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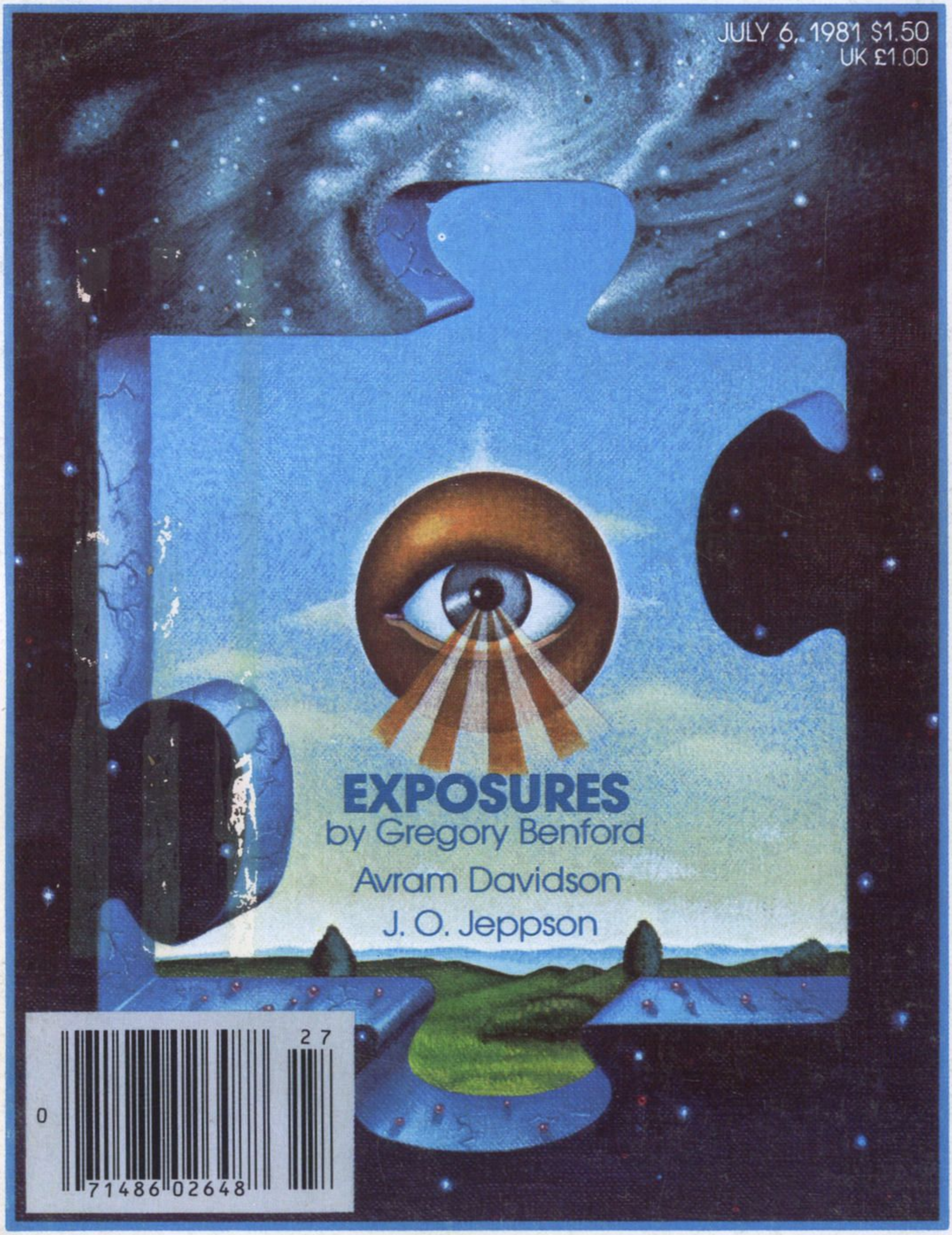

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EDITORIAL: OUR OWN GALAXY

by Isaac Asimov

art: Frank Kelly Freas

Last issue, I talked of the evolution of the word "galaxy" and how it came to be used for those huge conglomerations of stars that are the most noticeable units of the Universe on a large scale. There are an enormous number of these objects, which—as far as we can tell—are distributed more or less evenly through the Universe in all directions.

The number of galaxies we can detect in our telescopes is in the neighborhood of a billion. The total number of galaxies in the Universe may be something like a hundred billion.

What do we name these galaxies individually? In particular, what do we call the galaxy we live in?

To begin with, I am not particularly enamored of the term "galaxy" as covering a class of objects. The word derives, as I explained last issue, from the Greek for "Milky Way"; and the galaxies are not milky ways. The Milky Way is the luminous band that circles our sky; and that is how a galaxy looks from the *inside,* so there is only one Milky Way. To call all the other objects that resemble the one we live in "milky ways" or "galaxies" is unfortunate.

After all, we speak of the Sun, but other objects of the same kind are stars. We speak of the Moon, but other objects of the same kind are satellites. By analogy, we should speak of the Galaxy, but call other objects of the same kind something else.

What else? My own choice would be "star-systems," which is what they are. Furthermore, it might be nice to attach a number to that general term to signify, logarithmically, the number of stars they contain. A giant galaxy containing ten trillion stars (10^{13}) would be a star-system-13. Our own Galaxy would, in those terms, be a star-system-11. You could have dwarf galaxies as small as star-system-6.

The beauty of this nomenclature is that it doesn't make distinction between conglomerations of different size. For instance, globular clusters are much smaller than the average galaxy; and the only

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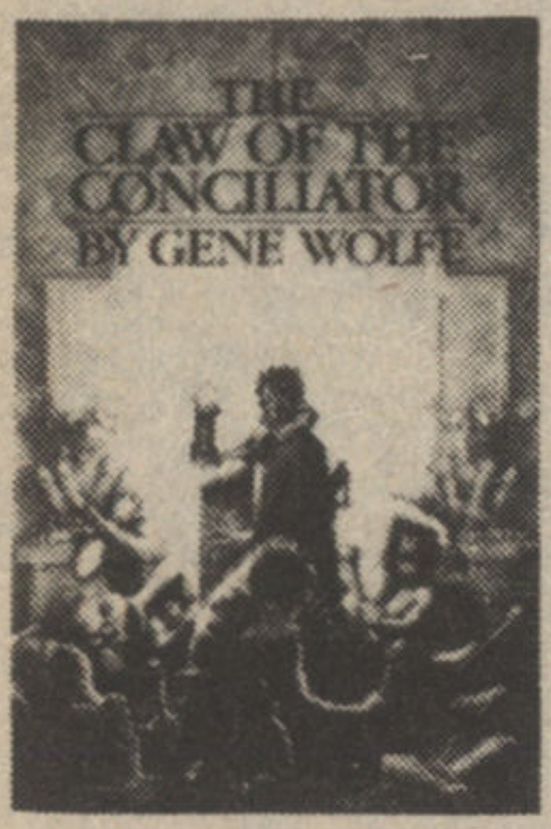

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ones we have detected are clearly satellites of galaxies, revolving about the center of the galaxy with which they are associated. But then, a small star that circles a much more massive one is nonetheless a star, and a small star-system that circles the center of another should be nonetheless a star-system. The largest globular cluster would be a star-system-6, though most would either be a star-system-5 or a star-system-4. The Pleiades would be a star-system-3. For that matter, a single star, like the Sun, would be a star-system-0.

The nomenclature could be used for galactic clusters. Our Local Group, made up of two dozen galaxies, is a star-system-12. Giant galactic clusters could be up to star-system-15, and the entire Universe would be, very possibly, a star-system-22.

If we were to adopt this nomenclature, that object in Andromeda would be the "Andromeda-star-system-11.5" and the object we live in would be the "Galaxy-star-system-11."

However, no one's going to adopt my suggested nomenclature, and we must work with what we have—galaxies, as a general term. Some of the closer galaxies have common names that depend on their location or appearance. The Andromeda Galaxy is in the constellation Andromeda; the Triangulum Galaxy is in the constellation Triangulum. There are also the Whirlpool Galaxy (which describes its appearance, not its location), the Sombrero Galaxy, and so on.

This is colorful but not very useful, since we would soon run out of names. There are only 88 constellations, and the vast majority of galaxies are so distant that they appear as nothing more than tiny smudges.

Can we use this system for the star-system we live in? We can give it pride of place and call it *the* galaxy or *our* galaxy, as opposed to other galaxies; or capitalize it and call it the Galaxy, as opposed to all other galaxies. However, you can't hear a capital letter, and it is inconvenient to be always stressing "the" or "our," and neither is a clear enough distinction.

Most often, the star-system we live in is referred to as "the Milky Way Galaxy." This is tautological, since we are saying the same thing twice: first in English, then in Greek. Besides, it can be a source of confusion. The Milky Way is a distinct object in the sky, and people who encounter the phrase casually may think that it is the Milky Way that is the Galaxy and that we, and the other individual stars in the sky that we see are not part of it.

Why don't we call the star-system in which we live the Home

Galaxy? It's the galaxy we live in, after all. We speak of "home town" and "home country," so why not "Home Galaxy"?

For the most part, however, galaxies are not referred to by trivial names, but by numbers; since numbers are objects that cannot be exhausted and can be used for any conceivable number of galaxies. Even 100,000,000,000 galaxies can each receive an individual number without exhausting the supply. (In fact, the number of numbers over a hundred billion is every bit as great as the number of numbers there are all together.)

The first to supply numbers was the French astronomer, Charles Messier (1730-1811). He was a comet-hunter by profession, and considered it the acme of delight to be the first to detect a fuzzy object approaching the Earth and to announce a newly discovered comet. However, he was always coming across fuzzy objects that disappointed him by being fixed features of the sky, things that were always there.

In order to prevent other comet-hunters from being fooled, he made a list, in 1784, of a little over a hundred such objects which should be ignored by serious cometeers. These objects are still sometimes referred to as "Messier 1," "Messier 2," and so on, or just "M-1," "M-2," and so on. Some of the objects on his list are clouds of gas. M-1 is the Crab Nebula and M-42 is the Orion Nebula. Some are globular clusters. M-13 is the Great Hercules Cluster, for instance.

About a third of the objects on Messier's list turned out to be galaxies, when these objects were recognized as such a century and a half after Messier. Thus, M-31 is the Andromeda Galaxy, M-33 is the Triangulum Galaxy, and M-51 is the Whirlpool Galaxy.

Can we use this system to name our own Galaxy? Why not? We could call the star-system we live in M-0, and let it head the list.

Of course, Messier's list was far too short. As time went on, it was extended. The German-British astronomer, William Herschel (1738–1822), who made his fame and fortune by discovering the planet Uranus in 1781, went on to study the sky as thoroughly as he could and, between 1786 and 1802, had prepared no less than three listings of fuzzy objects (nebulae), which contained a total of 2,500 items, with the location of each carefully noted.

William's son, John Herschel (1792–1871) continued his father's work in this respect and, in 1864, published *The General Catalogue of Nebulae,* which contained 5,079 objects, with positions and descriptions. It speaks of the careful labor of the two Herschels that of these 5,079 objects, 4,630 (or 91 percent of the whole) were dis-

covered by them.

Even this went rapidly out of date, and the work was continued by a Danish-British astronomer, Johann L.E. Dryer (1852–1926). In 1878 he published a supplement to *The General Catalogue*, listing hundreds of new items. The Royal Astronomical Society suggested he do a complete overhaul of the *Catalogue*.

This he did, and in 1888 published *The New General Catalogue of Nebulae*, in which 7,840 nebulae were listed, numbered, and described. In 1895 he prepared an *Index Catalogue* listing nebulae that were not mentioned in the earlier catalogue, and in 1910 he prepared a second *Index Catalogue*. The three catalogues together contained 13,226 entries, and the vast majority of these proved, eventually, to be galaxies.

Other, more exhaustive, listings have been made since; but Dreyer's lists include all the nearer galaxies that are most often referred to. As a result, most of the galaxies mentioned in astronomy texts are identified by their NGC (*New General Catalogue*) or IC (*Index Catalogue*) numbers even today. Thus, the Andromeda Galaxy is not only M-31, it is also NGC 224; while NGC 147, NGC 185, NGC 205, NGC 221, NGC 6822, and IC 1613 are all dwarf members of the Local Group of galaxies, ranging in size from star-system-8.4 (700,000,000 stars) to star-system-10 (10,000,000,000 stars.)

The same reasoning that would make our Galaxy M-0 would also make it NGC 0, or IC 0. However, one of these is enough, and M-0 is the oldest.

Besides, I still prefer Home Galaxy as the name it should bear.

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Astounding Science Fiction July 1939 as edited by John W. Campbell, Southern Illinois University Press, $12.95.

Isaac Asimov's Foundation Trilogy is a milestone in the history of science fiction. No other work so well defines the excitement and intellectual daring of the "Golden Age"; I say this, by the way, not because this is *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine,* but because I have known and loved those books most of my life and I have a point to make. The Foundation Trilogy has also been a millstone on the neck of SF, since it is one of those cases of a concept so well used that almost no one has dared to reuse it, and this is rather a shame since it's such a *good* concept. (For those benighted souls who have not read the Trilogy, the major idea is of an organization so adept in sociology, psychology, and the study of history that it can not only predict the future of a civilization with uncanny accuracy, it can attempt to change it.)

So when I see a blurb on a book jacket, as I did recently, that reads "AS VAST AND ENTHRALLING AS ASIMOV'S FOUNDATION TRILOGY," I tend to grit my teeth and go on to something else.

M.K. Wren's *Sword of the Lamb,* the unfortunate book harnessed with that blurb, also had another thing going against it. It seemed an obvious attempt to be a futuristic family saga, sort of a Deep Space *Dallas,* or one of those John Jakesian multi-volume hysterical—sorry, historical—family chronicles set in the future, since we were told that it was Book One of "The Phoenix Legacy." This smacked of a production, in the sense that so many books these days are "produced" rather than written.

But I must confess that I'm a sucker for *well done* family epics; I'm immensely fond of the Forsyte Saga, for instance, both in its written form and as a 26-hour television drama (I'm currently well into my fifth viewing). So despite misgivings, I started into *Sword of the Lamb* and, I must say, I'm very glad I did. It's a damn good

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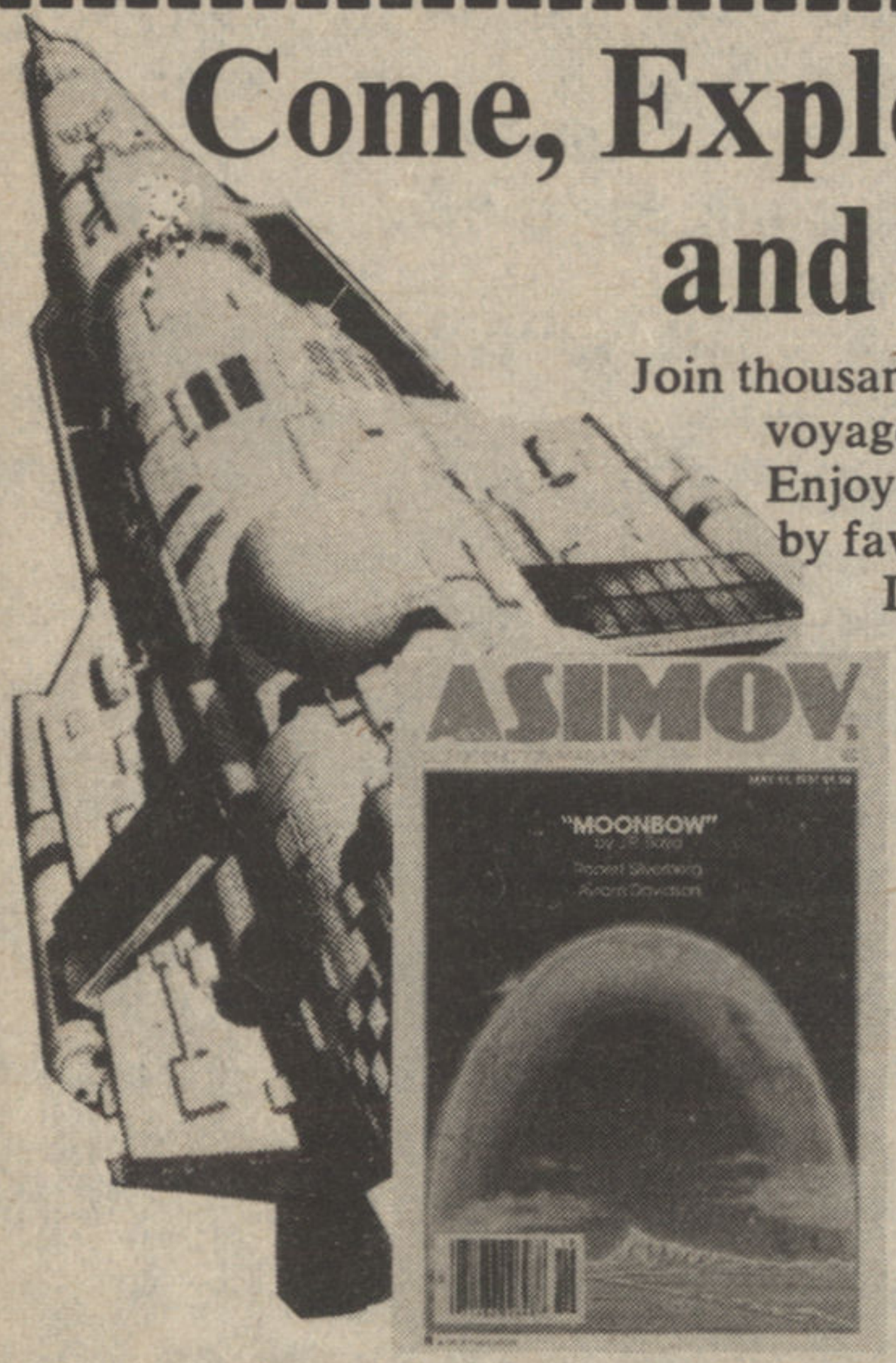

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story, well and intelligently told, and I'm looking forward to the rest of "The Phoenix Legacy" with interest.

It is not, Lord knows, a very original work. It takes place in the 33rd century; after a second Dark Age, man has expanded to the stars, but hardly in a big way. In two systems, including the Solar, there are a total of fourteen colonized worlds. So much for it being as "vast" as the Foundation Trilogy (unless they were simply talking about wordage), and Trantor makes Concordia, the capitol of the Two Systems, look like Pocatello, Idaho. But there is impetus toward further expansion, which might be explored later in the saga.

However, one of the things that is standing in the way of the further exploration of space is the incredibly stratified and entrenched social system that has evolved in the Concord, as the astropolitical entity made up of the Two Systems is known. A *third* Dark Age is in the cards, which only a few seem to realize; a few of *those* few set out to stop it by discreet manipulation of the social structure in many ways.

Do you see where we're heading? You got it—an organization that must stay underground, setting out to change history before it happens. It's a very neat variation on the Foundation theme, not so slavishly imitative as to be a mere repetition, certainly not so "vast" or "enthralling" (though if I were not enthralled, I was at least intrigued).

And, of yes, it *is* a family saga, too. The family is that of DeKoven Woolf, second most powerful in the Concord; the two sons of DeKoven Woolf are the major characters in this volume, which more or less takes them through their teens.

The family plot (as it were) is interspersed in the narrative with a great deal of expository material about humanity's history from now to then. This could have been fatal, but it's not; this future history is intelligently thought out and ties in nicely with the "contemporary" situation. The society of the Concord is extremely well evoked; I was reminded in a general way of another of my favorite techni-feudal societies, that of H. Beam Piper's *Space Viking*.

So I can't claim vast originality or enthralling new concepts for *Sword of the Lamb*, but it's a good storyteller telling a good story, good enough to pick you up and take you along with it, which is rare enough these days.

The case of Damon Knight is an interesting one. Not that well known by or popular with the general public, he might be regarded as a sort of *eminence grise* in the field of SF, an influential voice

whose work is highly regarded by other writers and whose efforts as critic, anthologist, editor, and mentor have earned him a high reputation.

Personally, I haven't read that much of Knight's work that stayed with me; but then, I haven't read that much of Knight's work. And the latest novel, *The World and Thorinn*, is more than a little interesting.

It begins like a Poul Anderson rewrite of an Icelandic saga. Thorinn Goryatson lives in windy Hovenskar; when there is a devastating earthquake, his foster father and brothers imprison him in the well from which the water has disappeared, as an offering to Snorri, the demon of the waters.

But when Thorinn escapes the well through a crack in its bottom, wanders through some odd caverns, and eventually breaks through the "sky" of a "world" the likes of which he has never seen, the reader begins to suspect that Not All Is What It Seems.

To reveal the details of Thorinn's odyssey through the many and curious places of his world would be unfair, since a good deal of the fun of the novel is the surprise of what pops out next. Knight keeps things spinning along at a good clip, and my major beefs with the book are a few instances of sloppy writing where the reader is simply adrift as to what exactly is happening (this applies to a lot of the book in general, but these are points where I don't think it's intended), and some places where some complex visual concepts are not quite brought off in words, a problem always for the writer of science fiction.

Speaking of visual concepts, though, the illustrations by Val Lakey (shockingly, only credited on the back flap of the dust jacket) are knockouts. At first glance, they are unnervingly like photographs and I would guess that photography had something to do with the technique involved in their creation. But they're about as far from those awkward photo-illustrations as one can get, visualizing the story with extreme fidelity, but being handsome artworks in their own right. I sincerely hope that the paperback edition will incorporate them.

And speaking of H. Beam Piper, there is a new book of works by that elusive and highly regarded author. Not new works, of course; he died in the mid-1960s, and his works have been elusive due to complications of the estate as well as neglect by publishers. Luckily, the major novels have all been reprinted recently; this new production is devoted to short stories.

I say "production" in the sense it was mentioned above. *Federation* is nothing but a collection of five of Piper's short stories, but it is produced and packaged to look like some sort of definitive framework for his "future history." "The ultimate source of Piper's Future History" burbles the front cover. "Little Fuzzies . . . Space Viking . . . Gunpowder God . . . Fuzzy Sapiens" trumpets the back cover. It's one of those large-sized paperbacks (with price to match) and a Whelan Fuzzy peers coyly out of the cover at you (no matter that there's not a Fuzzy to be found in the interior). What a production! What a hype!

What *is* on the inside? Jerry Pournelle's preface is a short, gentlemanly tribute to Piper; aside from that, there is a 20-page introduction and individual introductions to each story by John F. Carr, which attempts to extract some coherence out of Piper's loosely knit and not entirely consistent future history framework as given in his fiction. I'm sorry to say I found Carr's contribution very much equivalent to the worst of fan writing: condescending, defensive, and gushy all at the same time.

And then there are the five stories.

I consider myself an admirer of Piper's works, to the degree that I find the novels enjoyable if obvious and in the case of *Space Viking*, a little more than that. I don't think, however, that the short story is Piper's forte. These are pretty ordinary specimens (arranged, by the way, in interior chronological order to give some semblance of a "framework"), representative of the sort of problem-solving short story of Campbell's *Astounding*. In "Omnilingual," for instance, a member of one of the first archeological teams on Mars struggles with the written language of the long-gone Martians, to the derision of most of her fellows. She solves it when she discovers what is obviously a table of elements, a Rosetta stone of mutual concepts between humans and Martians. There is the problem, there is the clever solution, and it's something of a plea for less narrow specialization in the sciences, which is fine, but not exactly the stuff of the memorable short story.

For SF historians, "Graveyard of Dreams" is of some interest since it seems to be a short, preliminary sketch for the novel, *Cosmic Computer*; ditto "When In the Course—" which is *Lord Kalvin of Otherwhen* (aka *Gunpowder God*) without Lord Kalvin.

Perhaps I'm being too hard on these poor little stories because of the pretentiousness of their packaging. They might well have been more acceptable as a modest regular-sized collection with a succinct, objective introduction stating their place in the Piper universe.

