a full gallop as he turned south.

He must leave Washington before Foucheaux could pick up his trail. He and Foucheaux were now both trapped in the history that Wilson had created, and he was certain that Alex would give him no rest because of that. Lincoln now lived, but his life had been purchased at a terrible cost.

Geoffrey Wilson would forever be an enigma: little noted and unremem-

bered. He was a shadowy figure with no past who had mysteriously appeared to save the president's life. He must now disappear again and, like the future he had fathered, begin anew.

A light mist was falling as he turned the assassin's horse toward the Naval Yard Bridge that led across the Anacostia River and south into the Confederacy. He knew the bridge would be lightly guarded. ✪

THERMO

> Heat energy flows automatically to a place of lower energy; hence, the universe approaches the "death of heat." However, applying other energy can temporarily and locally stop this flow. . . .
>
> — Lecture on the Laws of Thermodynamics

As he pares the worm-gnawed half of the fruit
forbidden, grounded from an Eden tree,
our tweedy warns, "The universe
is running down in a wake for the earth."

Well. You and I and Betelgeuse
may leach our ergs like unfired clay
that rains dissolve into muddy sherds.
And some midnight day the reindeer's ghost
my nuzzle lichen on a blistered plain
then chilled on a pruny sphere and last iced,
forgotten in nearly total zero.

I'd confess to owning more concern
that grass may choke my primrose plants.
For meanwhile we've prevailed ten fists
of equinoctial-treading suns,
to jump-rope over still-warmed years,
to lace our still-thawed fingers, and to knit
our nanoseconds into an hour's quilt.

— Robert Hays

Inflections

The Readers

Dear Mr. Price,

As a reader of *Amazing Stories* since 1981, I have a few comments and suggestions to make on the Price-era issues.

1. Art and Graphic Design. The interior design used since you took over is the best in my five years and three editors of reading. I especially like the contents page and the department headings. I have one problem with the cover, however. The oval around the word STORIES is always the same unattractive shade of green, which often clashes with the rest of the cover. It would be an improvement to colour this oval the colour of the word AMAZING or the colour of the bar code.

2. Fiction. For the last two years I had found most of the issues uninspiring but not without merit, but I have found the last two issues to be an improvement. In the March 1987 issue, only "Under Her Skin" and the Feghoot failed to interest me. My favorite stories were "Dreamtigers" and "When the Haloperidol Runs Out and the Blue Fairy Never Comes," and I liked the ending of "Uphill Climb." I just realized that these are the same stories mentioned in the January 1987 *Locus* — a surprising coincidence. Although I liked "A Tale at Rilling's Inn," I find this type of heroic fantasy out of place, as it does not fit in with your recent slant to either science fiction or contemporary fantasy.

3. Nonfiction and Departments. I find it ironic that this area is the weakest part of *Amazing Stories* now. The irony is in the fact that the only thing that kept me reading in the late Scithers regime was the nonfiction, especially the book reviews. I found this column to be valuable in helping to decide what novels to read. I did enjoy the review of Lovecraft's works, but those books are totally unavailable in London, Ontario. I even tried all the used and rare books stores. I suggest that you include ordering information for the small-press books that are reviewed. If you plan to continue these theme reviews, I hope you concentrate on studies of an author's work instead of reviews like Roland Green's "The Fantastic Battlefield," which was too generalized to be of use to me. I've found Robert Silverberg's "Reflections" column uninteresting when he isn't writing about the genre. "On Exhibit" shows a flash of innovative brilliance. Your rivals have picked up on this great idea, which just goes to show your foresight. (In case you missed it, *Twilight Zone* started a similar feature last issue.)

In conclusion, I've found my enjoyment of *Amazing Stories* increasing lately, so keep moving in the same direction.

Truly yours,
Steven Jordan
153 Victoria Street
London, Ontario
Canada N6A 2B6

Thanks for your compliments, Steve. As you have, many of our readers have sent us letters stating how pleased they

are with the graphic quality and the caliber of fiction found in recent issues of Amazing Stories.

To respond to some of your points: Firstly, the oval containing the word STORIES has not been the ghastly shade of split-pea green for the last three issues; we realized that such a graphic element was incongruous to the rest of the cover design. Secondly, though our book reviewers may reference a rare SF or fantasy book that you may not be able to find in your bookstore doesn't mean that you can't ask your sales clerk to order *it. Thirdly, Bob Silverberg's comments about masquerades, the AIDS crisis, and embalmed plants have stirred up some interesting rebuttals from our readers. We find such debates refreshing.*

— Patrick Lucien Price

Dear Pat,

The Gregory Benford review ["Hard? Science? Fiction?" July 1987] was wonderful. If you can get him to do more things like this, then I, for one, would be utterly pleased. I told another writer in a letter that I'd love to have Benford review my novel, even if he ended up totally demolishing me.

Best,

Rebecca [Brown] Ore
P.O. Box 129
Critz VA 24082

Well, Rebecca, you're in luck: Greg Benford has at least one other nonfiction piece in mind for publication in Amazing Stories. *Something a bit controversial, we've heard. So keep an eye out for his article in the January 1988 issue.*

— Patrick Lucien Price

Dear Pat,

Thanks for the contributor's copies of the July 1987 issue. Great cover by John Lakey. John Devin's "Daemon" really knocked me out, beautiful imagery and movement, as did Roberta Grant's "Catscape." Also liked Darrell Schweitzer's "The Shaper of Animals" and the Bailey-Chilson collaboration. J. M. Zeller's "The Hand of the Survivor" was a very imaginative and disturbing piece — I'd certainly like to see more by this author.

Robert Silverberg's comments on Weyerhauser's embalmed trees were fascinating, but I think he's overlooked some of the most obvious applications of this wondrous technological advance. No doubt a flame retardant could be added to the emblaming fluid and thus all of our national forests could truly be preserved, as is, for future generations. And what about Christmas! Each year we can have living (dead) trees without fighting holiday traffic to buy them. Just haul the sucker out of the attic and dust it off each time the sleigh bells start to jingle. But perhaps the most profound application of the Weyerhauser coup still lies some years in the future, when the terraforming of Mars will be performed by Bekins Moving and Storage.

Hope all goes well.

Bruce Boston
P.O. Box 6398
Albany CA 94706

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 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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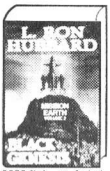

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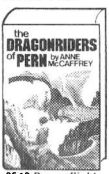

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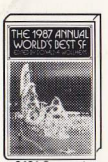

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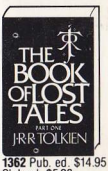

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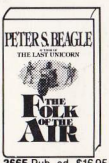

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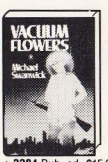

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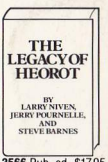

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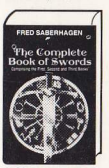

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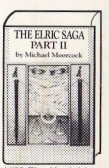

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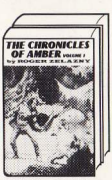

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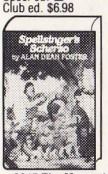

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