Now grit your teeth, younger readers, because I'm going to indulge myself in a those-were-the-days number which you'll just have to take on faith. You, who have such a plentitude of SF to choose from, have no idea of the frustration and joy of the days when the field was almost totally confined to a scant dozen periodicals (anywhere from monthly to quarterly), and the publication of a real book was a cause for celebration.

But there were wonders to be found in the periodical pulp pages. A new Foundation story, a "novel" by Kuttner illustrated by Finlay (*novel* meant anything longer than a short story), a Clarke story with a wonderfully raunchy cover painting by Bergey.

So I am happy to note a couple of publications which in one way or another bring back that pulpy period. One is a revival, of the most venerable magazine of them all, *Weird Tales*, which began publication in 1923, at a time when tales of science fiction, the supernatural, and horror were considered much the same thing (as is still so true in film today). *Weird Tales*, after a distinguished career that included launching the careers of many fine writers (Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith and, of all people, Tennessee Williams), died in 1953, and revived briefly in the 1970s. Now it is back, in format a paperback periodical, scheduled to appear twice a year

and edited by Lin Carter.

Biannual or no, the first two issues appeared in my area simultaneously, and both are mixed bags. There are some things old, some things new, at least one thing borrowed (a Seabury Quinn story first published in another magazine), and nothing at all blue.

There is the first publication of a Robert E. Howard story called "Scarlet Tears," and after reading this tale of a "rugged, two-fisted detective" pitted against "devilish votaries of the death-goddess Kali," one might hazard a guess as to why it's never been published. There's a certain camp value, though, as there is with the goodly amount of Howard's poetry in the two issues.

There's also an unpublished story partially by H.P. Lovecraft (co-author Robert H. Barlow—apparently one of those collaborations where HPL wrote the story on a draft submitted by another). Titled "The Night Ocean," it is called a "mood piece," i.e., almost nothing happens except that a man living in a lonely house by the sea sees strange figures on the beach. Pretty restrained stuff for Lovecraft.

Other stories, new and old, by *Weird Tales* stalwarts such as Robert Bloch, Frank Belknap Long, August Derleth, and Joseph Payne Brennan (a Lucius Leffing episode) fill out the issues. There's one by the great fantasy illustrator, Hannes Bok, which confirms the suspicion that he should have stuck to paint, and a neatly creepy couple by relative newcomer Ramsey Campbell.

The prizes of the lot, however, are two tales by the young, prolific Tanith Lee. "When the Clock Strikes" is a delicious variation on a story that one realizes several pages in is very, *very* familiar (not for the world would I say what); "The Sombrus Tower" plays with the stuff of sword and sorcery as did the late Lord Dunsany. His successor seems to have finally been found. (*Weird Tales*, by the way, had a tradition of publishing women long before they were allowed into the sacrosanct SF magazines.)

The success of this venture will undoubtedly depend on finding contributors of the talents of Lee and Campbell; obviously, lost works of Howard and Lovecraft won't keep turning up without raising some suspicious eyebrows. I wish it luck.

The new *Weird Tales* is a whiff of nostalgia, but here's a real blast from the past; a facsimile of the July, 1939, issue of *Astounding Science Fiction*, published as a hard cover book; it's wonderful. The dust jacket is a reproduction of the cover by Gladney. The lead novelette is "Black Destroyer" by A. E. van Vogt; another is by the glorious C.L. Moore ("Greater Than Gods"). There are short stories by Asimov, Bond, and Rocklynne, a science article by the great Willy

Ley, and the invaluable letter column (invaluable because it enabled the fans sparsely scattered across the country to find each other), this issue containing letters from Damon Knight (see above), P. Schuyler Miller, and (you guessed it) Isaac Asimov.

This was not an exactly great period for art at *Astounding*, so the illustrations are pretty undistinguished, but there are always the ads. "Listerine ends husband's dandruff in 3 weeks," blares one full page. "Beauty, love, etc., round the world. World's greatest collection of strange and secret photographs," takes up a half page. (I always wondered what the etc. was.) A small ad invites you to "start a potato chip business in your kitchen." This is what one had to put up with when reading SF then. And we think the field lacks dignity *now!*

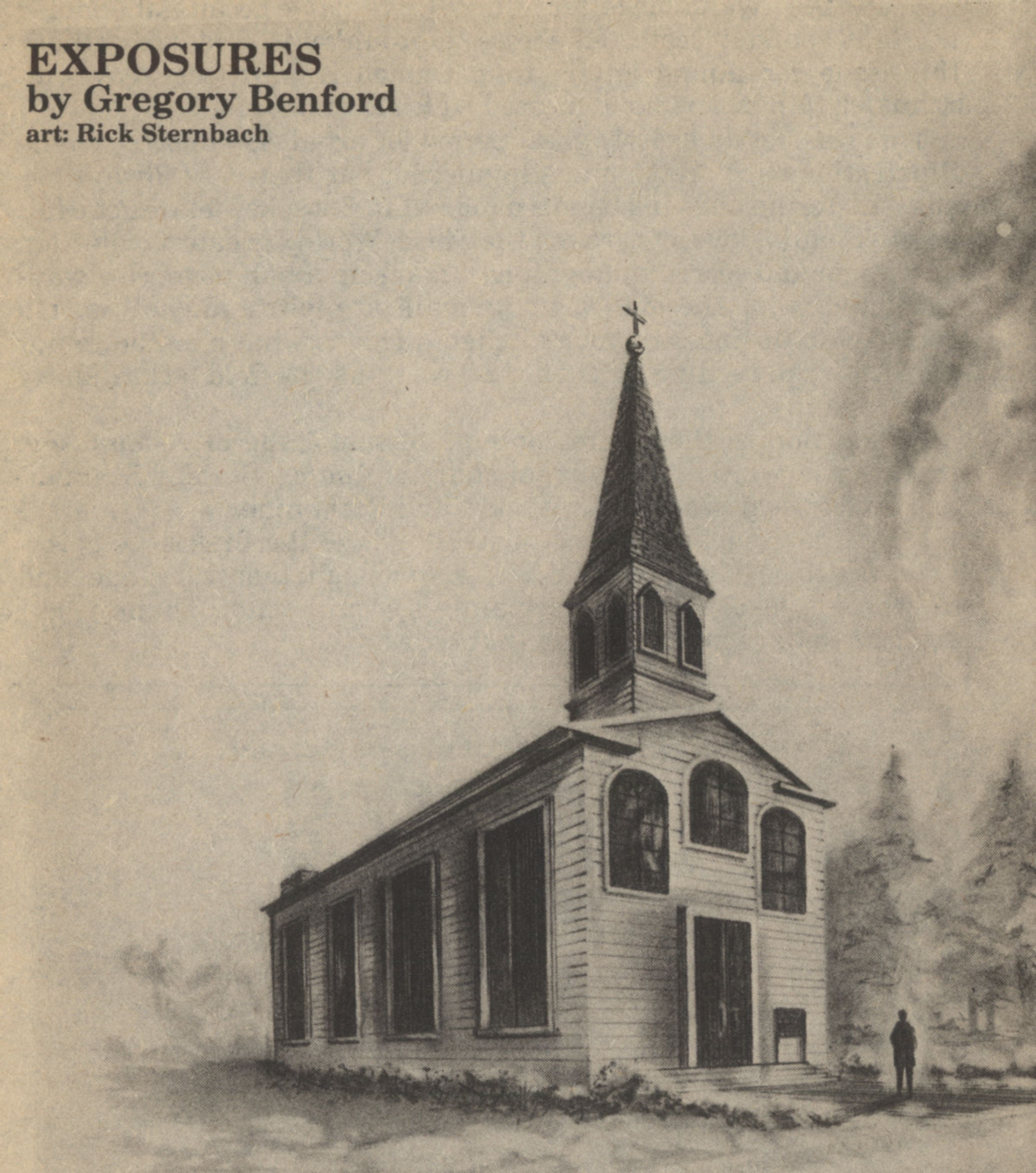
In addition to the entire contents of that issue of *Astounding*, there is a forward by the current editor of *Analog*, Stanley Schmidt, and epilogues by van Vogt, Asimov, and Rocklynne.

Why that issue, you may ask. Well, it was the first issue of *Astounding* to be edited by John W. Campbell, another milestone (and to repeat a joke, some will certainly say millstone). Thank God I don't have the space to go into that here.

EXPOSURES

by Gregory Benford

art: Rick Sternbach



Sternbach

The author is Professor of Physics at the University of California, Irvine. His astronomical research centers on the dynamics of pulsars, violent extragalactic events, and quasars. A recent novel is Timescape, *available in hardcover from Simon & Schuster and paperback from Timescape Books (Pocket Books).*

Puzzles assemble themselves one piece at a time. Yesterday I began laying out the new plates I had taken up on the mountain, at Palomar. They were exposures of varying depth. In each, NGC 1097—a barred spiral galaxy about twenty megaparsecs away—hung suspended in its slow swirl.

As I laid out the plates I thought of the way our family had always divided up the breakfast chores on Sunday. On that ritual day our mother stayed in bed. I laid out the forks and knives and egg cups and formal off-white china, and then stood back in the thin morning light to survey my precise placings. Lush napkin pyramids perched on lace table cloth, my mother's favorite. Through the kitchen door leaked the mutter and clang of a meal coming into being.

I put the exposures in order according to the spectral filters used, noting the calibrated photometry for each. The ceramic sounds of Bridge Hall rang in the tiled hallways and seeped through the door of my office: footsteps, distant talk, the scrape of chalk on slate, a banging door. Examining the plates through an eye piece, I felt the galaxy swell into being, huge.

The deep exposures brought out the dim jets I was after. There were four of them pointing out of NGC 1097, two red and two blue, the brightest three discovered by Wolsencroft and Zealey, the last red one found by Lorre over at JPL. Straight lines scratched across the mottling of foreground dust and stars. No one knew what colored a jet red or blue. I was trying to use the deep plates to measure the width of the jets. Using a slit over the lens, I had stopped down the image until I could employ calibrated photometry to measure the wedge of light. Still further narrowing might allow me to measure the spectrum, to see if the blues and reds came from stars, or from excited clouds of gas.

They lanced out, two blue jets cutting through the spiral arms and breaking free into the blackness beyond. One plate, taken in that spectral space where ionized hydrogen clouds emit, giving H II radiation, showed a string of beads buried in the curling spiral

lanes. They were vast cooling clouds. Where the jets crossed the H II regions, the spiral arms were pushed outward, or else vanished altogether.

Opposite each blue jet, far across the galaxy, a red jet glowed. They, too, snuffed out the H II beads.

From these gaps in the spiral arms I estimated how far the barred spiral galaxy had turned, while the jets ate away at them: about fifteen degrees. From the velocity measurements in the disk, using the Doppler shifts of known spectral lines, I deduced the rotation rate of the NGC 1097 disk: approximately a hundred million years. Not surprising; our own sun takes about the same amount of time to circle around our galactic center. The photons which told me all these specifics had begun their steady voyage sixty million years ago, before there was a *New General Catalog of Nebulae and Clusters of Stars* to label them as they buried themselves in my welcoming emulsion. Thus do I know thee, NGC 1097.

These jets were unique. The brightest blue one dog-legs in a right angle turn and ends in silvery blobs of dry light. Its counter-jet, offset a perverse eleven degrees from exact oppositeness, continues on a warmly rose-colored path over an immense distance, a span far larger than the parent galaxy itself. I frowned, puckered my lips in concentration, calibrated and calculated and refined. Plainly these ramrod, laconic patterns of light were trying to tell me something.

But answers come when they will, one piece at a time.

I tried to tell my son this when, that evening, I helped him with his reading. Using what his mother now knowingly termed "word attack skills," he had mastered most of those tactics. The larger strategic issues of the sentence eluded him still. *Take it in phrases,* I urged him, ruffling his light brown hair, distracted, because I liked the nutmeg smell. (I have often thought that I could find my children in the dark, in a crowd, by my nose alone. Our genetic code colors the air.) He thumbed his book, dirtying a corner. Read the words between the commas, I instructed, my classroom sense of order returning. Stop at the commas, and then pause before going on, and think about what all those words mean. I sniffed at his wheatlike hair again.

I am a traditional astronomer, accustomed to the bitter cold of the cage at Palomar, the Byzantine marriage of optics at Kitt Peak, the muggy air of Lick. Through that long morning yesterday I studied the NGC 1097 jets, attempting to see with the quick eye of the

theorist, "dancing on the data" as Roger Blandford down the hall had once called it. I tried to erect some rickety hypothesis that my own uncertain mathematical abilities could brace up. An idea came. I caught at it. But holding it close, turning it over, pushing terms about in an overloaded equation, I saw it was merely an old idea tarted up, already disproved.

Perhaps computer enhancement of the images would clear away some of my enveloping fog, I mused. I took my notes to the neighboring building, listening to my footsteps echo in the long arcade. The buildings at Caltech are mostly done in a pseudo-Spanish style, tan stucco with occasional flourishes of Moorish windows and tiles. The newer library rears up beside the crouching offices and classrooms, a modern extrusion. I entered the Alfred Sloan Laboratory of Physics and Mathematics, wondering for the *n*th time what a mathematical laboratory would be like, imagining Lewis Carroll in charge, and went into the new computer terminal rooms. The indices which called up my plates soon stuttered across the screen. I used a median numerical filter, to suppress variations in the background. There were standard routines to subtract particular parts of the spectrum. I called them up, averaging away noise from dust and gas and the image-saturating spikes that were foreground stars in our own galaxy. Still, nothing dramatic emerged. Illumination would not come.

I sipped at my coffee. I had brought a box of crackers from my office; and I broke one, eating each wafer with a heavy crunch. I swirled the cup and the coffee swayed like a dark disk at the bottom, a scum of cream at the vortex curling out into gray arms. I drank it. And thumbed another image into being.

This was not NGC 1097. I checked the number. Then the log. No, these were slots deliberately set aside for later filing. They were not to be filled; they represented my allotted computer space. They should be blank.

Yet I recognized this one. It was a view of Sagittarius A, the intense radio source that hides behind a thick lane of dust in the Milky Way. Behind that dark obscuring swath that is an arm of our Galaxy, lies the center. I squinted. Yes: this was a picture formed from observations sensitive to the 21-centimeter wavelength line, the emission of nonionized hydrogen. I had seen it before, on exposures that looked radially inward at the Galactic core. Here was the red band of hydrogen along our line of sight. Slightly below was the well-known arm of hot, expanding gas, nine thousand light years across. Above, tinted green, was a smaller arm, a ridge of gas moving

outward at 135 kilometers per second. I had seen this in seminars years ago. In the very center was the knot no more than a light year or two across, the source of the 10^{40} ergs per second of virulent energy that drove the cooker that caused all this. Still, the energy flux from our Galaxy was ten million times less than that of a quasar. Whatever the compact energy source there, it was comparatively quiet. NGC 1097 lies far to the south, entirely out of the Milky Way. Could the aim of the satellite camera have strayed so much?

Curious, I thumbed forward. The next index number gave another scan of the Sagittarius region, this time seen by the spectral emissions from outward-moving clouds of ammonia. Random blobs. I thumbed again. A formaldehyde-emission view. But now the huge arm of expanding hydrogen was sprinkled with knots, denoting clouds which moved faster, Dopplered into blue.

I frowned. No, the Sagittarius A exposures were no aiming error. These slots were to be left open for my incoming data. Someone had co-opted the space. Who? I called up the identifying codes, but there were none. As far as the master log was concerned, these spaces were still empty.

I moved to erase them. My finger paused, hovered, went limp. This was obviously high-quality information, already processed. Someone would want it. They had carelessly dumped it into my territory, but. . . .

My pause was in part that of sheer appreciation. Peering at the color-coded encrustations of light, I recalled what all this had once been like: impossibly complicated, ornate in its terms, caked with the eccentric jargon of long-dead professors, choked with thickets of atomic physics and thermodynamics, a web of complexity that finally gave forth mental pictures of a whirling, furious past, of stars burned now into cinders, of whispering, turbulent hydrogen that filled the void between the suns. From such numbers came the starscape that we knew. From a sharp scratch on a strip of film we could catch the signature of an element, deduce velocity from the Doppler shift, and then measure the width of that scratch to give the random component of the velocity, the random jigglings due to thermal motion, and thus the temperature. All from a scratch. No, I could not erase it.

When I was a boy of nine I was brow-beaten into serving at the altar, during the unendurably long Episcopal services that my mother felt we should attend. I wore the simple robe and was the first to appear in the service, lighting the candles with an awkward

long device and its sliding wick. The organ music was soft and did not call attention to itself, so the congregation could watch undistracted as I fumbled with the wick and tried to keep the precarious balance between feeding it too much (so that, engorged, it bristled into a ball of orange) and the even worse embarrassment of snuffing it into a final accusing puff of black. Through the service I would alternately kneel and stand, murmuring the worn phrases as I thought of the softball I would play in the afternoon, feeling the prickly gathering heat underneath my robes. On a bad day the sweat would accumulate and a drop would cling to my nose. I'd let it hang there in mute testimony. The minister never seemed to notice. I would often slip off into decidedly untheological daydreams, intoxicated by the pressing moist heat, and miss the telltale words of the litany which signalled the beginning of communion. A whisper would come skating across the layered air and I would surface, to see the minister turned with clotted face toward me, holding the implements of his forgiving trade, waiting for me to bring the wine and wafers to be blessed. I would surge upward, swearing under my breath with the ardor only those who have just learned the words can truly muster, unafraid to be muttering these things as I snatched up the chalice and sniffed the too-sweet murky wine, fetching the plates of wafers, swearing that once the polished walnut altar rail was emptied of its upturned and strangely blank faces, once the simpering organ had ebbed into silence and I had shrugged off these robes swarming with the stench of mothballs, I would have no more of it, I would erase it.

I asked Redman who the hell was logging their stuff into my inventory spaces. He checked. The answer was: nobody. There were no recorded intrusions into those sections of the memory system. *Then look further*, I said, and went back to work at the terminal.

They were still there. What's more, some index numbers that had been free before were now filled.

NGC 1097 still vexed me, but I delayed working on the problem. I studied these new pictures. They were processed, Doppler-coded, and filtered for noise. I switched back to the earlier plates, to be sure. Yes, it was clear: these were different.

Current theory held that the arm of expanding gas was on the outward phase of an oscillation. Several hundred million years ago, so the story went, a massive explosion at the galactic center had started the expansion: a billowing, spinning doughnut of gas swelled outward. Eventually its energy was matched by the gravitational

attraction of the massive center. Then, as it slowed and finally fell back toward the center, it spun faster, storing energy in rotational motion, until centrifugal forces stopped its inward rush. Thus the hot cloud could oscillate in the potential well of gravity, cooling slowly.

These computer-transformed plates said otherwise. The Doppler shifts formed a cone. At the center of the plate, maximum values, far higher than any observed before, over a thousand kilometers per second. That exceeded escape velocity from the Galaxy itself. The values tapered off to the sides, coming smoothly down to the shifts that were on the earlier plates.

I called the programming director. He looked over the displays, understanding nothing of what it meant but everything about how it could have gotten there; and his verdict was clean, certain: human error. But further checks turned up no such mistake. "Must be comin' in on the transmission from orbit," he mused. He seemed half-asleep as he punched in commands, traced the intruders. These data had come in from the new combination optical, IR, and UV 'scope in orbit, and the JPL programs had obligingly performed the routine miracles of enhancement and analysis. But the orbital staff were sure no such data had been transmitted. In fact, the 'scope had been down for inspection, plus an alignment check, for over two days. The programming director shrugged and promised to look into it, fingering the innumerable pens clipped in his shirt pocket.

I stared at the Doppler cone, and thumbed to the next index number. The cone had grown, the shifts were larger. Another: still larger. And then I noticed something more; and a cold sensation seeped into me, banishing the casual talk and mechanical-printout stutter of the terminal room.

The point of view had shifted. All the earlier plates had shown a particular gas cloud at a certain angle of inclination. This latest plate was slightly cocked to the side, illuminating a clotted bunch of minor H II regions and obscuring a fraction of the hot, expanding arm. Some new features were revealed. If the JPL program had done such a rotation and shift, it would have left the new spaces blank, for there was no way of filling them in. These were not empty. They brimmed with specific shifts, detailed spectral indices. The JPL program would not have produced the field of numbers unless the raw data contained them. I stared at the screen for a long time.

That evening I drove home the long way, through the wide boulevards of Pasadena, in the gathering dusk. I remembered giving

blood the month before, in the eggshell light of the Caltech dispensary. They took the blood away in a curious plastic sack, leaving me with a small bandage in the crook of my elbow. The skin was translucent, showing the riverwork of tributary blue veins, which—recently tapped—were nearly as pale as the skin. I had never looked at that part of me before and found it tender, vulnerable, an unexpected opening. I remembered my wife had liked being stroked there when we were dating, and that I had not touched her there for a long time. Now I had myself been pricked there, to pipe brimming life into a sack, and then to some other who could make use of it.

That evening I drove again, taking my son to Open House. The school bristled with light and seemed to command the neighborhood with its luminosity, drawing families out of their homes. My wife was taking my daughter to another school, and so I was unshielded by her ability to recognize people we knew. I could never sort out their names in time to answer the casual hellos. In our neighborhood the PTA nights draw a disproportionate fraction of technical types, like me. Tonight I saw them without the quicksilver verbal fluency of my wife. They had compact cars that seemed too small for their large families, wore shoes whose casualness offset the formal, just-come-from-work jackets and slacks, and carried creamy folders of their children's accumulated work, to use in conferring with the teachers. The wives were sun-darkened, wearing crisp, print dresses that looked recently put on, and spoke with ironic turns about PTA politics, bond issues, and class sizes. In his classroom my son tugged me from board to board, where he had contributed paragraphs on wildlife. The crowning exhibit was a model of Io, Jupiter's pizza-mocking moon, which he had made from a tennis ball and thick, sulphurous paint. It hung in a box painted black and looked remarkably, ethereally real. My son had won first prize in his class for the mockup moon, and his teacher stressed this as she went over the less welcome news that he was not doing well at his reading. Apparently he arranged the plausible phrases—A, then B, then C—into illogical combinations, C coming before A, despite the instructing commas and semicolons which should have guided him. It was a minor problem, his teacher assured me, but should be looked after. Perhaps a little more reading at home, under my eye? I nodded, sure that the children of the other scientists and computer programmers and engineers did not have this difficulty, and already knew what the instructing phrase of the next century would be, before the

end of this one. My son took the news matter-of-factly, unafraid, and went off to help with the cake and Koolaid. I watched him mingle with girls whose awkwardness was lovely, like giraffes'. I remembered that his teacher (I had learned from gossip) had a mother dying of cancer, which might explain the furrow between her eyebrows that would not go away. My son came bearing cake. I ate it with him, sitting with knees slanting upward in the small chair; and quite calmly and suddenly an idea came to me and would not go away. I turned it over and felt its shape, testing it in a preliminary fashion. Underneath I was both excited and fearful and yet sure that it would survive: it was right. Scraping up the last crumbs and icing, I looked down, and saw my son had drawn a crayon design, an enormous father playing ball with a son, running and catching, the scene carefully fitted into the small compass of the plastic, throwaway plate.

The next morning I finished the data reduction on the slit-image exposures. By carefully covering over the galaxy and background, I had managed to take successive plates which blocked out segments of the space parallel to the brightest blue jet. Photometry of the resulting weak signal could give a cross section of the jet's intensity. Pinpoint calibration then yielded the thickness of the central jet zone.

The data was somewhat scattered, the error bars were larger than I liked, but still—I was sure I had it. The jet had a fuzzy halo and a bright core. The core was less than a hundred light years across, a thin filament of highly ionized hydrogen, cut like a swath through the gauzy dust beyond the galaxy. The resolute, ruler-sharp path, its thinness, its profile of luminosity: all pointed toward a tempting picture. Some energetic object had carved each line, moving at high speeds. It swallowed some of the matter in its path; and in the act of engorgement the mass was heated to incandescent brilliance, spitting UV and x-rays into an immense surrounding volume. This radiation in turn ionized the galactic gas, leaving a scratch of light behind the object, like picnickers dumping luminous trash as they pass by.

The obvious candidates for the fast-moving sources of the jets were black holes. And as I traced the slim profiles of the NGC 1097 jets back into the galaxy, they all intersected at the precise geometrical center of the barred spiral pattern.

Last night, after returning from the Open House with a sleepy

boy in tow, I talked with my wife as we undressed. I described my son's home room, his artistic achievements, his teacher. My wife let slip offhandedly some jarring news. I had, apparently, misheard the earlier gossip; perhaps I had mused over some problem while she related the story to me over breakfast. It was not the teacher's mother who had cancer, but the teacher herself. I felt an instant, settling guilt. I could scarcely remember the woman's face, though it was a mere hour later. I asked why she was still working. Because, my wife explained with straightforward New England sense, it was better than staring at a wall. The chemotherapy took only a small slice of her hours. And anyway, she probably needed the money. The night beyond our windows seemed solid, flinty, harder than the soft things inside. In the glass I watched my wife take off a print dress and stretch backward, breasts thinning into crescents, her nobbed spine describing a serene curve that anticipated bed. I went over to my chest of drawers and looked down at the polished walnut surface, scrupulously rectangular and arranged, across which I had tossed the residue of an hour's dutiful parenting: a scrawled essay on marmosets, my son's anthology of drawings, his reading list, and on top, the teacher's bland paragraph of assessment. It felt odd to have called these things into being, these signs of a forward tilt in a small life, by an act of love or at least lust, now years past. The angles appropriate to cradling my children still lived in my hands. I could feel clearly the tentative clutch of my son as he attempted some upright steps. Now my eye strayed to his essay. I could see him struggling with the notion of clauses, with ideas piled upon each other to build a point, and with the caged linearity of the sentence. On the page above, in the loops of the teacher's generous flow pen, I saw a hollow rotundity, a denial of any constriction in her life. She had to go on, this schoolgirlish penmanship said, to forcefully forget a gnawing illness among a roomful of bustling children. Despite all the rest, she had to keep on doing.

What could be energetic enough to push black holes out of the galactic center, up the slopes of the deep gravitational potential well? Only another black hole. The dynamics had been worked out years before—as so often happens, in another context—by William Saslaw. Let a bee-swarm of black holes orbit about each other, all caught in a gravitational depression. Occasionally, they veer close together, deforming the space-time nearby, caroming off each other like billiard balls. If several undergo these near-miss collisions at once, a black hole can be ejected from the gravitational trap alto-

gether. More complex collisions can throw pairs of black holes in opposite directions, conserving angular momentum: jets and counter-jets. But why did NGC 1097 display two blue jets and two red? Perhaps the blue ones glowed with the phosphorescent waste left by the largest, most energetic black holes; their counter-jets must be, by some detail of the dynamics, always smaller, weaker, redder.

I went to the jutting, air-conditioned library, and read Saslaw's papers. Given a buzzing hive of black holes in a gravitational well—partly of their own making—many things could happen. There were compact configurations, tightly orbiting and self-obsessed, which could be ejected as a body. These close-wound families could in turn be unstable, once they were isolated beyond the galaxy's tug, just as the group at the center had been. Caroming off each other, they could eject unwanted siblings. I frowned. This could explain the astonishing right-angle turn the long blue jet made. One black hole thrust sidewise and several smaller, less energetic black holes pushed the opposite way.

As the galactic center lost its warped children, the ejections would become less probable. Things would die down. But how long did that take? NGC 1097 was no younger than our own Galaxy; on the cosmic scale, a sixty-million-year difference was nothing.

In the waning of afternoon—it was only a bit more than twenty-four hours since I first laid out the plates of NGC 1097—the Operations report came in. There was no explanation for the Sagittarius A data. It had been received from the station in orbit and duly processed. But no command had made the scope swivel to that axis. Odd, Operations said, that it pointed in an interesting direction, but no more.

There were two added plates, fresh from processing. I did not mention to Redman in Operations that the resolution of these plates was astonishing, that details in the bloated, spilling clouds were unprecedented. Nor did I point out that the angle of view had tilted further, giving a better perspective on the outward-jutting inferno. With their polynomial percussion, the computers had given what was in the stream of downward-flowing data, numbers that spoke of something being banished from the pivot of our Galaxy.

Caltech is a compact campus. I went to the Athenaeum for coffee, ambling slowly beneath the palms and scented eucalyptus, and circumnavigated the campus on my return. In the varnished perspectives of these tiled hallways, the hammer of time was a set of Dopplered numbers, blue-shifted because the thing rushed toward

us, a bulge in the sky. Silent numbers.

There were details to think about, calculations to do, long strings of hypothesis to unfurl like thin flags. I did not know the effect of a penetrating, ionizing flux on Earth. Perhaps it could affect the upper atmosphere and alter the ozone cap that drifts above our heedless heads. A long trail of disturbed, high-energy plasma could fan out through our benign spiral arm—odd, to think of bands of dust and rivers of stars as a neighborhood where you have grown up—churning, working, heating. After all, the jets of NGC 1097 had snuffed out the beaded H II regions as cleanly as an eraser passing across a blackboard, ending all the problems that life knows.

The NGC 1097 data was clean and firm. It would make a good paper, perhaps a letter to *Astrophysical Journal Letters*. But the rest—there was no crisp professional path. These plates had come from much nearer the Galactic center. The information had come outward at light speed, far faster than the pressing bulge, and tilted at a slight angle away from the radial vector that led to Earth.

I had checked the newest Palomar plates from Sagittarius A this afternoon. There were no signs of anything unusual. No Doppler bulge, no exiled mass. They flatly contradicted the satellite plates.

That was the key: old reliable Palomar, our biggest ground-based 'scope, showed nothing. Which meant that someone in high orbit had fed data into our satellite 'scope—exposures which had to be made nearer the Galactic center and then brought here and deftly slipped into our ordinary astronomical research. Exposures which spoke of something stirring where we could not yet see it, beyond the obscuring lanes of dust. The plumes of fiery gas would take a while longer to work through that dark cloak.

These plain facts had appeared on a screen, mute and undeniable, keyed to the data on NGC 1097. Keyed to a connection that another eye than mine could miss. Some astronomer laboring over plates of eclipsing binaries or globular clusters might well have impatiently erased the offending, multicolored spattering, not bothered to uncode the Dopplers, to note the persistent mottled red of the Galactic dust arm at the lower right, and so not known what the place must be. Only I could have made the connection to NGC 1097, and guessed what an onrushing black hole could do to a fragile planet: burn away the ozone layer, hammer the land with high-energy particles, mask the sun in gas and dust.

But to convey this information in this way was so strange, so—yes, that was the word—so alien. Perhaps this was the way they had to

do it: quiet, subtle, indirect. Using an oblique analogy which only suggested, yet somehow disturbed more than a direct statement. And of course, this might be only a phrase in a longer message. Moving out from the Galactic center, they would not know we were here until they grazed the expanding bubble of radio noise that gave us away, and so their data would use what they had, views at a different slant. The data itself, raw and silent, would not necessarily call attention to itself. It had to be placed in context, beside NGC 1097. How had they managed to do that? Had they tried before? What odd logic dictated this approach? How. . . .

Take it in pieces. Some of the data I could use, some not. Perhaps a further check, a fresh look through the dusty Sagittarius arm, would show the beginnings of a ruddy swelling, could give a verification. I would have to look, try to find a bridge that would make plausible what I knew but could scarcely prove. The standards of science are austere, unforgiving—and who would have it differently? I would have to hedge, to take one step back for each two forward, to compare and suggest and contrast, always sticking close to the data. And despite what I thought I knew now, the data would have to lead, they would have to show the way.

There is a small Episcopal church, not far up Hill Street, which offers a Friday communion in early evening. Driving home through the surrounding neon consumer gumbo, musing, I saw the sign, and stopped. I had the NGC 1097 plates with me in a carrying case, ripe beneath my arm with their fractional visions, like thin sections of an exotic cell. I went in. The big oak door thumped solemnly shut behind me. In the nave two elderly men were passing woven baskets, taking up the offertory. I took a seat near the back. Idly I surveyed the people, distributed randomly like a field of unthinking stars, in the pews before me. A man came nearby and a pool of brassy light passed before me and I put something in, the debris at the bottom clinking and rustling as I stirred it. I watched the backs of heads as the familiar litany droned on, as devoid of meaning as before. I do not believe, but there is communion. Something tugged at my attention; one head turned a fraction. By a kind of triangulation I deduced the features of the other, closer to the ruddy light of the altar, and saw it was my son's teacher. She was listening raptly. I listened, too, watching her, but could only think of the gnawing at the center of a bustling, swirling galaxy. The lights seemed to dim. The organ had gone silent. *Take, eat. This is the body and blood of* and so it had begun. I waited my turn. I do not believe, but there

is communion. The people went forward in their turns. The woman rose; yes, it was she, the kind of woman whose hand would give forth loops and spirals and who would dot her **i**'s with a small circle. The faint timbre of the organ seeped into the layered air. When it was time I was still thinking of NGC 1097, of how I would write the paper—fragments skittered across my mind, the pyramid of the argument was taking shape—and I very nearly missed the gesture of the elderly man at the end of my pew. Halfway to the altar rail I realized that I still carried the case of NGC 1097 exposures, crooked into my elbow, where the pressure caused a slight ache to spread: the spot where they had made the transfusion in the clinic, transferring a fraction of life, blood given. I put it beside me as I knelt. The robes of the approaching figure were cobalt blue and red, a change from the decades since I had been an acolyte. There were no acolytes at such a small service, of course. The blood would follow; first came the offered plate of wafers. Take, eat. Life calling out to life. I could feel the pressing weight of what lay ahead for me, the long roll of years carrying forward one hypothesis, and then, swallowing, knowing that I would never believe this and yet I would want it, I remembered my son, remembered that these events were only pieces, that the puzzle was not yet over, that I would never truly see it done, that as an astronomer I had to live with knowledge forever partial and provisional, that science was not final results but instead a continuing meditation carried on in the face of enormous facts—*take it in phrases*—let the sentences of our lives pile up.

THE JINN FROM HYPERSPACE

by Martin Gardner

Only one puzzle-&-solution,
this time around.

John Collier Fletcher had always wanted to be an opera star. He was a big man, but unfortunately his singing voice was on the small side—difficult for audiences to hear without electronic amplification. At college he gave up his dream, got a doctorate in mathematics, and became a professor at New York University. His specialty was number theory. For many years he struggled without success to prove Fermat's last theorem.

[Fermat's last theorem asserts that the equation $a^n + b^n = c^n$ has no solution in positive integers if n is greater than 2. The case of $n = 1$ is trivial. When $n = 2$ there is an infinite number of solutions, called Pythagorean triples, of which the simplest is $3^2 + 4^2 = 5^2$. Pierre Fermat had made a note in the margin of a book saying he had a marvelous proof of his theorem, but that the margin was too small for it. To this day no one has found such a proof or a counterexample to the theorem.]

One wintry evening, when Fletcher was tramping through snow and slush to his bachelor's apartment in the SoHo (*So*uth of *Ho*uston) area near NYU, he passed a small store that he could not recall having seen before. A sign above the dirty window said: "Ray Palmer's Old Bottle Shop."

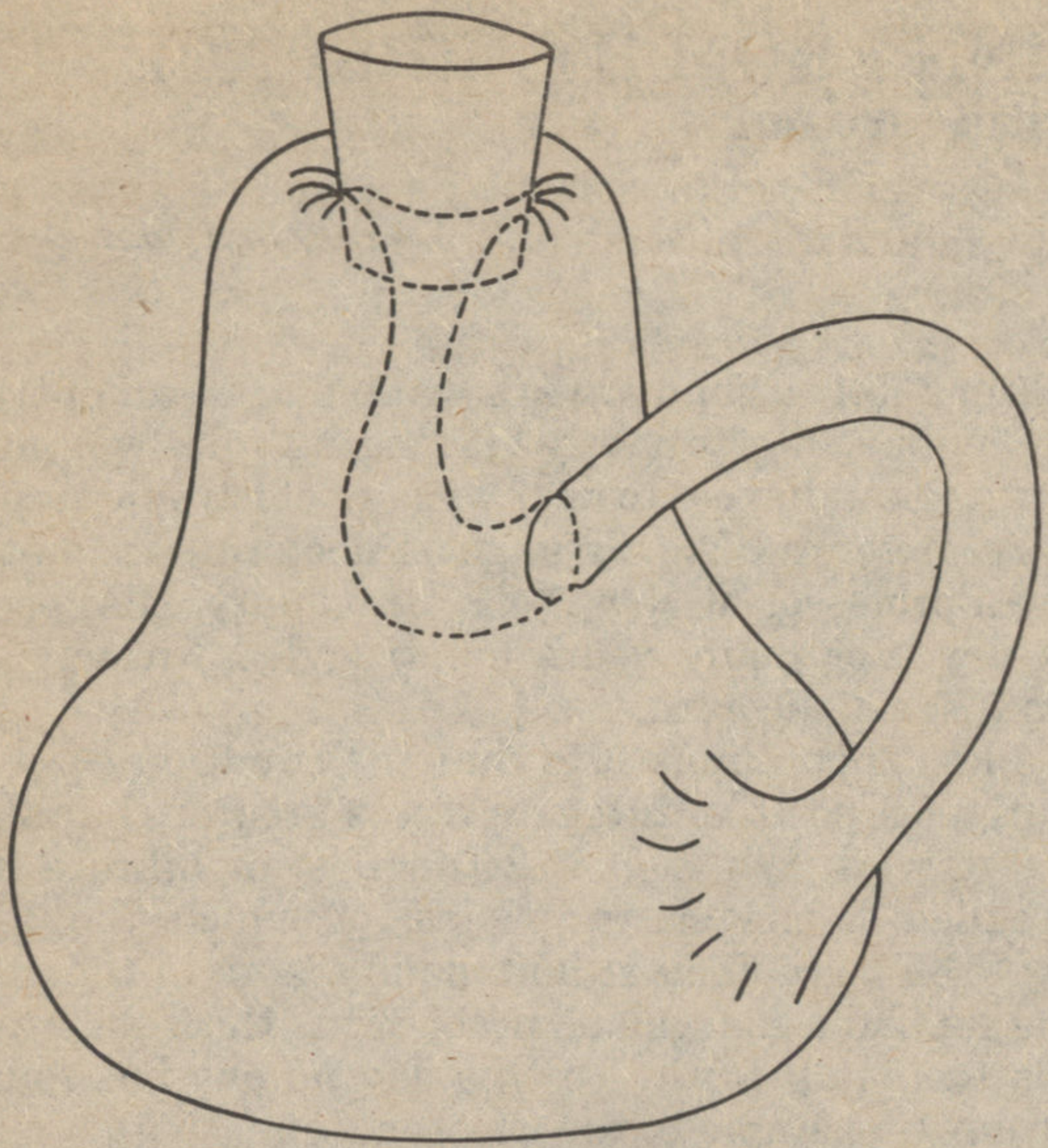
A shelf behind the window held a dozen or so curious bottles. One caught Fletcher's eye. It looked as if—yes, it surely was!—a Klein bottle.

[A Klein bottle is a closed surface without edges, like that of a sphere. A sphere's surface has two sides, outside and inside. An ant, crawling outside, cannot get inside unless there is a hole. But a Klein surface is one-sided like a Moebius strip. Outside is continuous with inside. Without going through a hole an ant can walk to any spot on both "sides" of the surface.]

Fletcher had always wanted to own a Klein bottle to show to his students. The shop's heavy door creaked ominously as he opened it. Through some tattered curtains at the back emerged an old man about four feet high, with white hair and watery blue eyes.

"Is that a Klein bottle in your window?" asked Fletcher.

"Well, not exactly," said the gnome. "It's just a crude model [see



MODEL OF KLEIN BOTTLE

illustration]. You'll observe that the stem goes through a hole where it enters the bottle. A true Klein bottle has no hole. The surface nowhere self-intersects because the stem twists around through the fourth dimension."

"I know, I know," said Fletcher. "I teach topology at New York University."

The gnome seemed unimpressed. "I do have a few genuine Klein bottles in stock. But they're more expensive. And they can be troublesome."

"Troublesome?" said Fletcher. "Why?"

"Because they twist through four-space. You never know what sort of creature from hyperspace might crawl out when you unstopper the bottle. It could be a friendly angel or jinn, but it might be something evil like a demon or a dero. Don't laugh. I'll show you one of the things."

Fletcher checked his laugh—actually it sounded more like a thin cackle—while the gnome disappeared behind the curtain. He

emerged a moment later with a pear-shaped bottle almost as large as himself. It seemed to be made of rather fragile pink glass. It was a Klein bottle all right, except that where the stem usually plunged through a hole, there was a spherical region of intense whiteness that shimmered and glowed like ball lightning. The gnome pointed to it with a black-edged fingernail.

"That's where the miserable thing bends through hyperspace," he said. "Naturally you can't see the twist. But if you drop anything into the bottle it will fall into the fourth dimension and you'll never recover it."

Fletcher was so intrigued that he bought the bottle at once even though it cost much more than he had anticipated. In his apartment he put the bottle in the center of his living room, then knelt on the rug beside it and tried to figure out what caused that cloud of scintillating light.

He tried to feel the cloud, but his hand simply vanished into a region of intense cold. When he removed his hand, his fingers were so frozen that he had to warm them under a hot-water faucet.

The opening at the top of the bottle was plugged by a black rubber stopper almost six inches across. By working it from side to side, Fletcher finally succeeded in pulling it out.

A loud popping sound was accompanied by a rush of icy air, a billowing cloud of purple smoke, and a strange Istanbul smell that seemed to mix sewage odors with aromatic spices. An enormousjinn, dressed as if he had popped straight out of *The Arabian Nights*, materialized from the cloud and made a low bow.

"I am at your command," he said in a deep resonant voice that Fletcher envied. "You have the usual three wishes. What is your first desire?"

After Fletcher recovered his composure he said hesitantly: "I've always wanted to sing like Caruso."

"To hear," said the jinn, "is to obey."

Fletcher felt a sudden surge of energy pulse through his lungs and it seemed as if his chest had enlarged several inches. He sang a few notes. Magnifico! The tone was perfect, the vibrato exquisite.

"Bravissimo!" said the jinn. "And your second wish?"

Fletcher thought for only a few seconds. "I would like a proof of Fermat's last theorem."

"I beg your pardon?" said the jinn.

Fletcher quickly scribbled an equation on a sheet of paper. "It's the greatest unsolved problem in number theory. If I can prove that this has no solution in integers, when n exceeds 2, I'll be more famous

than Isaac Asimov."

The jinn studied the equation. "I have a poor head for figures. This will require consultation with a higher authority. Don't leave. I'll be back in a few Earth minutes."

Somehow the jinn managed to flow into the pink bottle. A moment later, out he popped in another purple burst of strange-smelling smoke, and handed Fletcher the paper he had taken with him. Under the equation, in small but legible handwriting, was a short proof.

Fletcher read the proof with mounting embarrassment. In his excitement he had written the wrong equation! He had interchanged the n's with a, b and c. The equation had, so to speak, been inverted like this:

$$n^a + n^b = n^c.$$

The easy-to-follow proof of impossibility, when n exceeded 2, was certainly watertight. Can you devise such a proof before turning to page 87?

THE SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR

by Erwin S. Strauss

Now is your last chance to join the world con(vention) for $45 (Denvention). To prepare yourself, get out for a social weekend with your favorite SF authors, artists, editors and fellow fans soon. For a longer, later list, an explanation of cons, and a sample of SF folksongs, send me an addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) at 9850 Fairfax Sq. #232, Fairfax VA 22031. The hotline is (703) 273-6111. If a machine answers, leave your area code and number and I'll call back at my expense. When writing cons, enclose an SASE. When phoning, give your reason for calling. Look for me at cons as Filthy Pierre.

CosmoCon. For info, write: **c/o McCue, 34 Halsey, Hutchinson KS 67501.** Or phone **(316) 663-3799** (10 AM to 10 PM only, not collect). Con will be held in: Hutchison KS (if location omitted, same as in address) on: 13-14 Jun., 1981. Guests include: J. Gunn, L. Killough.

Westercon 34, Box 161719, Sacramento CA 95816. 2-5 Jul. C. J. Cherryh, Grant Canfield.

InConJunction, 1415 N. Somerset Ave., Indianapolis IN 46222. 3-5 Jul. Philip Jose ("Riverworld") Farmer, Wilson Arthur ("Ice and Iron") Tucker, old-time fan Ray Beam. 24-hour video.

EmpiriCon, c/o TESSFA, Box 682 Church St. Sta., New York NY 10008. 3-5 Jul. Theodore Sturgeon, Arthur Hlavaty. The big annual NYC con, across the street from Penn Station.

FantasyCon, c/o Mike Chinn, 1 Buttery Rd., Smethwick, Warley, West Midlands B67 7NS, UK. Birmingham, England, 10-12 Jul. 7th annual British Fantasy Convention. At the Grand Hotel.

Torque, 1560 Bloor W., Mississauga, Ont., Canada. Toronto, 10-12 Jul. T. Disch, R. Pavlac.

Archon, Box 15852, Overland MO 63114. (314) 727-8607. St. Louis MO, 10-12 Jul. Geo. Alec Effinger, Joe Haldeman, Wilson (Bob) Tucker, G. R. R. Martin, C. L. Grant. Masquerade.

FairCon, 200 Woodlands Rd., Glasgow G3 6LN, UK. 24-26 Jul. John Brunner, fan Ken Slater.

NECon, c/o Booth, 67 Birchland Ave., Pawtucket RI 02860. Bristol RI, 24-26 Jul. Peter Straub, Les Daniels, Pete Pautz. $50 for single room, board and registration at Williams College.

ParaCon, c/o Casto, 425 Waupelani Dr. #24, State College PA 16801. 24-26 Jul. Wm. Tenn.

RiverCon, Box 8251, Louisville KY 40208. 31 Jul.-2 Aug. Sunday afternoon riverboat cruise.

BecCon, 191 The Heights, Northolt, Middlesex, UB5 4BU, UK. Basildon, UK, 31 Jul.-2 Aug.

August Party, Box 893, Silver Spring MD 20901. Rosslyn VA (near Washington DC), 7-9 Aug. After a year's rest, this most fannish Star Trek convention picks up where it left off.

StuCon, c/o Mecker, Eichenweg 24, D-7016 Gerlingen, West Germany. Stuttgart, 14-16 Aug. Marion Zimmer Bradley, Cherry Wilder, David A. Hardy, Helmut Gabriel. German nat'l con.

Tolkon, c/o SU Tolkien Soc., Box 272 Wentworth Bldg., Sidney U. NSW 2006, Australia. 21-24 Aug. Peter Jon Noble. The seventh Australian UniCon. Not connected with U. S. UniCons.

B'hamaCon, Box 57031, Birmingham AL 35259. (205) 252-4515. 28-30 Aug. Bob Shaw, Gerald Page, Hank Reinhardt. The 19th annual DeepSouthCon. 24-hour party room, Hearts tourney.

Denvention II, Box 11545, Denver CO 80211. (303) 433-9774. 3-7 Sep., 1981. C. L. Moore, C. Simak, R. Hevelin, Ed Bryant. WorldCon. $45 till 15 Jul. East Coast train group planned.

WesterCon 35, Box 11644, Phoenix AZ 85064. (602) 249-2616. 2-5 Jul., 1982. Gordon Dickson.

ChiCon IV, Box A3120, Chicago IL 60690. 2-6 Sep., 1982. A. Bertram (Rim Worlds) Chandler, Kelly Freas, Lee Hoffman. The 1982 WorldCon. Go to other cons to prepare for WorldCon.

THE LIONS OF TULATH

by Tony Richards

art: Hilary Barta

URVASSE

LAVASHARK

Mr. Richards, now 24, is married; he lives just outside of London, England. He's done everything from publishing to park-keeping, but now makes his living as a full-time free-lance writer. Although this is his 12th story sale, it is the first to a U.S. publication.

Across his knees lay sleek steel death. The catalogue described it thus: *Kleiskohm .08 Marksman Superb—ten shot plasmathread magazine; instant reload; gyro balance; laser sight.* The finest, most expensive plasmathread rifle in all the worlds. He would need it, and much more.

Crayman obviously loved it like a child. All through our first conversation in the bar of the sector West-9 hunting lodge, he would touch it with thin, blunt fingers, gaze down at it and absently smile. It was his baby, formed out of a blood-red womb. And he—he had been formed out of a mold marked Fanatical Huntsman. Hair and beard greying like summer grass. Small bright eyes flickering within wrinkled, protecting lids. Voice low but firm, manner calmly intense. Skin dried and darkened by a hundred suns, and by a hundred alien winds. Like hide; dried, darkened hide.

I'd seen his kind most every month since I had set up as a hunting guide on Tulath. Fanatical Huntsmen. For them, a rifle wasn't just a physical extension of the arm, it was a *logical* extension. They were the only types who dared to face the lions of Tulath. And hence they were the only ones who died by them.

Crayman stroked his rifle again. I decided it was time to stop exchanging aimless pleasantries and get right down to business.

I said, "You've changed the stock on that piece. Who did it for you?"

Crayman looked up sharply, surprised. As if I didn't know my job. "Garwitz of Old Earth," he said.

Any other answer, and I would have called off the trip right there and then. Only Joahim Garwitz could have custom-built a new stock for a Kleiskohm Superb without spoiling the balance.

"I've shot *jaqs* and *skutitu* with this," Crayman continued, almost smugly. "And icecats on Sirius 12. *Three* of them. How about that, Levis?"

"How about it? This isn't Sirius 12, and those things out there make icecats look like day-old koala bears. All you've faced up till now are dumb animals. The lions are much more than that."

"They're still just creatures."

"Really?" There was humourless laughter alive in my voice. "They're different, Mr. Crayman. Different from anything we've ever known. They can be any of a million things, but the people who hunt them can only be two things. Very clever—or very dead."

My voice had grown piercingly harsh more than loud, and a number of people had heard me. Over by the panoramic window, backdropped by the glowing, half-mile-high jungle which fills nine tenths of sector West-9, four tourists fresh back from potting *koopir* had turned to stare at me. Like most humans, they'd never heard anyone discuss death so factually before. I stared back, and they turned away uncomfortably.

Crayman was trying his best to look unconcerned. He shrugged, raised his glass, and said, "Here's to those very clever huntsmen."

"All thirty-one percent of them," I added.

His drink stopped far short of his lips. He frowned and put it down. There was dark, angry blood beneath the dark skin of his face.

"I'm not sure I like you, Levis," he said "I'm not sure I like your attitude. In fact, I might just go and find another guide."

"Suit yourself." My hands and eyes were studiedly nonchalant. "Only, the thirty-one percent survival rate only applies to *my* hunters. It's the best odds, because I'm the best guide. Second best is seventeen percent."

I had just given him no choice at all. Come with me, or die for sure. Of course, he could always go and pot *koopir*, but a hunter like Crayman would turn his rifle on himself before doing that. While he pretended to think it over, I toyed with my own glass of water, sipped it, stared at the skins and the mounted heads on the walls. Here, the coruscating hide of a Patt's treecrawler. There, and there, and there, bright *koopir* skins. And over the bar counter, the lumpy head of an *urvasse*. No lions. The lions of Tulath don't have heads or skins, and their bodies would slide right off a nail like melting wax.

Very deadly. Very strange.

"I think," Crayman said, "I'll stick with you."

"It might be best."

"So, how do we find these lions?"

"It isn't difficult if you know how. The lions are semi-nomadic. They move in prides of one leading male, his harem of three to seven females, and their young. Plus, maybe, two or three junior male stragglers. Their territories are split into two parts: the inner and the outer ring. Outer ring extends for a radius of about ten

miles—it's their personal hunting zone, and not fiercely protected. Other prides can pass through as long as they don't stop. And we'll be fairly safe in there. The lions won't hunt humans as a rule. We don't look right, or smell right, or taste right. We're like ripe squid on a gourmet's oyster platter. The inner ring, though, that's a different story."

Crayman was leaning forwards by now, perched on the edge of his seat. His drink lay on the table, forgotten. The gleam in his eyes had grown much brighter.

"The inner ring," I continued, my finger tracing a wide circle through the air, "comprises every blade of grass for half a mile around the pride's camp. It's the male's domain, and the male will kill any large predator which strays inside. Including man. Walk past that boundary, Mr. Crayman, and you'll be facing your first lion within three minutes. One of you will be dead several seconds after that."

I looked straight at him, asked, "Is that the kind of challenge you *really* want?"

It was the usual question, and the last time I would ask it. Just to be sure. The client's facial response was more important than the verbal.

The dimension of Crayman's smile did not alter one millimeter. His teeth seemed wedged between his lips. "I'll live," he said. "I'm one of the best huntsmen there is . . . and how can I fail with the best guide beside me?"

"Uh-uh, I won't be entering the inner ring."

He stared at me amazed. The corners of his mouth began to droop, subside.

"That's another part of the deal," I explained. "I lead you through the jungle, find the pride, get you safely through the outer ring. But there I stop. I'm not in business to get myself killed."

"So you—what?—you wait outside?"

"Just beyond the edge, where the lions won't bother me. I wait for one hour. If you aren't back within that time, I turn around and go home."

"And if I'm fifteen minutes late?"

"I turn around and go home."

"And if I'm hurt and need your help?"

Our eyes met, held. I did not need to answer, not a third time. Crayman had just realised how little I cared for his life.

At last, he said, "Okay."

Just that. Okay. Quietly. He downed the last of his drink with a

heavy gulp, stood up, extended a dark, wrinkled hand.

"Six o'clock tomorrow, then. And look, since we're going to be together for some time, we might as well drop this surname routine."

"No first names," I replied coldly. "That's part of the deal too. I don't want to get involved with someone who might not be around much longer. Professional detachment."

I didn't shake his hand either.

I have a small, self-contained apartment in the north wing of the lodge, far away from the guests and the staff rooms. No one else has ever been inside. The walls are their original pale grey, with spots of damp left untended, the floor is bare as rock. No sheets or pillows mask the stark, taut surface of my bed. There is no decoration save a huge map of West-9 and the surrounding sectors. That, and the only picture in the room . . . a print of a painting, and the subject, almost three-dimensional in menace, is a lion of Tulath. In its natural state. Or at least, in the form that humans see it.

Lion—a misnomer. It's nothing like the great, caged Earthside cats.

The painting shows a mature male of the species. It has no mane at all: that would break up the streamlining, and for a lion of Tulath streamlining is everything. Its hide is one seamless stocking of flat, sleek fur, somewhere between ochre and olive. The body belongs to a snow leopard, all quicksilver grace and powerful hind legs. The paws are large. From each protrude four long, razor-sharp retractable claws, just right for tearing flesh. The teeth glint very white.

And the eyes. They are hot yellow fire.

Set in a small, pointed skull, below the flattened ears. Death.

Place a picture of an Earthside lion beside that print—the Earthside lion would look puny, small. Place a photograph of a *man* beside it—the man would look utterly ridiculous. And yet my clients still go out to hunt the beast. Each of them have their own reasons, all of which go far beyond the normal need for adventure and sport. I do not care. I take them out and bring them back. Thirty-one percent of the time.

That evening, as a hundred times before, I tore the print to small shreds with my fingernails. I would buy a new one when I got back.

We were both up well before six, but we waited for the first glimmerings of light before setting off. There are two kinds of dawn in a Tulathi jungle. The first, the rising of the sun, goes all but unseen, hidden by the dense forest roof eight hundred metres up. The second,

minutes later, is by far the most spectacular. In the darkness between the mighty trees, the first few pinpoints of strange light appear as the luminous insects awaken. Soon, great clouds of them are spreading their thin glow like ever-moving nebulae. They skim, feed, alight on plants. And then the plants, on their cue, come alive. The phosflowers of Tulath unfold. Incandescent colours. Hues which drain the senses and astound the eye. Orange borrowed from the noonday sun, and blue from starlit sapphires, red from flame. And white from polished ivory. And violet. And gold.

I waited till Crayman had caught his breath, then led him deep into that place of weird lights and impossible shadows.

We moved amongst the mightiest trees man had ever found, so tall that the lowest branches were beyond our reach. Above our heads, the mid- and top-most levels of the jungle were a tapestry of brown and green and grey, alive with fleeting shapes. The larger denizens were on the move. Nothing of any size lived on the ground; the branches quivered with the weight of swift, suction-footed beasts.

I watched Crayman very closely, as I watch all my clients on the first day out. It's hard to get the gauge of a huntsman in an air-conditioned bar—you have to observe him, like a wild beast, in his natural environment. Crayman looked just right. The way he wiped the first sequins of perspiration from his brow with blissful satisfaction. The way he strode, the way his eyes glittered. The expression on his face.

But most of all, the way he wanted to press on. Life was all around us by that time, peering at us from its burrows in the treetrunks, scuttling at our feet. The air was filled with the piping of acrobatic, four-winged birds. But never once did Crayman stop, nor even slow his pace. He was not a sightseer in this world. He wanted to get to the lions, quickly.

Good. Perfect.

I was eager to find them too, but I led the way carefully. Trikmoss falls across your face and chokes you. Treecrawlers can snare you in their endless rubber limbs. *Huhar* cocoons look like berries and poison at a touch. We avoided them all; and soon we were just where I liked to be, beyond the reach of humankind. Only lion hunters came out this far. Crayman, as far as I knew, was the only hunter in this whole district.

His feet and legs were tired towards the end of the day. He moved less surely than before, and seemed to be developing a slight pain in the back. A camp was chosen, near the edge of a clearing. I checked the trees and undergrowth first before letting Crayman

unroll his silvery paktite sleeping bag.

"What about yours?" he asked.

"I don't need one. I'll sleep on the ground." Avoiding his startled gaze, I glanced up at the sunset-shadowed sky. "Let's get some food while we still have light to shoot."

It was the first time I had watched Crayman use his expensive rifle, and what I saw impressed me. A score or so *koopir*—winged lizards—were gliding home. As soon as they sensed our presence, they began to zigzag and dip in their characteristic style, flashing from side to side like scarlet fireworks. Unperturbed, Crayman lined up on the largest, the leader. He did not try to follow each movement in his sights, just waited till the *koopir's* dartings brought it within range—and touched the trigger.

One clean shot, right through the head. I carried back the carcase, skinned it. Fire came from a flat disc of frozen, slow dispersing gas. We cooked. We ate. The smell of roasted meat and burnt fat mingled with the narcotic scent of the Tulathi flowers. Insects hummed.

Crayman wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, stared into the darkness as the last luminous petal folded shut.

"Just think," he said. "There could be a lion out there right now. To us, it might look like a bush, a rock, perhaps even some harmless creature."

"I'd know," I said. "Besides, no lion ever comes down this far."

That was a lie. One lion had come this far, and much further, a long time ago. But Crayman would only learn about that later.

Pain . . . pain . . . pain . . .

I sensed it long before I saw the beast. It was alive on the air, like the smell of burnished copper.

It was the middle of day two, and the jungle had already begun to thin. The trees were spaced further apart; the glowing flowers had given way to their stable counterparts. There were more openings now, flatter, wider. And in the largest yet, we stumbled across the dying thing, its fur somewhere between ochre and olive, lain down amongst the tall flute-grass.

I crouched, pointed. For one small moment, Crayman froze. Then his eyes blazed, his mouth went tight.

"Can't be," he whispered above the high-pitched noise the grass made in the wind.

"It is. Your first lion."

His rifle was already at his shoulder. His trigger finger was moving. I hit the barrel with the flat of my hand, and the plasmathread

seared a harmless line through air. Crayman stared at me, simultaneously furious and aghast. By his expression, he might well have used the next shot on me. He had not yet noticed that the lion was still.

"Leave it alone," I said. "There's no sport in killing that thing. It's finished anyway."

"What? Is it wounded? Sick?"

"Neither," I answered. "Much, much worse."

I gestured for him to follow. Keeping low, treading as stealthily as humans could, we approached the lion. It saw us after a while. Its head came slowly up: the fire in its eyes was banked, reduced to dull embers. Life was almost over. It could not have hurt us even if it had wanted to.

As we drew closer, the sense of pain increased. Pure mental pain, pure anguish. Misery, fear, defeat, a thousand other sour emotions, all melded and amplified like condensed light. The lion would let itself die, simply to shut out that agony.

"It's got clawmarks on its side," Crayman pointed out.

"That's not what's killing it. They don't even register any more."

We stopped about ten yards away. The lion made one final desperate attempt to assert its supremacy. It tried to transmute, camouflage itself. Its body flickered for a second, became hazy, took on the vague appearance of a rock. But the creature was too weak. The original form returned.

Perhaps it recognised me, I don't know—but in that last instant before oblivion it looked straight at me, right into my eyes.

Its gaze went gray, then black. Over. Gone.

Like fine ash in the wind, the structure of its outer body began to break up. The ochre-olive surface faded to an indistinct light green. Translucency occurred. I shot a sideways glance at Crayman, saw that he was held transfixed by this rarest of sights. The loose, malleable atoms around the lion's true core were coming adrift. The huge and savage body was succumbing to reality. No illusions now. Not now.

There was the faintest whisper as the atoms all dispersed. That, and a mild residual heat, a tingle like static electricity.

The flute-grass played a solemn threnody.

The true form of the lion lay pale and flaccid on the ground, spreading, dripping amongst the stalks.

It might have been a parasite. Twelve inches long, torpedo-shaped, its edges amoeboid in their softness, their lack of symmetry. Faint phosphorescence hung about its limbless, featureless frame. Below

the skin, traceries of red veins turned slowly blue, small muscles fluttered out their last few reflex spasms.

"That's what you've got to hit," I told Crayman. "Embedded four inches into the pseudoflesh behind the lower throat. Some target."

But the hunter did not seem to hear. He forced breath out between his teeth, grunted. His hands were on his hips.

"I knew it was true but all the same . . . now that I've *seen* it, I find it harder to believe. The cat seemed so real, so solid."

"It was solid enough to kill you, Crayman. Remember that. The outer body may just be a bloodless collection of atoms, a vehicle to carry the inner core around, but it's no less deadly for that."

"But why did it die?"

A pain was growing deep within me. I wanted to get out of this place, quickly.

"The lions are gregarious creatures," I said. "Or perhaps that's an understatement. There's no such thing as a lone Tulath lion—they *have* to live in prides. Without that special social network, all meaning vanishes from their lives. And once in a while, when a lion commits some awful sin against the community, they banish it. It cannot come back, ever. Nor can it join another pride, or wander into an inner territorial ring. That's what happened to this lion. The creature died of hopelessness."

Two hours before dusk, on the border between jungle and marshland, I raised one hand for the hunter to stop. There were familiar signs here. I went tense.

"What is it?" Crayman asked.

The scent on the air was pungent and unmistakable. Several thin twigs ahead of us had been broken in careful, precise ways.

"We're lucky," I replied at last. "We've run right into an outer ring."

I was still looking for more signs. As I found them, they pieced together to spell the identity of the pride. This time, it was my turn for disbelief. I checked again. All the hallmarks were there, clear as the patterns in the stars.

My gaze lifted towards the distant mountains with their plumages of smoke.

"Old One!"

"Are you going to talk sense?" Crayman asked.

I turned to my client so sharply that he took a step back. By the look on his face, my own expression must have been a vicious, twisted thing.

"Okay, Mr. Crayman," I snapped. "How's this for sense? That territory up ahead belongs to a lion called Old One. He's a king amongst kings. Powerful. Supreme. It's been a long time since he's come down this far. Now he's here, with his entourage. Four subordinate males, eleven females, maybe up to twenty offspring in various stages of growth. All of them against you."

"But if I just kill Old One, the rest will turn tail and run. Right?"

"*If* you kill him," I said.

It was a job to persuade Crayman not to carry on. I thought it best to stay outside the territory that night. Discretion, valour, and all that. As soon as we had set up camp, we both went out to shoot our evening meal. I clutched my rifle tightly, thinking, *Old One, Old One, how I* hate *you!*

When darkness fell, we hid our pool of flame behind a tree and huddled round it cautiously. Beyond the outer ring, we should have been safe. We were highly on edge all the same. It might have been our imaginations, but there seemed to be more night movement here than in the dense jungle. Impossible, but every rustle in the grass, every flit of a low wing, brought our heads up with gazelle sharpness. Each time, the firelight reflected in Crayman's eyes. His pupils had grown very small. There was a new kind of glow in them.

Like most of my hunters at this stage, he kept me up with questions long past my normal time for sleep. Talking, talking, using words to balm his drawn-out nerves. He wanted to know all about the lions, everything. He must have read about them long before he came, but he wanted to hear it from me.

I sat up straight, and blinked coldly, and listened, and spoke back.

Why were the lions so ferociously inclined?

Because they were the lords of Tulath, and they behaved accordingly.

Why take the shape they did?

Partly the same as answer one. Partly because of their origins.

Their origins. Yes. What about them? How did they develop into such a bizarre form of life?

Well, that was a question I had tried to answer many times. There was no reason why I should not try again.

Of all the dozens of theories, one seemed the most likely. The lions must have started in their core form, as amorphous slugs. Most probably, they lived in lakes once and had to adapt to land life when the water dried up. They were both large and defenseless, the lowest *stratum* on Tulath, not the highest. Easy meat for every predator

from insects up. Completely helpless.

There was little scope for evolving conventional defences. But the primeval lions did have one rare advantage: the phosphorescent aura round their skins, a natural magnetic field.

They worked on that, strengthening it to considerable degrees. At the same time, their bodies were growing larger. The outermost cells came loose, split up, became subject to whatever shape the magnetic field imposed on them. A thousand different pseudoforms must have been tried before the lions settled on their feline appearance. Millions of years must have elapsed before they reached perfection.

It had been worth the effort. Think: a beast which needs no blood, feels no pain, fears nothing. A creature almost limitless in energy and strength. The inner core was the only true living organism, well-fed by its outer shell, protected by the death machine it had created and controlled. From lowliest invertebrate to master of the whole planet. It had been worth it all.

Crayman sat watching me, his face half in shadow, half in swarming light. The denizens of the surrounding dark were long forgotten.

"I've been thinking," he said. "That lion which died on its own. It seemed to feel, to know, to understand. They can't be intelligent, can they?"

"The scientists said not. Otherwise, we wouldn't be allowed to hunt them."

"Scientists have made mistakes before. You seem to know a lot about them, Levis. What do you think?"

"They're not intelligent," I said.

It was my second lie, but not my last.

Old One came to me in my sleep, his huge, impassive face parting the oily waters of my dreams. Unblinking eyes of hellfire stared at my thoughts. His lips did not move, did not need to move.

So, He-who-calls-himself-Levis! You are back. The Deathbringer has returned.

We are both Deathbringers, Old One. You and I. But you were the first—I simply learnt your lesson.

You fancy yourself my student, then? Old One's eyes flickered and burned. He seemed almost amused. *Have you not noticed the difference? I do my own killing, with no resort to lackeys and mad fools.*

The result is the same. And this man I bring with me is both sane and expert at his sport. He will destroy you, and your reign of cruelty will end. You should have stayed to higher ground.

His expression did not alter. It was no use accusing Old One of

cruelty—the concept was beyond him

I did not come here by mere chance, he replied at last. *What you took for serendipity was carefully planned by myself. Your huntsmen have murdered too many of my kind, Deathbringer. It is high time I finished you.*

How, Old One? I flung my laughter at him like a javelin. *Not even you can defy the Great Laws. You may not harm me unless I enter the inner ring.*

Then I must entice you in.

Again, how?

Old One showed me an image. It was Crayman, sound asleep in his silvery cocoon, lips curved into the smile of an innocent child.

He begins to grow curious, Old One told me. *The death of the banished one aroused his suspicions, and now he yearns to know the truth. I can use him against you, Deathbringer. He will not be your weapon for much longer.*

You— I began.

But Old One was gone.

Crayman woke up bad-tempered and nervous the next morning, and the mood persisted most of the day. I might have put it down to the approaching climax of the hunt, but I suspected that Old One had been touching his mind. No way of telling what thoughts had been implanted, what closed secrets revealed. Control over the hunter was sliding from my grasp.

There was nothing to do but press on.

The marshlands had been desert until the sea had swept in. Now, a flat expanse of brackish water met us, luke-warm from the heat of the mountains, clouded with microscopic life. Scorpion-shrimp and aquarachs were the main hunters here. Around us, the long reeds rustled in the eastward breeze like the voices of ghosts. Flies buzzed in jagged orbits round our heads. The sun was bright and high and hot. It scorched us. Our shadows on the water were as fathomless as seas.

We waded. We got soaked. Once or twice, Crayman brushed his finger along the unguarded trigger of his rifle. I was forced to warn him, scold him, as if he were an amateur. So strange for an experienced hunter to make mistakes like that. So strange.

On the far side of the marshlands, we struggled up the shelf of baked-dry salts and coral onto high ground. We were there. On the mountain slopes. At last. And there could never be a more appropriate habitat for the lions of Tulath.

It was a landscape built on heat. The ground burned like clay out of a kiln, fissured by escaping steam, gargoylised by sculptures of hard lava. The plant life had grown in massive and twisted ways: flowers too heavy for their stems; trees like corkscrews; grasses which split to whiplash ends. And since their energy was drawn from the hot soil, photosynthesis was out. Green was redundant on the slopes; anything but green.

It was grotesque. It drowned us in its wild horror.

Out of the shimmering haze much further up, a quartet of natural obelisks gradually emerged. I knew this place. Within the pillars lay a pool of clean water, bitter-sweet to the taste.

"There's your inner ring," I said, pointing. "That's where we'll find the pride."

In fact, we saw three lions well before the pool. And then a fourth. It was no accident.

One mile to our right, on a great hunchback of a ridge, we spotted a pack of lavasharks emerging from their hole. They dragged themselves on their bellies, propelled by flipper feet. Their huge, tooth-filled heads jerked from side to side. Hissing noises emerged from their blowholes and carried down the wind. They had found something good to eat.

And something had found them.

An ochre-olive flash was all we saw at first. Crayman brought the rifle up to his shoulder; I knocked it down again.

"Too far away," I whispered. "Just watch. What you'll see might help you later on."

Crayman's eyes were fixed on the lions. We could make out three of them now. His tongue darted to his lips. "They're not approaching from downwind," he commented.

"They control their own scent molecules as well."

"Is there anything they can't control?"

"No."

The three lions had stopped some distance from the sharks. They were crouched low, their stomachs pressed against the ground. As we watched, they began to change shape. Their hides turned brown. Their bodies became stocky things, teetering on ungainly legs and spongy feet. Heads lumpy, eyes opaque, tails switching at imaginary flies.

Urvasse. Harmless bovine beasts. Wolves in sheep's clothing, they ambled towards the sharks.

Crayman drew a sharp breath. Admiration. And fright.

The shark's heads came up simultaneously. They gazed at the

approaching beasts with hungry, wicked eyes, thinking they had found a better meal, suspecting nothing wrong. The pack leader slid forward, and the others followed it. They were spreading out, taking a pincer formation to surround the *urvasse*. You could practically smell their greed.

Now they were circling the three *urvasse*. Now they were closing in. The leader whipped forwards, ready to sink its teeth into a meaty flank, and . . .

Somewhere between ochre and olive, somewhere between demon and beast, the lions were back. The leading shark went down under a swiping paw. The rest of the pack, tensed to move, did not have time to realise their mistake. It was all over in five seconds of flashing claws and heavy, helpless flapping.

The lions, lords of Tulath, kings of sudden death—they stood amongst the fallen sharks, supremely proud, magnificent. Like bronze statues. Stock still.

Oddly, they were not touching the fresh meat.

Another, vastly larger shape loomed up behind them, came into the open. *Old One*. Beside me, I heard Crayman start, then groan as the four lions turned around and headed back towards the pillars.

"We'll follow them," I said.

But no. Old One stopped a final time, craned his head across his shoulder to stare directly at us. His eyes flashed.

Crayman whimpered and put one hand to his temples.

"What is it?"

"I don't know." The hunter shook his head, trying to clear it. "I heard a noise inside my skull. Like . . . like a laugh."

Old One was vanishing towards the lofty rocks.

I grabbed hold of Crayman's sleeve.

"Come on!"

"I don't think you've been straight with me, Levis," Crayman said angrily.

I was beginning to get angry myself. We had trekked the last two miles, reached the perimeter of the inner ring, and now Crayman seemed ready to back out. With other hunters, fear had been the cause and I had been able to cajole them inside. But something else was bothering this man. Beneath the rough exterior, a finely-tuned brain was at work.

Now, of all times.

We were so close to killing Old One. I could sense his presence somewhere there amongst the obelisks, watching us, waiting. So

close. Reaching distance.

"I've always told the truth," I said, controlling the tremor of rage in my voice.

"Have you? About the dying lion, for instance?" Crayman swept his arm back the way we had come. "I was prepared to believe it had died of simple loneliness, until I began hearing things inside my head. Weird, alien voices. And laughs. Things poking about in my mind. Do you have any facile explanation for all that?"

I kept silent, and made my face a mask.

"Let me tell you what *I* think," the hunter continued. "I never heard those lions make a noise. They didn't seem to communicate with body signals. Which leaves the possibility that they are telepathic—and if so, they're intelligent. All this business of inner and outer rings involves far more than physical territory. The inner ring is the focus of the pride's mental link. The banished lion died because it was excluded from that special communication. There was silence in its head and it was totally bewildered. Am I right?"

"Why should they be telepathic?" I asked.

"They're small, featureless creatures locked inside an artificial shell. Can you suggest a better way?"

Very clever. No fool, this Fanatical Huntsman. His rifle was pointing at me. His finger hovered a hairsbreadth above the trigger.

"You knew it all along," he said. "Why help me kill an intelligent being?"

"It's personal," I replied. "You wouldn't understand."

"Maybe not. But I'm a huntsman, not a murderer."

His finger left the trigger. Seizing the rifle barrel in both hands, he flung the gun far out into the rainbow maze. It flew in a high arc, glinting as it turned over, over. Hand-bored muzzle, custom stock. Expensive, exclusive, irreplaceable, falling, gone.

"I'm going home," he said.

Oh, stupid puny irrational little human. Bound by morality, by conscience. Weakling. Idiot. He could not walk away from me. I wanted—*needed* him to kill Old One.

Before I could remonstrate, my enemy had got to him. By linkage, by mind. The hunter's face went blank, his body and his eyes stopped moving. Almost as if he had died upright. Then his head tipped to one side. He was listening to a voice that only he could hear. Old One was talking to him. Though I could not hear the words, I knew that my own lies had become insignificant as falling leaves.

Suddenly, Crayman was let go. He tottered, and I held his arm to steady him. He looked at me uncertainly, brushed my grip away,

then stared towards the thicket. A smile played about his face. A peaceful, trusting smile.

One of his feet moved forward. Then the other. His steps were zombie-like. He was going to the pride.

"Crayman, *no!* Old One will kill you!"

He shook his head, still walking. "No, Levis. He knows I mean no harm. He wants to communicate. He forgives us for hunting down his kind."

"You don't understand," I told him. "You're mixed up in something too big . . . ."

The sentence died deep in my throat. Crayman had crossed the invisible boundary. He was in, and I could not follow. Whatever happened. *Whatever.*

He was only ten metres in when a medusabush moved, resolved itself into a shape of a huge lion. Old One sprang forwards and knocked his victim to the ground. Steel trap jaws fastened around Crayman's collar, hauling him to a sitting position, blocking my line of fire at the beast's vulnerable throat. I flung my rifle aside, furious.

Old One regarded me steadily.

I warned you, Deathbringer, that I would use the man against you.

Stunned and weakened, Crayman struggled to get free. Old One responded by clawing his shoulder just enough to make him scream.

See, Deathbringer? I can hurt him quite easily. And will continue to do so until you enter the inner ring.

He clawed again, deeper this time. Crayman looked at me with pain and pleading in his eyes.

I wanted to turn round, walk home. But. But. This was a *good* man. Weak, yes, but good. Capable of mercy, capable of trust. Unable to slaughter a sapient creature, whatever the cost. Better than Old One. Much better than I.

He could have killed me, and he didn't.

My right hand was squeezed into a tight fist. I opened it, saw that my nails had broken the flesh, burrowed down inside.

There was no blood. Of course.

A brief, dark storm tore at my soul, and when it ebbed I was no longer pink and clothed and upright. Ochre-olive fur. Four-legged. Claws. Teeth. Inferno eyes. My ears were flat against my skull. I moved with fluid grace, outrunning the wind to reach my enemy.

Old One dropped Crayman the moment I was inside the forbidden ring. We met head on, each clawing for the other's throat, and rolled. Once, twice. Up. In again. Old One turned and my swipe raked futilely down his flank. Doubling back like an elastic loop, he bowled

me over, sought my living core with his fangs. Instead, he tore the upper part of my throat. My windpipe hung open, revealed as the artifice it was.

This time, for the first time in so many years, my own turn came to laugh.

We collided again, became one rolling, twisting, impenetrable ball. And when we finally came apart, Old One was not moving any more.

I watched as he dispersed, then glanced along my own body. My pseudoflesh was hanging in loose strips, unable to fall off. I let it hang. It did not bother me.

Crayman was standing by now, staring at me from the wide-eyed paleness of his face. His jaw moved slackly on its hinges.

"You didn't have to save me," he said.

Then, "Thank you."

A long time after that, he managed to ask: "What is this . . . all of this . . . about?"

I touched his mind and told him. How Old One had banished me from his pride for one petty act of defiance, how my own people had forsaken me. How I might have died alone had I not come across the hunter called Levis. He'd lost his way in one of the East sectors, had been wandering for weeks. I stalked him through his final days, observed his mind and learned everything about him. When at last he fell asleep and died, I transmuted, took his form, his identity. Became human as nearly as I could. And set up as a guide in the lodge in sector West-9. I had something to live for now: hatred; revenge.

The lions of Tulath. My own people. I loathed them for their cruelty, and in seeking to destroy them I had become crueller.

It was over now.

Slowly, I returned to the Levis-shape. Not a scratch on my pink skin.

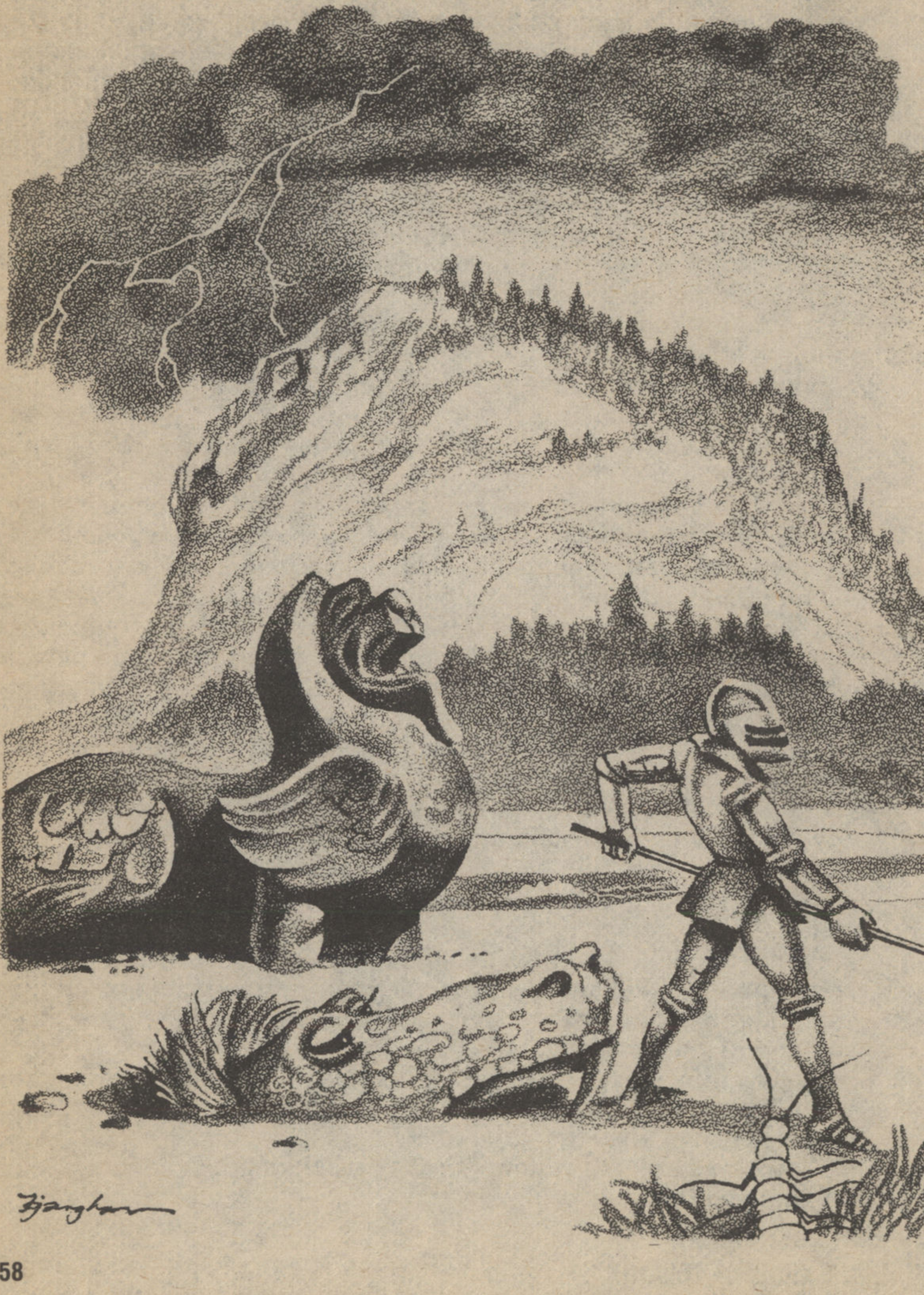
"You won't tell the authorities?" I asked.

"About you? No, but I'll have to report that the lions are intelligent. The hunting will be stopped." Concern shadowed his face. "What will you do now?"

"Leave this world, perhaps. Go live with humankind amongst stars. They are my people now." Turning, I faced the gathering dusk. "Let's go home."

"Your eyes are still yellow," Crayman said.

I changed them back.



ADVENTURES IN UNHISTORY: AN ABUNDANCE OF DRAGONS

by Avram Davidson

art: Jack Gaughan

Be assured, the Dragon is not dead
But once more from the pools of peace
*Shall rear his fabulous green head.**

Robert Graves, *Collected Poems*
Anchor/Doubleday

America, that great Antiquity, observed Sir Thomas Browne, *lay buried in the Urn for centuries.* At least I think he did. Something less bulky lay buried in my subliminal mind (for a somewhat shorter period), to wit, *Did dragons have kidney-stones?* Suddenly, and I don't know why, it came to me that what I had really been wondering was, *Did dragons have* **gizzard**-*stones?* And with that the entire matter of dragons seemed to leave the realm of the imaginary and enter that of the possible. The rest followed.

Dragons are in. But have they ever been out? The Reverend Mr. Sabine Gould, one of those 'satiably curious Victorians, suggested that, so vivid is mankind's apprehension of the dragon, it might perhaps have had its origin in an actual creature, now extinct. This was easy to suggest when we were groping our way to a knowledge of paleontology, each year bringing notice of some new-discovered monstrous fossil relic of the past and easy willingness to accept; but Mark Twain characteristically suggested a formula for "reconstructing" the skeleton of a dinosaur was "three bones and a barrel of plaster." A century has passed without evidence of any actual primordial dragons, so we must with regret dismiss the notion. The dragon, with its wings and scales, its snout breathing fire, lurking in its den upon a hoard of gold and jewels, ever-willing to sally out and pick a person's bones for dinner, did not . . . as such . . . exist.

And yet we "know" the dragon. It is more real to us than many an actual animal. Children can describe it. How many of us can describe a wombat? Certainly no one ever sat down and made up the dragon. The legend had an origin, hadn't it? The fact is, that like most legends, it had more than one origin. And so, perhaps

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after all the dragon did exist . . . if not, indeed, just as the legend had it.

There is a small book called *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea,* likely written during the reign of Nero; despite vice and persecution, business went on as usual. One such business was the commerce of the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, the upper Indian Ocean, and—lovely little phrase— "the circumjacent coasts." These waters were collectively called the Erythraean [lit. *red*] Sea, and a periplus was a sailing guide; this one, in addition to being a handbook of navigation in days before compass and sextant, was also a manual of commerce. This small book is made larger by fascinating commentaries, one of which, for instance, tells us that the resinous gum frankincense was so very precious that the trees which oozed it were guarded. Other trees were also, anciently, said to be guarded; remember the golden apples of the far-distant Hesperides? In order to take these fruits Hercules had to slay a huge snake, or dragon. The ancients knew a reptile when they saw one, but otherwise did not often distinguish: *draco* or *drakon* sometimes had legs, sometimes not.

Herodotus (c. 484 B.C. – c. 424 B.C.), called "The Father of History" and usually praised for his oft-cautious tone, says that "winged serpents" guarded those frankincense trees in southern Arabia. "And every spring," he says, "these . . . flew into Egypt through a narrow pass . . . where they were met by ibis [birds] and defeated; hence the veneration for the ibis in Egypt" —where one of the very gods, Thoth, is depicted as ibis-headed. Does the ibis kill snakes? Many birds do. Are there winged snakes? No. Are there any winged reptiles at all? From India unto Indonesia live small lizards, *Draco taeniopterus* and others, which glide from tree to tree with the aid of distended skin-flaps; this is far from Egypt, but if even a dead and dried such creature reached the West it might easily have been taken for "a winged serpent," or "a baby dragon. . . ." Why these creatures left the precious frankincense trees unguarded and why they wished to fly into Egypt and why they kept on trying when their attempts were always defeated, I do not know. The swarming and migration of even real creatures leaves many questions unanswered.

The great Dr. Borges cites some comments of Pliny the Elder, who had lots of comments on lots of subjects; told his nephew, Pliny the Younger, "No book so useless as not to contain one fact worth writing down;" certainly true to his own books.

. . . the Ethiopian Dragon, in search of better pasturage, regu-

larly crosses the Red Sea and migrates to Arabia.

Perhaps this is simply another version of what must be the return trip from trying to slip across into Egypt. But, "better pasturage," indeed! The notion of a grazing dragon, though entertaining, cannot be entertained: hippos graze, elephants browse, dragons do neither; but, this trail begun, can there have been some confusion between elephants and hippos in regard to dragons? Maybe.

Imagine these trading ships, the merchant marine of the "South Sea" of ancient Rome, very small by our standards, propelled largely by the trade winds of the Indian Ocean at the monsoon seasons—imagine them as having passed through the Sinus Arabicus or Arabian Gulf (which we call the Red Sea) and out into the upper western part of what we call the Indian Ocean; past what their passengers called Arabia Felix, or Happy (i.e. fertile) Arabia—as distinct from Arabia Petra, or Stony Arabia, and Arabia Deserta—off the coast of what was once Aden and is now the Republic of South Yemen. . . . Belonging to that new nation is an old island called Socotra; also called Socotora, Dioscorida, and other names much forgotten. This is a true Desert Island and hence does not produce very much, but what it produced was precious. Listen:

"Aloes, dragons blood, frankincense are all plentiful, also myrrh and other gums. . . . Ships exchange their cloth and wheat for frankincense, which lies in heaps all over."—*Periplus.*

Frankincense we know, aloes are cathartic, but . . . *dra*gons blood? Only a few centuries had passed since Herodotus recorded that the frankincense trees of Arabia were guarded by "winged serpents," i.e. dragons, and yet the blood of the Arabian dragons was common enough to be an article of commerce. What made them bleed so copiously? I will cite a more recent account. Clark B. Firestone, in that wonderful book, *The Coasts of Illusion: A Study of Travel Tales,* quotes one John Lok, who "in his *Voyage to Guinea* paraphrases an ancient belief . . . [elephants] have continual warfare against dragons, which desire their blood, because it is so very cold: and therefore the Dragon, lying awaite as the Elephant passeth by, windeth his taile, being of exceeding length, about the hinder legs of the Elephant, and so staying him, thrusteth his head into his tronke and exhausteth his breath . . . and when the Elephant waxeth faint, he falleth down upon the serpent, being now full of blood, and with the poise [i.e. weight, as in avoirdupois] of his body breaketh him, so that his own blood with the blood of the Elephant runneth out of him mengeled together, which being colde, is congealed into that substance which the Apothecaries call Sanguis Dra-

cōnis [dragon blood] . . . otherwise called Cinnibaris, commonly called Cinoper or Vermilion. . . ."

Quite a story. And if you should give a wry smile at how dragons' blood should turn out (in this account) to be nothing after all but vermilion, take a moment to recognize that vermilion means *little worm: worm,* among its other meanings, means *dragon!* It is nevertheless a bit disconcerting to read in a Renascence work, *The Craftsman's Handbook: The Italian "Il Libro Dell' Arte,"* by Cennino D'Andrea Cennini, "A color known as dragonsblood is red. This color is used occasionally on parchment for illuminating. But leave it alone, and do not have too much respect for it; for it is not of a constitution to do you much credit." (trans. Daniel V. Thompson, Jr., Dover NY, 1960) Perhaps old Cennini had gotten a bad batch. *Sigh*

The ancients were fascinated by gore. The life *is* in the blood. One reason why frankincense was regarded with awe was that the tree was thought to be female and the sap was thought to be its catamenial blood, a substance still regarded, if only clandestinely, as being both sinister and magical: ask your neighborhood witch or wisewoman. But—was there not a confusion of bloods here, in popular thought? We do not know. In modern times the substance now called dragons blood is prosaically described as "the exhudate of no less than three different plants," and is used chiefly to manufacture quality varnishes. That hideous strength vanishes as we get close to it. *Dragons! Varnish!*

Phaedrus (c. 1st cent. B.C.) said that the dragon is "a creature born under evil stars . . . doomed to guard against others the treasure it cannot use itself." The treasure or hoard is not yet conventionalized into coins and gems, this belongs to a more sophisticated age; so far we have seen it as golden apples and a reddish-gold gum. We go on, in time, but ere we finish, we shall return.

If the Garden of the Hesperides was not actually in Spain (and it might have been, Rand McNally wasn't around yet) it was certainly near Spain: in that Garden, belonging to the Daughters of the Dusk, grew the far-famed Golden Apples. Some say they were actually quinces, others have said oranges . . . and yet others both ancient and modern have called our attention to a most curious Greek homonym: the word for "apple" is *mēlon* and the word *mēlon* also means "sheep." . . . Taking little for granted, I applied myself to the great Greek Lexicon of Liddell and Scott (Liddell was the father of Alice, *the* Alice, of Wonderland: it is said that, disturbed

at his lifetime work on *the* Greek Lexicon by a person from Porlock, he strangled the intruder on the spot . . . and, the importance of the Work being implicitly recognized, went scot-free): sure enough! μηλον does mean *apple* (or quince or apricot): and it does mean *sheep* (or goat): and it also does mean *bags under the eyes,* or *tonsils:* shall we stick to apples and sheep?

Now consider: On the outside of an apple is a peel; let that pass. For on the outside of a sheep is a fleece—and we have all heard of the Golden Fleece, of Jason and the Argonauts, one of whom was Hercules. Was the lanolin-sticky pelt used to collect gold-dust from auriferous streams? Or was it that of a gold-colored mountain-goat or antelope in, really, *central* Asia? Whatever; there seems a beautiful symmetry here. The Golden Apples were on a tree on the yonder shore of the Atlantic Sea, in the Farthermost Ancient Greek West. And the Golden Fleece was on a tree on the yonder shore of the Euxine (or Black) Sea, in the Farthermost Ancient Greek East. *And both were guarded by dragons.*

It has been suggested that, what with one Greek word and another and one golden treasure and another and one Herculean adventure on one far frontier and another, someone got rather badly mixed up; who knows? Ladon, he who "lay coiled around the tree which bore the golden apples of eternal life," replied in effect to Hercules's demands to have a piece of fruit, "Over my dead body, Herk." Hercules killed him, grabbed the pippins, and split. Dragons have generally had a reputation for being anti-social. Liberals may attribute this to a deprived childhood, Conservatives to mere idleness: after all, is that a way to go through life, coiled around some *tree?* Sir John Mandeville in the 1300s indicated something of this, in writing of "the isle Silha. In that land is full much waste, for it is full of serpents, of dragons and of cockodrills, that no man may dwell there." Do you see what I mean? What about your real estate values? What about your tax base? How do you expect to attract industry? But Sir John is silent. The oracle is dumb. . . .

Which gets us to Delphi, does it. Sadly changed. Apollo doesn't live there any more, and there's not much left to remind us that this was once Dragon Country. But the triple-headed serpent- or dragon-column is still in Constantinople, whither it was toted; surely the one spoken of as the "image of a triple-headed dragon which was erected to destroy all scorpions, serpents, lizards, and 'similar poisonous reptiles' . . ." Like cures like, and dragons were powerful medicine. We have all heard of Greek fire, a sort of nautical napalm, the formula of which was lost so long ago that the Byzantines did

not have it to protect their City in its final siege in 1453; though mention has been made of "a triple-headed dragon which belched fire at hostile ships approaching from the Bosporus;" surely the same article; so note the progression: serpent . . . dragon . . . fire. . . . What's missing?

Treasure?

As every schoolchild knows, a carbuncle is not just a fancy boil, often found in an embarrassing place, it is also a jewel: and its name comes from the Latin *carbunculus,* a small coal. Jorge Luis Borges tells us in his *Book of Imaginary Beings:* "It is associated with the precious stones which dragons were thought to have hidden in their brains." (Though, perhaps, as I may show later, they were actually hidden somewhere else.) On this subject the great Argentine writer refers to the *Etymologies* of Isidore of Seville (some of them are corkers: horses, says Isidore, are called *equine* because when harnessed together they pull *equally*), who gives more than a mere etymology for this: "It is taken from the dragon's brain but does not harden into a gem until the head is cut from the living beast"—until which time, one supposes, it just sort of slops around, looking much like a glob of strawberry Jello— "wizards, for this reason, cut the heads from sleeping dragons. Men bold enough to venture into dragon lairs scatter grain . . . doctored to make these beasts drowsy, and when they have fallen asleep their heads are struck off and the gems plucked out." The association of dragons with caves and with gems is very old and very common: and not with gems alone: with gold. And perhaps we will learn why. . . .

One of the ancient libraries—Ignatius says Constantinople, others say Alexandria—had a copy of "Homer" written on the intestine of a dragon; it was 125 feet long. Was this the very copy which Alexander the Great put, along with a dagger, under his pillow each night? Pleasant dreams, Al. Ars longa, vita breva.

Lest you have thought that dragons pertained only to the warm Mediterranean and the torrid realms farther south and east, keep in mind the dragon-headed ships of the Vikings: for dragons, as must be clear by now, Got Around. They got around, too, even if only as symbols, to the "elaboratories" of the alchemists. And there, says Bessy, "In the 'synthesis of alchemical operations,' the 'conjunction' triumphs over the dragon, the symbol of primordial matter": the conjunction being "the union of body, soul, and mind, carried out in the presence of the toad and the dragon (symbol of primordial forces)." *The toad.* Shakespeare.

Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head.

Venomous. Dragon. Jewel. Head.

Bessy again. Says that the Gnostics considered old dragon as "the symbol of a transcendent cosmic force," one of those phrases which might mean whatever you think it might. But right after that he says something which sheds a quicker light, *vide licet,* "In a similar way to the serpent which eats its own tail, it" —the dragon— "symbolizes a perpetual renewal . . ." This is of course the famous *Worm Ouroboros;* as boys, we used to wonder if such a snake would get smaller and smaller, or if the tail would constantly slither out of its mouth, thus causing the snake to go round and round in circles; the words *Worm Ouroboros* we never heard. But recollect that not only does "Worm" in Old English very often mean "snake," it often means "dragon." (Even Siegfried, who spoke Old Burgundian, killed his dragon at Worms.) I would refer you, for example, to a fascinating book, *The Great Orm of Loch Ness,* whose author, F. W. Holiday, argues that the so-called Monster is actually a giant marine worm; and he cites a great many reports that in earlier times these giant worms inhabited other lakes and also rivers; and were so often slain that they became largely, perhaps entirely, extinct. On the purely physical level of meaning, could this have been the origin of the dragon legend? I think it could have been, in part: *one* origin.

In early Egyptian pictures we see a figure having the hindquarters of a hippo and the head of some spotted, speckled creature: this is "Amaït . . . a kind of Egyptian pre-dragon which was also called 'the Eater' or 'the Devourer,' guarding the threshold (which only the initiate could cross)—the threshold of the invisible." Once again we have a flash to the image and concept of the dragon as the guardian. Seemingly we can't get away from it: thresholds, groves of golden apples, trees bearing golden fleece, frankincense, gold and jewels in heaps in caves . . . Egypt! Daughter of the Nile!

Appollonius of Tyanna had been there. He lived in the reign of Domitian, a couple of emperors after Nero, and not a very nice person, either. (If Lord Acton didn't have the Roman emperors in mind when he penned the words, *Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely,* I don't know why not.) Apollonius was a sort of ancient hippie, wore funny clothes, didn't cut his hair, even went to India for enlightenment. His biographer, one Philostratus, reports that there Apollonius saw "dragons of extraordinary size, from whose head were thrown off flames . . . and if you slew one of them . . . you found marvelous stones upon the head."

Apollonius, someone named Hiercoles once said, observed that "the Arabians have a way of understanding swans and other birds . . . by eating . . . the heart and . . . livers of dragons. . . ." We need linger no longer than to note the mention of dragons in Arabia and to recollect a similar notion in the Burgundian legend of Siegfried, the Niebelungen, and the dragon Fafnir. I wish I could recall who said that Siegfried's childhood was spent in large part alone, "with no one for company but a metallurgical dwarf," by name Mime.

Let us take a quick hop, skip, and jump: lo! there is the lad Arthur withdrawing the sword from the stone, thus proving himself rightful king of Britain, and son of old King Uther Pendragon . . . which last name means, or *might*: Dragon Hill . . . Cape Dragon . . . Mount Dragon . . . Dragon's Head . . . or, at its simplest, Head Dragon. (It may also mean Head Leader: but, however we may push the dragon motif back, sooner or later we must face it, scaly back against the wall: Britonic power-figures were called "dragons" because the Britons believed that dragons existed and had power.) Long, long did Arthur, the dragon-king's son, keep at bay the savage hordes of Anglo-Saxons, barbarous people with hyphenated name; in the end they triumphed, and the Britons were slain, enslaved, or fled—either across the sea to Gaul, thus establishing Brittany; else into the mountains of what the Saesnigs, Sassenachs or Saxons, called Wild Wales. Listen:

I was in London in 1952 when King George VI died: and I stood, well-wrapped, though not well enough, in the rain and sleet and snow; and while the muffled church-bells tolled and the minute guns boomed, saw pass between the silent throngs the coffin with the royal corpse, followed by three royal dukes, one himself an ex-king and one now so suddenly the husband of a queen. I saw displayed, as it passed by, the Standard of Ireland with its Harp, the Standard of Scotland with its St. Andrew's Cross; I saw pass, too, the Standard of Wales with its Dragon Rampant, and I saw the Standard of England bearing the St. George's Cross. . . .

And if you think that everything I have said so far is mere myth: tell me: is it mere myth that the Dragon-banner Kingdom of Wales was conquered and slain by that England whose banner was and is still that of St. George—*who killed the dragon*—?

Was it not St. George? These little coincidences are rather interesting. Tell who cleft the devil's foot . . . and gat with child the mandrake root. Since the old word *fire-drake* means dragon, is not in one sense the man-drake the man-dragon? Which medieval writer

says that "at the midsummer celebration, lads burned bones and filth to generate a noxious smoke ["like cures like"] and so drive away dragons, which, excited by summer heat, copulated in mid-air, poisoning the wells and springs by dropping their seed in them" . . . The dragon was still tormented by the heat, but in Europe there were no elephants. The connection of wells and springs with dragons is widespread and old; a modern African writer has a Zulu say, "I am descended from the man who speared the crocodile by the water-hole."

When the Roman writer Lucan said that the dragon "burst apart vast bulls," was he thinking of bull-*elephants?* Recall the battles?

South African Black Nationalists, seeking another name for their country, have chosen "Azania." This is questioned by those who say that by this name *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* certainly meant what we now call Somalia. As one goes sailing down "the bluffs and courses of Azania," one passes "the valley called Apollo's, which bears . . . frankincense. . . ." No, not all the frankincense was on "the other side" in Arabia. And, as there were frankincense trees in Azania, perhaps there were dragons guarding *them,* there, too: as in Arabia.

"Next," says *Periplus,* "is the mountain Elephas, projecting into the sea. . . ." Now, *Elephas* means "ivory," and not only does ivory come from elephants, it was to fight the elephants (and get cooled in their blood: says Pliny and others) that the dragons used to fly over from Arabia; and just before Mount Elephas lies the Valley of Apollo—who slew a dragon, himself. Elephant. Dragon. We may just have pinpointed here the scene of an old battle-ground involving those two kinds of great beasts. Mere myth and legend? Maybe. Stick around.

Going on afar in space we learn that the Chinese chose the green dragon to symbolize the south. They were by no means as usually anti-dragon as the western nations were. The dragon in China also stood for lightning, the sky, and "for the Father, the Prince . . . and the male procreative force."

Maurice Bessy, a modern French fancier of magic and the supernatural, reminds us that, just as China had the I-Ching, the Graeco-Roman world had the Oracle of Delphi: but there was more to Delphi than the Oracle alone: it was at Delphi that Apollo killed the dragon.

But—*China.* Kung Fu-tse* said, "As to the dragon, we cannot

*If you believe he wrote Latin, call him Confucius.

understand his riding on wind and clouds and his ascending to the sky. Today I saw Lao-tse; is he not like the dragon?" Undoubtedly an air-dragon; of a water-dragon it was said, "The *kiao* resembles a snake. It has four legs." Problem? What problem? Here is how the Emperor Chao handled things: "The Emperor Chao, when angling in the Wei River, caught a white *kiao*, three chang long. The Emperor said, 'This is not a lucky omen,' and ordered the Ta kwan to make a condiment of it. Its flesh was purple, its bones were blue, and its taste was very savory and pleasant." So says Dr. De Visser; what more is there to say?

Chinese dragon-lore is so rich that, indeed, it contains an embarrassment of richness. In De Visser's *The Dragon in China and Japan,* I find ample confirmation of the fact that the dragon was obliged to make rain in time of drought by the Emperor's beating upon a dragon-skin drum; this was originally revealed to me one day at lunch long ago by Mr. Yen Yü-chuan, a very elderly eunuch, who had served the last two emperors, long *long* ago. (The lunch, by the way, was in the Mohammedan Restaurant in Peiping's East Bazaar. I would recommend the roast duck. Excellent.)

De Visser ascribes the whole Chinese dragon-legend to the Indian myth of the Naga, demi-divine were-serpents, serpent-men whose great power must yield to that of the Garuda; demi-divine were-birds, usually eagle-men. Oddly well I found this ties in with Armstrong's *Folklore of Birds*: "Between the eagle and the dragon there is constant enmity, the eagle seeking to kill it, and the dragon breaks . . . the eagle's eggs. . . ." This would seem rather reckless of the eagle, and my initial reaction was that the eagle would go only after young, small dragons which, threshing and tumbling around in the nest, might indeed break eggs. Was I at all right? We shall see.

Here I compress from Jordanus Catalanus, his book of *Miraculous Descriptions.*

> In India Tertia there be dragons in the greatest abundance. These have their lying places upon golden sands, and grow exceeding big, and cast forth from the mouth a most fetid and infectious breath, like the thickest smoke. These animals develop wings, but being too heavy, they drop into a certain river which issues from paradise, and perish. And when people see one fallen, they go down and take the carbuncle in the top of its head, and carry it to the Emperor of the Ethiopians, whom you call Prester John.

Well. "The Third India" *is* Ethiopia, according to the middle-old geography. The "certain river which issues from Paradise" is the Nile. The dragon is in this case the crocodile. The infectious and smoky breath is a fable. And so is the stone in the great beast's head. *Head.* Professor Marianne Thalman, in her *The Romantic Fairy Tale,* quotes August Macke on the authors of certain *märchen.* "What these men saw was not a naively simple nature, but mysterious signs which could be singled out and become in this abstraction the means to magical spatial effects. They did not want to copy the world. They recreated it, responsible to themselves alone. Truth does not depend upon actuality. It must merely fill us with certainty. Through this intellectual selectivity, nature loses nothing of its greatness and the intimacy of its effects, as experience shows. The world is transformed by it to new realities. Reality which is contested appears again in surreality."

And that's another explanation.

In the farthest West, hard upon the stormy Atlantic, a dragon guards the Golden Apples. In the farthest East, on the yonder shore of the friendly Black Sea, a dragon guards the Golden Fleece. In the farthest North, amidst the Burgundian snows, what do we see? a vast golden treasure; what is guarding it? a dragon. Which leaves the South; what golden treasure have we been told was there? Well, the Table of the Sun, for one . . . which certainly sounds as though it might have been golden. We are certainly told that Apollo, who was among a number of other things the sun god, used to go south once a year to visit "the wise and fleecy-haired Ethiopians." And inasmuch as Apollo when a youth had killed a dragon at Delphi, if no dragon was to be seen guarding the Table of the Sun, perhaps it went into hiding on hearing that Apollo was coming. —Still. The dragon did guard the groves of frankincense in southern Arabia: those clumps of precious resin-gum with their sometimes golden glints.

There *is* a sort of fearful symmetry in this pattern. Isn't there?

Jacob Grimm in vol. IV of his massy four-volume work on Teutonic Mythology refers to "dragon-quellers," a nice phrase. He quotes Saxo Grammaticus as saying that one "Frotho, a second Siegfried, overpowers a venomous dragon that lay reposing on his treasure." *Frotho,* cognate with "prudent," is certainly the same name as *Frodo,* protagonist of J.R.R. Tolkien's *Ring* Trilogy, merely one ensample of the immense learning lying behind that immense romaunt.

When Grimm informs us that the infant dragon is called *lyngorm,*

I make this "lingworm" or "longworm," though I may be wrong; is there a connection of *lingorm* and *lingam?* Snake and phallus were identified and for obvious reason long *long* before Freud delved and Jung span. "Show me what jewels you have brought back," asks Mrs. Sancho Panza; "I will show them to you at home, wife," says he.

Kennst du the beautiful Thora Borgarhiörter? She "had a small lingorm given her, whom she placed in a small casket with gold under him . . . as he grew, the gold grew also, till the box became too narrow, and the worm lay himself in a ring all about that, with his tail in his mouth. . . ." Ouroboros again. "Nearly all of this," says Grimm, "has its counterparts in the beliefs of other nations. As the Romans borrowed *gigas*, giant, from the Greeks, so they did *draco*, for neither *serpens* nor *vermis* was adequate . . . to express the idea." And "*drakon* comes from [Greek] *derkein*, to look, illumine, flash out. . . ." Ere we leave him (*'Wiedersehen*, Yakob!), Grimm babbles a bit about "Fen-gold," that is, "gold that has lain in the fens," or marshes, swamps, *"with the snakes and dragons."* To find it, follow the will-o-the-wisp.

And then, out of left nowhere, although tipped off by my earlier mention of Mime, the "metallurgical dwarf" who helped raise Siegfried, who slew Fafnir, the treasure-guarding dragon on the North; along comes *this*: "the dwarf race, like the dragons, cherishes and guards treasures. . . ." Do we know of such a race . . . today? The race of Pygmies lives today deep into Africa, though evidently more widely-spread once; and, though "a people not strong," are a people with courage. For example. They kill elephants. So did the dragons. Did some distant echo of any of this, from a very distant time, reach into northern Europe? It may be so. I do not know.

". . . it was at Delphi that Apollo killed the dragon. . . ."

The phrase, *The Dragon at Delphi,* has a sound of great power. In the course of this Adventure I have found my way to a vast book called *Python,* by Joseph Fontenrose, subtitled *A Study of Delphic Myth/And Its Origins.* The author, in his Introduction: "In dealing with Asiatic myths I have had to rely upon the studies and translations of orientalists; but the work of specialists, after all, is intended for the use of others." Indeed! and I am sure that Professor Fontenrose would not object to my using his own immensely impressive work here. Listen: "The late-appearing version of a myth may very well have appeared earlier in writing, or an orally transmitted version may . . . then have received literary notice for its

first time. In short, all is grist to our mill."

In the biblical cautions against witchcraft, what the King James (Protestant) Version terms *familiar spirits* are in the Douai (Roman Catholic) Version termed *pythonic spirits;* but in speaking the word *Python*—which is itself a Word of Power—we are not speaking of the ghosts of snakes, you know. "*Python*" was the name of the great serpent or dragon which appeared at Delphi, in western Greece, and it must be realized that this reptile was not called "*Python*" because it was a Big Snake: the big snake of that name is so-called because it has been named after the one at Delphi. If this is not utterly clear, you are all going to be very confused.

Delphi was one of the places called "The Navel of the Earth," and what is attached to a navel in the original state? yours, mine, the English Queen's, the Roman Pope's: anyone's? Answer: an umbilical cord. Isn't an umbilical cord serpentine in appearance? It is. But dragons, you will say, being reptiles and hence hatching out of eggs*, *have* no navels: but this does not distress dragons, who are much too busy with their usual fun-and-games to bother about not having belly-buttons. Their usual fun-and-games includes making and/or being thunderbolts and chasing meteors. One did not know that dragons chase meteors? Meteor*ites?* Has one never seen a traditional Chinese picture of a dragon with mane flying and claws curving and body twisting and tail writhing as it pursues a Great Ball of Fire? Of course it may not be a meteorite. Mr. L. Newton Hayes says, in his *The Chinese Dragon**, that it is the sun (after all, Apollo was the sun god). One may accept a once-popular Chinese concept that it is some sort of mysterious and immense flaming pearl. But . . .

No. Back to Delphi. What was the dragon *do*ing there? Well, what was *any*body doing there? To visit the great Temple of Apollo? Ah, but we are—suddenly—in Delphi at a time when even Apollo, one of the immortal gods, had yet to be born! and even *then* people were coming to worship . . . despite the fact that the Dragon would often pounce upon and eat them. The old time religion; not good enough for me. But we have an oblique answer from the Roumanian scholar Mircea Eliade, who is deep, heavy: true, some of his deeps and heavies would be of interest only to another Roumanian; but to all: his *The Forge and the Crucible: The Origin and Structures of Alchemy*.

*Yes, I know that some reptiles are viviparous; go away.

*Commercial Press, Ltd., Shanghai, 1922.

Mircea Eliade speaks of ". . . the early religious significance attached to aeroliths," i.e. meteorites. "They fall to earth charged with celestial sanctity; in a way they represent heaven. . . . Heaven, via meteorites, impregnates the earth with iron . . . the thunderbolt and the meteorite 'cleaved' the earth . . . [and] Delphi, most famous of the clephts of ancient Greece . . . signifies the female generative organ. . . ."

Evidently the meteorites were in one view regarded as dragon-seed. Recall the medieval report that in Summer the dragons, disturbed by the heat, attempted to copulate way up in the middle of the air, and, when baffled, "dropped their seed upon the earth." I wonder: a reference to the Perseid meteor "shower"? And M. Bessy, in his highly suspect *Magic and the Supernatural* (intriguing, though), says that in Chinese cosmology ". . . the symbol of the sky . . . also stands for the Father . . . the Dragon . . . and the male procreative force. . . ." A force regarded as highly desirable and highly dangerous: *The rude mind with difficulty associates the ideas of power and benignity*. And Bessy, busy over-simplifying the ancient Chinese, has it that "the earth symbol also stands for the Mother [and] . . . the Female Principle. . . ."

Delphi, Delphi. It was "the center of the pre-Christian west. Dominating the valley of Pleistos . . . the city of Apollo rapidly took on the characteristic of a religious capital . . . of the ancient Greek world. . . . it is certain that the influence of Delphi had been made manifest at least [1400 years before the Christian Era]. . . . As if to confirm its reknown as a place chosen by the gods, Delphi was subjected to innumerable catastrophes: earthquakes, floods, rocks, avalanches and fires." (Earthquakes, said the Chinese, were caused by the writhings of subterranean dragons.)

And this, we may recall, was where Apollo killed the dragon Pytho, or *Python*. But Zeus had not been idle, either: he had killed his own dragon, by name *Typhon*. Are you slightly puzzled? Zeus had a fight with a dragon, Typhon*, and Apollo had a fight with a dragon, Python. Which form of the name came first? The ancient Greeks didn't know, either. We are informed that the root of the word *Pytho* is from a Greek word meaning *rotten, rotting* (or, says one very modern translator, *gangrene*): why? because after Apollo killed the dragon, it rotted. Horses are called equine because they pull equally. However. Is there some hint of bad-smelling natural

*The matter of Typho, Typhon, Pytho, Python, Plato, Platon, Drako, Drakon, etc., is a matter of Greek grammar, into which I will not go.

gasses which were allegedly present at Delphi? I don't know. Willy Ley wrote that the original of the dragon was to be seen in the snake house of any zoo; I can testify that the untreated skin of a slain snake does stink, but I think the late Dr. Ley over-simplifies here. And *Typho(n)?* Said to be from the old Greek, *smoke.* This would fit in with the theory that the dragon was a mythologizing explanation of a volcano. But—

—my theory is that *Pytho(n)* ("rotten") was called so because dragon dens are always full of rotten stuff. Dragons are slobs, they even smell rotten. And *Typho(n)*? Well, what comes out of a dragon's mouth? That medieval thing about building big fires of *rotten* stuff in hopes the *smoke* would scare away dragons? Hair of the dog. Like cures like. But . . . Python. We are not astonished to learn that each priestess of Apollo at Delphi was called *pythonissa.* Sometimes one of these pythonissas became the mouthpiece of the Delphic Oracle, and sometimes another; "any woman," it says in my notes, "was supposed to have a spirit of divination." Woman's intuition?

Bessy refers to the "defeat of the dragon who protects the primeval female cults of Delphi." True, prior to the death of the Delphic dragon there were no priests there at all, purely priestesses. But. Zeus (himself a dragon-slayer) had once again gotten a mortal woman with child; Leto by name, and pregnant with Apollo. Old Pytho, who was by some accounts a *female* dragon, tried to gobble the baby: no dice: the baby was born, the baby grew, eventually young Apollo killed the dragon; and, says Bessy, "installed . . . the Sun cult of the male principle." Bring back the mother goddess? when She used to eat women and children first? Always some catch, you see . . .

Lloyd A. Brown, author of *The Story of Maps,* tells us that Solinus (a later Roman writer, called "Pliny's ape") ". . . told of people in Italy who sacrificed to Apollo by dancing barefoot on burning embers; and he describes the pythons of Calabria," in southern Italy. It is probably only a coincidence, if one may ever dare say "only a coincidence," for perhaps there are no coincidences; but, still, it is at least mildly curious: the first progression, back at Byzantium, went: serpent . . . dragon . . . fire; and this one goes: Apollo . . . pythons . . . fire. . . .

It was a favorite trick of those lecherous old Olympians to change their shapes and forms at the twinkling of a passing girl: Zeus as bull, Yoo-hoo, Eu*ro*pa! and so on: but this ought really to surprise us, here is Jacob Grimm again: "Apollo in the form of a dragon conceived a son by a mortal female." Apollo the dragon-slayer as-

sumed the form of a dragon? There it is. Black and white. I suppose it was no worse to have had a dragon for a father, than, like Helen of Troy, a swan.

But Dr. Fontenrose is chiefly interested in the dragon as prime exemplum in what he calls *The Combat Myth*, and he lists quite a number of *Themes of the Combat Myth*. For instance:

The Enemy lived in a cave, hut, or tree.

Huts, no, but The Enemy is not always a dragon; caves, certainly; as for trees, well, in their associated form of snake don't dragons sometimes coil around trees; even when they don't live in trees the dragons sometimes guard them or their treasures: frankincense, golden apples, golden fleece.

He was guardian or spirit of a spring.

A dragon to the life. *Water!*

He lived in lake, sea, or river.

Dragon! Water again! Keep it in mind.

The Chinese distinguished between sky (or air) dragons, earth (or land) dragons, and water dragons. Accepting the sky/air dragons as mythological (or meteorological), I hope to show that the earth/land and water dragons were the real thing and one and the same. *Lake*. The Loch Ness Monster lived, perhaps lives, in a Scotch lake. *Sea*. In the case of Perseus-and-Andromeda, and St. George, the dragon comes out of the sea. *River*. Jordanus Catalanus reports "an abundance of dragons" living in a river "which issues from Paradise."

The Enemy was gigantic.

He had nonhuman form: most often that of a snake, but also lizard, crocodile, scorpion, fish, hippopotamus, etc.

Also,

The Enemy sent death by fire, glance, or breath, fire from his nostrils, mouth, or eyes . . . poison-laden breath from nostrils or mouth.

Legend/myth as a personification of some force of nature: Jupiter Pluvius is the rain; yellow-haired Apollo, the sun and its rays. And the fire-breathing giant whose breath is poison-laden? Could it be perhaps: the volcano? Some say so.

The Enemy was vicious and greedy.

He carried off the young of man and beast. He was gluttonous . . . a man-eater . . . a lecher and ravisher, demanding . . . maidens. . . .

This last of course perfectly fits both the legend of Perseus res-

cuing Andromeda, chained to the rock at Joppa to await the coming of the monster, and St. George—whose adventure at Joppa was so similar to Perseus's that skeptical historians have supposed the St. George story to be no more than an imitation, with the addition of Christian elements. Maybe. Maybe not. But if there were any truthful or actual, factual thing behind the Perseus story, the same "thing" might have recurred at the time of St. George . . . *after* his time, for that. We are told that St. George lived in the 3rd century, but we are told that the dragon entered the story in the 10th or 11th century. Roman Catholics have been known to state that there was no actual dragon and that it merely "symbolized evil." As to this, I will merely recall that my old boyhood barber, Jimmy Picone, now in his 90s, told me that in a rock near his native town in Sicily is what is said to be the footprint of a dragon. "What do *you* think, Jimmy?" I asked. "I ain't made up my mind yet," he said.

It has been stated (in Brion's *Pompeii and Herculaneum*, for example) that in late pagan times, which were—in part—early Christian times, when the old heathen faith was fading, Perseus in pictures represented the divine power which rescued the human soul, symbolized by Andromeda, from the threatening monster, death. How easily this concept could fit into the emerging and more vigorous religion of Christianity: and so, Enter St. George! In which case, why does St. George enter so *late*? Two reasons I offer: *One*: The original MSS accounts have been perhaps lost or destroyed and the 10th or 11th century MS is later copy of an older one; *Two*: the same or a similar type of incident happened to *happen all over again*! —a vigorous and heroic man, I mean, rescued a young woman from a threatening monster on or near a seacoast: and as about the only class of Christian people who could write was the priesthood, it hastened to write up the story in good Christian terms, lest the recent incident should play into the hands of those who might try to connect it with the old pagan one.

Do I really think that such an incident really occurred in or near the 10th or 11th century? Not necessarily; I merely think that one could have. And I repeat what Fontenrose writes:

> The late-appearing version of a myth may very well have appeared earlier in writing . . . or an orally transmitted version may . . . then have received literary attention for the first time.

Dr. A.E. Wallis Budge, in his fascinating (and often incorrect) book, *Amulets and Talismans*, shows us an exceedingly ugly little picture of St. George slaying at Joppa that same dragon whose ad-

diction to human female flesh was eventually to exhaust the patience of the eastern Meditteranean world. But as to the old question, do dragons have legs?, not only does this one on the amulet have legs, it looks in fact not unlike a gigantic centipede (there it is again: dragon = worm). And upon the creature's face as St. George slips in the lance is an expression of almost comic-strip disillusionment which seems an indictment of the blind date ("She'll be waiting by the big rock on the beach; do you like . . . *chains?*") in all its conceivable and widest ramifications. However—

St. George killed his dragon near the seaport of Joppa (now Jaffa), just where Perseus had killed, earlier, his dragon. Jaffa is not far from the River Yarkon, in which crocodiles once tarried; it is quite a ways from Greece, even from Asia Minor, but not so very far from Syria, where flows the River Orontes: According to one account the River *Orontes* used to be called the River *Drakon*. . . . Got that? Get this? Who came there to visit once, but Perseus! Hadn't he had enough of dragons? Be that as it may: it may surprise you to learn that the Dragon River (Orontes) at the western end of Asia is balanced by the Dragon River (Amur) which divides Siberia from Manchuria at the eastern end of Asia . . . curious . . . is it possible that each was named simply because it was considered a rather *snaky* river? Stuff! Piffle! On with the Adventure . . .

The (Syrian) Dragon River began to flood the land. "Perseus, what shall we do?" was the common cry. Perseus after all knew about dragons; his answer was brief. "Pray," said he. You may bet they did . . . "and their prayers were followed by a ball of lightning from heaven that stopped the storm and checked the river."

I had first begun my musings on this aspect of the subject by observing the dragon's status as a then still-living myth in China; but what came repeatedly to my eyes were the emblematic Chinese dragons, completely traditional and stylized: one saw them in China in 1945 on countless works, some of them of art, with body writhing sinuously and limbs spread out jaggedly and viewed from an odd sort of projection in which all the limbs appeared at once; and in front of it, always in front of it, that flaming ball: what could it mean? What was it?

The answer came to me like a flash of lightning.

The answer was: it was a flash of lightning.

That is, the dragon was a flash of lightning.

There are several forms or kinds of lightning. There is heat lightning, that distant pulsating shimmer we see in summer on the

horizon like a luminous sheet. —That isn't it.

There is chain lightning, the most familiar sort: the thunderbolt: that is it. The kind that shatters trees, strikes people dead, is deflected from houses by lightning rods, and which Ben Franklin induced to enter a key and slither down a wire attached to a silken rainproof kite during a storm . . . the beginning of electricity's long enslavement at the hands of man. That jagged branching streak of electricity, with its flashing branches of fire, *that* was the origin of the dragon . . . anyway of the *sky* dragon. . . .

Late spring or early summer, 1945. The island of Okinawa. Night. I am lying in a foxhole. Rifle- and gunfire, off stage. Down on wings of silk floats a rose-red flare, which presently dies away. I am 22, and have no brains at all; illuminated by more distant flares, I crawl out, retrieve the cloth, crawl back. From an adjacent den, the voice of Marine Corps Bugler Bell: "Doc, that was crazy. The Nips could of seen you." That fall, in Peiping (as it was then called), Bell approaches me. "Doc, you still got that parachute silk? Well, you give it to me, I take it to Embroidery Street and get two dragons with balls of fire sewed on it, and we divide it: one for you and one for me." I hope he got his one. I'm still waiting for mine.

Dragons. Silk. Storm. Fire from Heaven.

One of the Books of the Apocrypha is called *Bel and the Dragon*.

Charles Fort, thou shouldst be living at this hour.

But what was that ball of fire, that flashing/flaming ball or "pearl" which traditional Chinese artists always placed just in front of the dragon's snout?

The inspiration to this was not long in coming; this was *ball* lightning! The old Chinese, seeing lightning flash across the sky, seeing its destruction upon the earth, had personified it, and of the main lightning-bolt had made the writhing body and of the flashing jagged branches had made the limbs. And of the ball-lightning had created those pearls of, if not great price, at any rate of great mystery.

Thus I had perceived it at the easternmost end of Asia.

And, out of the pages of Fontenrose's *Python* book, I had perceived at the westernmost end of Asia the great ball of lightning which had fallen into the Syrian River Orontes, the Dragon River, and checked its flood.

Fearful symmetry.

Perhaps it was a meteorite? Perhaps it was.

But regard a most interesting juxtaposition: at the easternmost extreme of Asia the dragon goes in pursuit of the ball of fire—

At the westernmost end of Asia the ball of fire goes in pursuit of the dragon—

The worm turned, you say?

Yes. But, and considering that *worm* also means *dragon*, evidently it didn't turn fast enough.

Well. Is that what it all adds up to? That the immense and immensely ancient legend of the dragon was inspired by a flash of lightning, and no more? Is that all?

By no means. To repeat from earlier on, That's *one* explanation. There are others.

Least of all in the realm of legend does the primitive idea hold true of there being but one answer to one question. I have said that I believe that the dragon is a flash of lightning. I have said that the fire-breathing poison-spouting dragon is a volcano. And yet there are other explanations yet. Every bit as good. Kipling: "There are nine and sixty ways/ Of constructing tribal lays/ *And every single one of them is right!*"

So now back to good old Fontenrose. And to Fontenrose on Norman Douglas . . . a man who travelled widely in Italy, and whose novels *South Wind* and *Siren Land* are well-known; less so, his travel book, *In Old Calabria*. You may remember that it was in Calabria, southernmost area of Italy, that Solinus reported fiery ceremonies in honor of Apollo; also huge serpents— "pythons," one might call them. But here's Fontenrose on Douglas, who

> believes that the primordial dragon is the spring; for, he says, springs are called "eyes" in both Italy and Arabia; and the eye must be upon a head and the head upon a body; the snake suggested the proper animal shape for the spring to take because of his glassy eye, earth-dwelling habit, cold blood, and tenacity of life. He might have referred also to Hebrew *'ayin*, which means both *eye* and *spring*. Then he points to springs in Greece and Italy that are now called Dragoneria or Dragonara. As springs flow night and day, so the dragons are sleepless. As earth's children they guard the treasures within her. . . . The spring-dragon becomes a river-dragon, who becomes hungry and spreads over the land in floods. . . . A volcanic crater is a spring of fire, so he becomes a fire-dragon that flows forth in lava torrents, or whose poisonous breath becomes the noxious exhalations from volcanic fissures. . . .

And so on. Well, it may be so. No? Whatever it is, this mysterious awesome dragon, it has become more real for us than many things.

—And, as for treasure, what does Fontenrose think? I have already quoted Pindar, "the Theban eagle;" Fontenrose, as he closes, quotes him, too.

Best is water, then gold that gleams like fire
*blazing at night, supreme above proud wealth.**

A question: If the dragon was a flash of lightning and a volcano and a spring, why not stop there? Ans.: Because that's only three answers. I knew, somehow, that there had to be others. In a time-travel story, I thought by Ray Bradbury*, which I read in the 1950s, occurred the (approximate) line, "He was so close to the dinosaur he could hear the gizzard-stones grinding. . . ." A great line; could it have been anatomically true? Not proven; whoever's. The Curator for Vertebrate Paleontology at a large museum told me he was doubtful. And, despite the hypothesis, DINOSAUR = DRAGON, and despite a million comic-strips, we now do know that men and dinosaurs never habited the earth together. But . . . if the *dragon* did have gizzard-stones, might this not explain both the fable of the dragon-guarded treasure hoards and the relationship between the fabulous animal and an actual and still-living animal?

First things first. Thus: if the dragon (not having grinding-teeth) had ingested stones, not, of course, rocks, but pebbles, as birds do, to help grind the food in its crop or gizzard—might not some of these have been sometimes by chance *precious* stones? . . . gold nuggets, *some*times? . . . might not the dragon, either by regurgitating same when they had become too worn to grind food, or by defecating them, in one spot, have given rise to the legend? Or, supposing the "dragon" to have died on land, in a subsequently-discovered den or elsewhere, the stones having eventually dropped out of the decomposed carcass—would this not seem to suggest that the beast had been lying on them? hoarding . . . guarding . . . them? precious stones perhaps even "polished," through having been ground down by use in gizzards . . . ?

And, doubtful though I was of the snake being entirely the animal sought, just to be sure, as the earliest Delphic dragon pictures show a snake, that is where I began. —And as for this other theory, that

*First Olympic Ode; from *The Odes of Pindar*, trans. Richard Lattimate, Chicago, 1947.

*Ray Bradbury kindly responded to my inquiry, "That sounds like a quote from . . . my story "A Sound of Thunder." [But] I went through the story and can't find the quote. Must be someone else." Damn.

dragons are a form of snake and snakes crawl up (sometimes) from underground and "all mines of gold and silver and precious stones" are likewise underground: therefore the snake/dragon "guards" them . . . well, there need be no contradiction if one uses the rule of thumb that legends have more than one origin— Whether any of the old Greek depictions of Typho, Pytho, or other immense dragon-serpents have been subject to the scrutiny of herpetologists, I do not know; but I have subjected to my own scrutiny *The Snakes of Europe**, by G.A. Boulenger (LL.D., Ph.D., F.R.S., F.Z.S.). I have not gone through it snake by snake, but turned at once to *Coluber Quatuorlineatus*, or Aldrovandi's Snake, solely because it is the largest snake in Europe.

> "Aldrovandi's Snake inhabits Southern Italy [*Calabria*!] and Sicily, Istria, Croatia, Dalmatia, Herzogovina, *Greece*, and eastwards to Southern Russia, Transcucasia, *Asia Minor*, and Persia. . . . Dry as well as marshy localities are the abode of this large . . . snake which often approaches the dwellings of man . . . It is as good at swimming as at climbing. Biting readily . . . appears to feed exclusively on mammals and birds . . . and will readily take dead food."

How does this fit for dragon? Well, as Aldrovandi's Snake approaches the dwellings of man, not to eat man but only man's poultry, and as its take of mammals and birds is only "up to the size of a rat or a dove;" and as, although it is "stated to reach a length of [only] 8 feet" and is described as "narrow" and as "the largest specimen measured by me [Boulenger] measures, however, only 4 feet;" it doesn't. Fit. And this is the *largest* snake in Europe: sorry. Dragon Wanted, No European Snake Need Apply.

The snakes which came out of the sea at Troy and did in Laocoön and his sons, I have dismissed as moray eels; they may have contributed to the dragon legend, somewhat.

However. Those precious stones, said to have been found in the heads of snakes and dragons? Regard:

> Indian snake-charmers profess to have a belief in the efficacy of snake-stones, or bezoar-stones, as a remedy to be applied on the part bitten by poisonous snakes, a belief shared by the natives of many tropical countries. These stones, extracted from various reptiles, birds, and mammals, are calcareous concretions from the stomach or bladder sometimes composed of superphosphates of lime, sometimes of phosphate of ammonia,

*Methuen, London, 1913.

or magnesia. The value of a bezoar stone being supposed to increase with its size, the larger are sold in India at very high prices. —*Boulenger*.

The preciousness of such a stone lies, therefore, not in its being a conventional gem or jewel, but in its allegedly valuable medicinal properties; combine this with belief in "snake charmers," and we may dispense with the "drowsy herbs and incantations" used to soothe the dragon before extracting the carbuncle, or whatever gem. Says Dr. Boulenger, "In many places a popular belief obtains that such stones are found in the *heads* of snakes," italics mine; his book came out in 1913, a long time after Apollonius of Tyanna, Jordanus Catalanus, and the others, eh? So, so much for that.

In searching for an actual animal original for dragons, I dismissed the African python, like the American boa constrictor or anaconda, and the Komodo monitor or "dragon-lizard," as having habitats far too far away from Europe or Asia Minor; and the Nile monitor lizards as being too small. The iguana and Gila monster fail on both counts; so what comes next? Next comes the crocodile. I had no idea if or not it has stones in that thickly-muscled stomach compartment called the gizzard, and the answer is a crisp "It all depends." As Socrates said before they socked the hemlock to him, "Define your terms." C.A.M. Guggisberg, in his *Crocodiles: Their Natural History, Folklore and Conservation* (Stackpole, Harrisburg, 1972), gives us a caution: "A crocodile's stomach, even though well-muscled, is not a real gizzard." But that is not all which Guggisberg gives us. Not being concerned with dragons, he is an impartial witness. "*A great deal has been written on . . . the stones found in crocodiles' stomachs,*" he writes—the first evidence I'd had that stones *were* found there! "To find them they must [sometimes] travel considerable distances" —sometimes hundreds of miles. The obvious question is, *why?* Guggisberg asks, "Could it be that these pebbles assist the digestion by grinding up . . . the food?" *My* question, from another corner. Dr. Hugh Cott, who has "analyzed the contents of hundreds of [crocodile] stomachs," thinks not.

Cott believes that they "have hydrostatic function . . . lowering the centre of gravity . . . and . . . also serve as ballast. . . ." Professor W.T. Neill, on the other hand, in his *The Last of the Ruling Reptiles: Alligators, Crocodiles, and Their Kin* (N.Y., Columbia University Press, 1971), strenuously denies this; he calls the stones *gastroliths,* and plumps for a digestive purpose. You reads your authorities and you takes your choice. "The jealousy of the scribes

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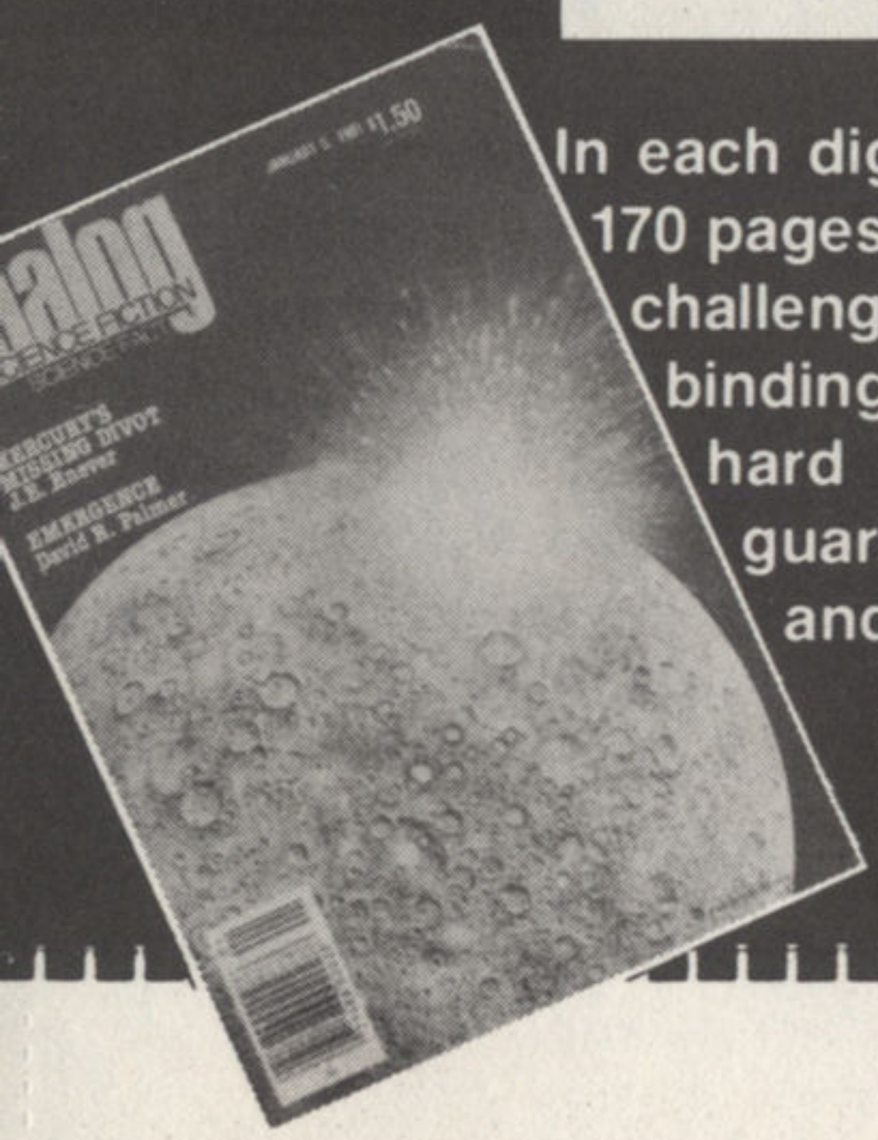

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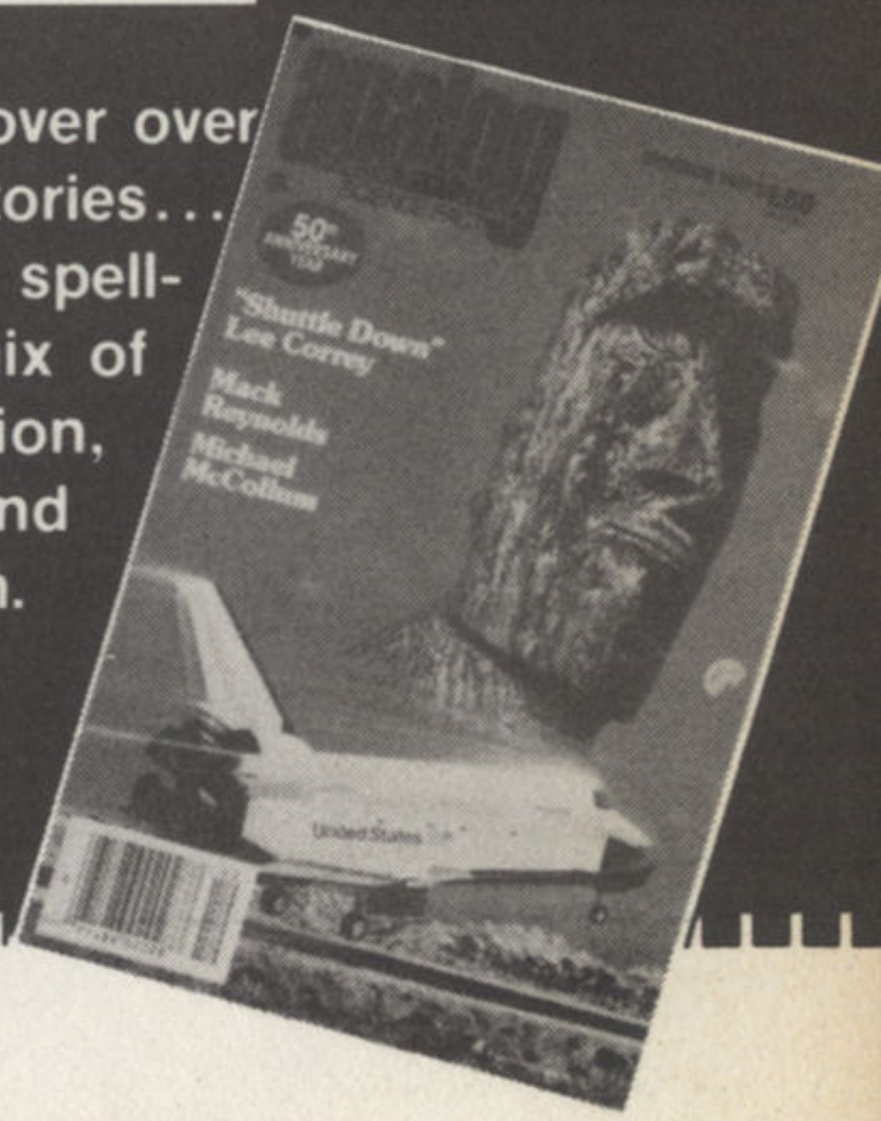

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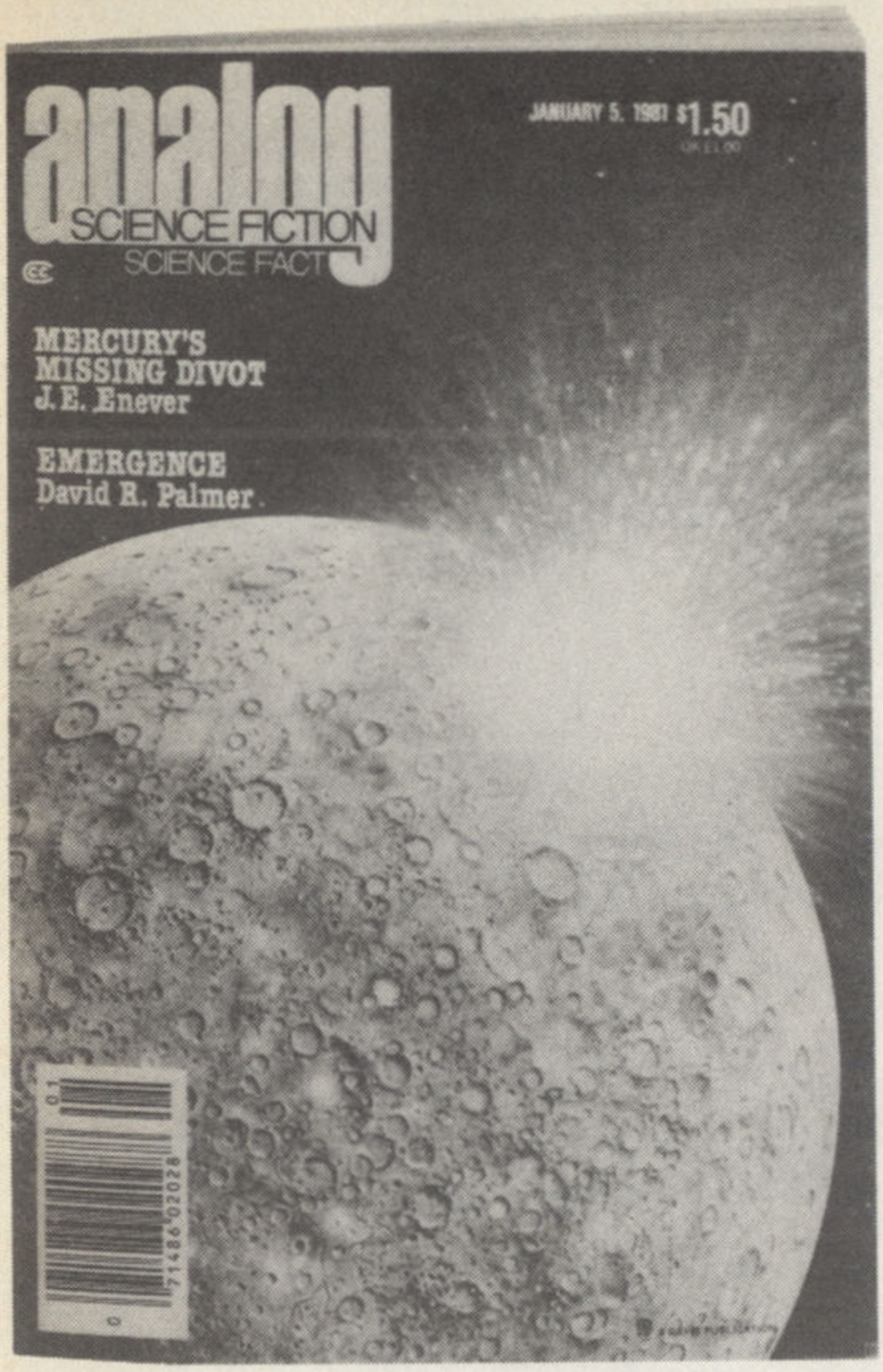

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increases wisdom." So far, then, my research has discovered only this: crocodiles do swallow stones and carry them around in their bodies, and the rest remains conjecture. Even if it is my conjecture.

What else? Does this prove there were crocodiles in ancient Greece or Grecian Asia Minor? Not at all, even though there were lions there and today there are lions only in places where there are also crocodiles: Africa, India. But had crocodiles been a creature common in the old Greek lands, the legend would likely not have begun. But. Could even only *one* crocodile have somehow gotten there? Even if not all the way to Greece, to Asia Minor, once so largely Greek? How far do crocs travel, anyway? Usually, not very far. But, sometimes, very far indeed. Occasional ones have turned up in the Cocos-Keeling Islands, the nearest source being Sumatra, over 540 miles away. By sea. And they have been reported to have travelled even further by sea, to Fiji and the New Hebrides. The species of crocodiles nearest to either Greece or Asia Minor is *Crocodylus niloticus*, by no means confined to the Nile itself. In Roman times they were common enough on the coast of Israel for the River Zerka to have been called the Crocodile River. How could one have gotten to Delphi? . . . if one did. If it were from the Palestinian marshes and had made its way by usual means as far north as Syria, to the River Orontes, that might explain the Orontes's other ancient name of *Drakon* right there. And thence?

Crocodiles in the New World have been known to float down the Paraguay, Plata, and Orinoco Rivers, on huge tangled mats of aquatic plants; and have turned up in the West Indies, 150 miles from land. Certainly today no western Asian river, flowing through long-deforested regions, would produce such rafts—but may have done so, in the remote past, when there were jungles in Asia Minor and elephants in them, as well as leopards and lions. Suppose a crocodile to have found itself aboard of such a mat, it might have been well-launched to sea in calm weather before its float broke up; and gone island-hopping to Greece the rest of the way. A flaw in this splendid theory is that Delphi is not on the Aegean or eastern side of Greece, but on the western. However, the Isthmus of Corinth is a narrow one, as I can testify; and, this perambulated, Delphi is a mere splash away.

However, in order to demonstrate the possibility that CROCODILE = DRAGON, it is not necessary to demonstrate that a crocodile actually came to Delphi, it is only necessary to hypothesize that one might have come to some region within the, so to speak, same cultural area as Delphi: where one would have been sufficiently un-

known as to produce a profound shock upon those who encountered it: a shock transmuting itself into legend: a legend subsequently transferred to Delphi, which, being perhaps already holy ground, would have attracted myths like a magnet. One need not imagine a deep-dyed plot to do so: someone's dream of a dragon would suffice.

Prof. Neill without realizing it has traced somewhat of this same trail, for, "The [Nile crocodile] is supposed," says he, "formerly to have ranged a short distance into southwestern Asia, following the eastern shore of the Mediterannean [we have already ranged it close enough to Joppa, where Perseus and, later, St. George slew "dragons"]. . . . There have also been suggestions that the Nile crocodile followed the islands and shores of the Mediterranean westward as far as Sicily and Tunisia, but it may be doubted . . ." Vile spirit of skepticism! —Could even one crocodile have crossed the Red Sea to Southern Arabia? To Socotra, rich in dragonsblood? It seems hardly impossible.

Now, what about the dragons' fiery breath? *Fire* we must ascribe to the volcano. But Jordanus Catalanus said, also, "smoke." Do crocodiles smoke? A reference from the pioneer American naturalist John Bartram may be questioned on two accounts, one of which is that he refers to American alligators and not Asiatic crocodiles; but here it is: ". . . the males emit vapory jets of musk. . . ." Neill absolutely denies this; Guggisberg suggests it "may . . . have been watery vapor puffed into the cooling night air." The dragons' poison breath, "fetid and infectious"? Bartram says the musk "saturates the surrounding . . . atmosphere." Neill says it doesn't, either; Guggisberg concedes that opinions differ "with regard to the intensity of this smell," then adds positively, "but I have been to a . . . place on the Victoria Nile where it could be perceived very distinctly." And while Dr. Cott has heard "basking crocodiles . . . voice an abrupt, hollow sound," Prof. Neill considers this to be a mere reptilian burp: "the sound being incidental to the passage of gas. The diet of a crocodilian, mostly meat bolted in chunks, must be quite conducive to flatulence."

Armstrong's *Folklore of Birds*, recollect, quotes old belief that "between the eagle and the dragon is constant enmity, the eagle seeking to kill it. . . ." Professor Neill, not one bit interested in dragons, but very much interested in crocodiles, reports that reported "predators on [newly-hatched] crocodiles include . . . fish *eagles*. . . ." So there's another checkmark in the crocodile's column for dragonhood. And another old legend vindicated.

In regard to the enmity between the dragon and the elephant, whose combats were once believed to produce the dragonsblood of commerce, I have earlier hazarded possibility that there may have been a confusion between the elephant and that other large African animal, the hippo; and Cott's examinations of the stomach contents of many crocodiles *does* disclose the remains of hippos . . . there is even a semi-officially-recognized story of crocs dragging down a rhino! And ancient reports of conflict between "dragon" (read "crocodile") and "an extremely large other animal" might have dragged the elephant into the picture anyway: but Prof. Neill plainly declares that, "Not only do many predators menace the [infant] crocodiles; the adults . . . are *also attacked by elephants*" —which is perhaps confirmation enough; but he continues, "and more frequently by hippos."

The wildest tales of Kew are the facts of Katmandu.

So. Time for a summing-up.

From the *Themes of the Combat Myth,* as put forth in *Python* by Dr. Fontenrose: *The Enemy sent . . . poison-laden breath from . . . mouth.* I should imagine that the eructations of a flatulent crocodile might qualify. *The Enemy lived in a cave. . . .* Neill says that, "In the wild, a crocodile will make a kind of burrow, a short tunnel . . . more nearly horizontally than vertically. . . ." *He lived in lake, sea, or river.* Crocodiles qualify for all three. *The Enemy was gigantic.* Accounts of modern 30-foot crocs are now discounted, but Neill measured one almost 17 feet long. *He had nonhuman form; most often that of a snake, but also lizard, crocodile, scorpion, fish, hippopotamus, etc.* You see. *He was gluttonous . . . a man-eater.* Crocodiles have hearty appetites and can, will, and do eat human flesh. But—*demanding that maidens be offered to him*—? Obviously reptiles do not "demand," but crocs, to this day, in Uganda and Madagascar, do come out when summoned and eat sacrificed oxen.

But perhaps this Adventure in Unhistory now demands a conclusion.

Thus it is: the dragon is the snake, the dragon is the phallus, the dragon is the serpentine river and the well and spring of water, the red-glowing volcano and the spurting fumarole and the fearful tusky crocodile, the waterspout and the stormcloud and the thunderbolt and the flash of lightning and the meteorite, the reptile monster in the marshes and the marsh-gas whose meteor-lamp glows and moves fitfully o'er the same uncertain terrain. It was not fear and ignorance alone which combined all these into one creature, it was essential

necessity which produced the dragon, for it seems that somehow we needed the dragon: and that is why the dragon is still with us in our minds, though no more seen on sea or land; why there is indeed an abundance of dragons, and why there will always be.

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SOLUTION TO THE JINN FROM HYPERSPACE
(from page 38)

I am indebted to Douglas Hofstadter for his proof of the upside-down version of Fermat's last theorem. Hofstadter introduces the theorem on page 333 of his Pulitzer-prize book, *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid*. No proof is there given because, as the text says, the marvelous proof "is so small that it would be well-nigh invisible if written in the margin."

The equation $n^a + n^b = n^c$ obviously has no solution in positive integers if $n = 1$ because it then reduces to the false equality $1 + 1 = 1$. It has an infinity of solutions if $n = 2$. We have only to let $a = b$, and $c = a + 1$. For example: $2^2 + 2^2 = 2^3$.

Suppose n is greater than 2. If n is the base of a number notation, then all powers of n have an n-ary representation that is 1 followed by a string of 0s. Thus in our base-10 notation, all powers of 10 have the form: 10, 100, 1000, 10000, and so on.

In the upside-down equation either $a = b$ or a does not equal b. If $a = b$, the sum of the two equal powers, written in base-n notation, will be the sum of two numbers, each written as 1 followed by a zeros. The sum will have the form of 2 followed by a zeros, which obviously cannot be a power of n.

Suppose a is not equal to b. Each power will be written in base-n notation as a 1 followed by a string of 0s, but now the strings will be of different lengths. Therefore the sum will have the form of 1 followed by a string of 0s that will contain another 1 somewhere in the string. Once more, a number of this form cannot be a power of n. Since a must either equal or not equal b, we have proved the theorem by reductio ad absurdum. (You may wonder why this proof doesn't apply to binary notation when $a = b$, but a little experimentation will make it clear.)

The jinn scowled while Fletcher explained his mistake. "We did supply what you requested," he said. "Therefore it must count as a fulfilment of your second wish. What is your third?"

"I desire a proof that *this* equation," Fletcher boomed in his new stentorian voice, "has no solution when n is greater than 2!" This time he wrote the equation correctly.

"To hear," bowed the jinn, "is to obey. But I must again check with my superiors."

The jinn flowed back into the bottle. Several minutes passed.

Fletcher could not stifle another impulse to test his voice. He sang a familiar aria from *Rigoletto*, ending on a high note. He belted out the note with all the lung power he could muster.

The pink bottle shattered into a thousand pieces.

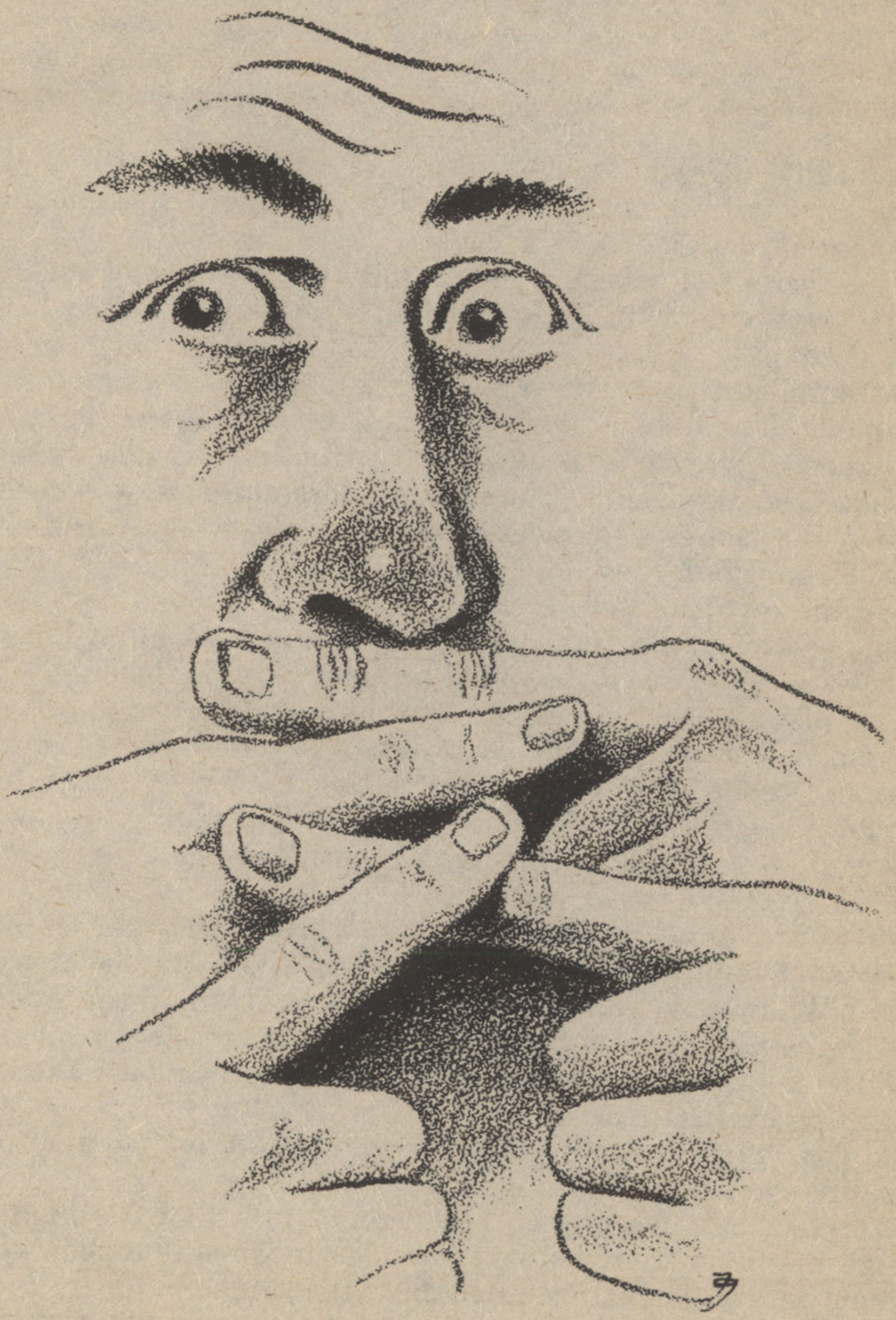
Of course Fletcher never saw the jinn again. Nor could he locate the old bottle shop. It seemed to have vanished as completely as the jinn.

Fletcher changed his name and occupation. Perhaps you have heard of John Luciano Pavoletti, said to be the greatest tenor since Caruso.

THE SNEEZE

by Lowell Kent Smith

art: Jack Gaughan



Dr. Smith is 43, married, with four daughters. He is the chairman of the biology department at the University of Redlands, in Southern California. Most of his writing has been professional papers or consulting work; but he began writing SF in 1972, made his first sale in 1973, quit it in 1974, and has just recently taken it up again.

Berdachev sneezed.

It was a small sneeze, he told himself later; but it was enough. A real sneeze. No accident.

In the instant of sneezing he himself was unaware of the awful thing he was doing. But in the moment afterwards, he knew.

A sneeze!

He trembled then. He shivered. His throat grew dry and his forehead moist. The hair on the back of his neck prickled, he felt his flesh creep. A wave of fear and—yes, awful *hope*—swept over him. A sneeze! He, Berdachev. The man his foreman said was good for nothing. Berdachev had sneezed, and now the whole world might know of him. Berdachev, the man who sneezed!

Then the revulsion set in.

Famous? Dead more likely. Quietly. In some back alley. For now, he knew, every man's hand would be against him. The simple days of being just a worker were over. Now he was a hunted man.

He glanced covertly about. That dumpy, twisted old hag there by the grocer's shop window, squeezing a tomato. Was she signaling a confederate even now? Berdachev suddenly longed to go to her; casually walk over to that old woman and suddenly snatch the tomato from her and jam it down her throat!

That young punk by the kiosk at the corner. He was picking up the phone. Did he glance at Berdachev just then? Had he heard the sneeze? What to do? Race to the kiosk and strangle the informer with his own phone cord? Pretend indifference? Deny everything when the police came? Berdachev felt dizzy with the dark possibilities filling his brain.

The dog, lying in the dust by the fountain. Was it wired? Were the police even now observing him?

Better to look innocent then. He began to walk. Slowly, innocently. Though his hand trembled he pretended to wave to a shop keeper he knew only slightly. He smiled up at the sun.

But his heart was frozen. Almost he wept.

"Why me?" he said to himself. "I pay my taxes. I give to the church. I work an honest day. I care for my family. I—"

His wife! She was to blame for it all! Last night, for no reason at all, and in the rain, she'd sent him for some trifle she needed in the kitchen. A trifle only, and look what it had got them. His chest heaved with the unfairness of it. One trip, wet feet—he'd forgotten his overshoes—and now look where they were. His shoulders shook, but with an effort he suppressed the sobs.

But was it "them," really?

His step slowed. His brow furrowed. His eyes half closed in thought. *Dare* he go home now? If *they* knew, then certainly they would lay a snare for him at his own door. And his wife . . .

She might cooperate.

Berdachev stopped and leaned heavily against a stone wall just before an alleyway. His wife. He was at once sure that he could not trust her. Not in something this big. She was a gossip. If she found out everyone would come to know of it. And if they knew already, well, his wife would surely sell him out. She complained constantly about his salary, about the condition of the children's shoes or teeth, the age of her dresses, the quality of the neighbor's furniture in comparison with her own. She would sell him out to one side or the other. He knew it.

There was a gentle tap on his shoulder.

Almost his heart stopped. Like ice his brain was. Terror so great that he could not move. With a great effort he could open one eyelid just a little.

It was a policeman!

Almost he died of fright right there. Until that moment he had been rather fond of policemen. Until before the sneeze. But now. What does an enemy of the state feel when the hand of the law is on his very shoulder?

Berdachev felt it all.

"Are you all right, Comrade?" the policeman said, studying Berdachev with a calm professional eye.

Perhaps he hasn't heard! Berdachev summoned all his strength and opened the other eye. Gathered himself with a tremendous effort and stood away from the wall.

"Yes," Berdachev said, "I had a moment of weakness. I work overtime at night. And I have not yet had breakfast."

Berdachev straightened up and tried to puff out his chest, in imitation of The Leader.

"You're sure?" the policeman said, seeming unconvinced by Berdachev's lie.

"Yes. Yes. I'm fine," Berdachev said, and he began to walk briskly away.

The policeman did not follow.

Berdachev strode on down the street, his lunch pail tucked under his arm. In his worker's uniform he blended with a hundred others like himself whom he passed.

But inside it ate at him. *He* had sneezed. The others might look like him, but *he* bore the awful weight of it.

Instead of walking homeward the fear kept him angling around the outside edge of the town. Through streets and alleys, down boulevards, through párks; he walked and walked.

After a time his confidence began to return to him. He summoned even enough courage to stand, idly, in front of a shop window and watch the hourly state news broadcast. And there was *nothing about him!*

Halfway through the broadcast he had begun to hope. When they came to the sports without mentioning him certainty grew. The weather—still nothing about his sneeze. Still he feared a last minute human interest item, or a bulletin advising citizens to watch out for him.

But there was nothing!

His heart leapt when the news was over and the standard photo of The Leader came on at the hour. He wanted to rush back to that place and kiss the old woman, compliment that young man on his appearance, pet the dog. He could go home. He was safe! The ordeal was over. He was a free man. Safe. It was a great moment in his life. Like a man reprieved, even in the shadow of the rope. Berdachev glowed with it.

Berdachev saw a bar, then, and decided to celebrate with a small drink.

Unfortunately, as it turned out, the bar did not sell small drinks, and the girls who worked the bar did not drink small drinks. Two hours later, Berdachev was drunk.

He sat serenely in a back booth, his arm around a woman who, in any other light, would have been unappetizing at best. They were both drinking. The last of Berdachev's money was on the table, though, and the woman knew it. She was tossing down her whiskey-colored tea more slowly, and eyeing the bar's clientele for a new mark.

Berdachev began to sing. An old folksong his father had taught

him. He waved his glass in time to the tune.

The woman got up and moved over to a newcomer who stood by the main bar, looking back toward the booth where she and Berdachev were sitting. He was tall and well dressed, dark, foreign looking.

"Buy me a drink, Mister?" she said in her most seductive way.

He tipped his hat to her and came back to Berdachev, sliding in opposite him.

"Can I buy you a drink, my friend?" he said.

Berdachev stopped singing for a moment and winked at the stranger. "Do you know this one?" he said, singing a bit of the folksong.

The stranger shook his head.

"My father taught it to me when I was a little child. It always reminds me of the freedom of the forests. The cold wind through the—"

" *'Cold,'* did you say?"

"Eh? Oh. The cold wind through the forests. The nights full of—"

"Oh, I thought you said you had a *cold*, Berdachev, my friend," said the stranger in a low voice.

Berdachev began to sober up, *fast.*

He looked at the stranger, stunned. Who was he? What did he know? What did he . . . ? Berdachev took a last gulp of his drink and pushed the glass away. He leaned forward across the table, his face close to the stranger's.

"Cold, did you say? Me?" He wagged his finger in front of his nose. "Not me. Not my family. Not even back to my grandfather. Even when there *were* colds. We never had 'em. Not *one*. Not in *three generations!* Not even a—not even a—"

"Sneeze?" the man said, darkly.

Berdachev was sober again, and his head hurt. He focused his eyes, tired now from a night of work and no sleep yet this morning, on the stranger. Could he be with the secret police? One of their goons? Or maybe with the biological warfare people of the army? No. He didn't look like it—he looked foreign. Berdachev studied the man's clothes. New, good workmanship, foreign. Foreign.

An enemy agent, then. A capitalist.

Berdachev half stood, ready to shout for a police spy to haul the man away. Then he realized that to draw attention to the stranger would mean his own doom. They would make the man talk. And the man *knew*.

Berdachev sank down again on the bench. Beaten.

"What do you want?" he said; he was drained of all strength. He was helpless now. A prisoner of events. A simple man destroyed by his wife's need for some stupid kitchen item and his own failure to keep his overshoes near the door. He nearly wept with the agony of the lost opportunity. If ever I get out of this, he thought, I will never go out without my overshoes—*even in the sun!*

The man glanced quickly around the bar and then said, almost in a whisper, "We can't talk here." He got up, and Berdachev followed him out of the bar. They walked across the road and into a park.

"I can't stay with you for long," the man said, his eyes darting about him, "so I'll just give you the—wait." They stopped. "Do you know that woman over there, Berdachev?"

Berdachev looked across at the park bench. He shook his head. They walked on.

The man said, "We want to do a deal with you, of course."

"How did you find out about—about—*it?* It was that old woman, wasn't it?"

The man, pretending to pick up some wastepaper and act the good comrade by carrying it to a trash barrel, shook his head.

"That boy at the kiosk then?" Another shake of the head. "The dog! I knew it. The dog by the fountain!" Still the man shook his head. They came to the trash barrel. As the man was about to throw the trash in he stopped. He studied the trash barrel. Then Berdachev suspected it, too. They walked on, glancing now and then back over their shoulders at the trash barrel, standing ominously by a twisted old elm.

"How then?" Berdachev said in a hoarse whisper.

"It was the fountain *itself,*" the man whispered back. "One of our listening posts. We have them all over. You'd be surprised. This is a good town for it."

Berdachev shivered. The fountain. And perhaps the trash can back there for the police. He eyed the park benches with renewed suspicion. He avoided a drinking fountain. He smiled warmly for a tree they were passing.

"What kind of a deal?" said Berdachev. Then he realized the stranger might be a police spy, sent to entrap him. They might not hang him for the sneeze, but if he did a deal with a capitalist agent! He said, "I mean, who are you with? What is it you want?"

"Let's not fence with each other, Berdachev. I'm not an agent. But we do want you. You understand?"

"Defect?"

"No, you fool. Not defect. Only take a vacation from work for a

while. A week or so at the seashore, perhaps. It could be arranged." The stranger smiled darkly.

"Who do you work for? Identify yourself." Berdachev stopped defiantly at a bridge over a stream through the park.

"Not here, you fool!" the stranger said, looking about them suspiciously. Then Berdachev caught his meaning, and did the same.

"You mean—the *bridge?*"

The man gave him a cryptic look. "Even the *water*, Comrade."

They strode away from the bridge. Now Berdachev was even examining the earth beneath his feet with new caution. His eyes flitted fearfully over each bush; even the blades of grass held a new meaning for him.

They came to a wide plaza, and walked across it, pacing slowly in the noon sun.

"I'm with a drug manufacturer," the man said, softly.

"What? Ah—I get you. Biological warfare. Well, Comrade, I tell you, I—"

"No, Berdachev. Not biological warfare." He smirked. "There's no money in *that*. We've much bigger stakes than some stupid secret weapon. *Much* bigger."

Berdachev was chilled through. Bigger than biological warfare? Some mind controlling drug? But what had that to do with his sneeze? He said, "Bigger than that? What then?"

The stranger fixed Berdachev with steely eyes for a moment, glanced about him, and then leaned close to Berdachev's ear.

"Cold remedies," he whispered.

"Cold re—" The man had seized Berdachev by the throat to stop his exclamation.

"Quiet, you fool. You want to get us both hung? Or sent to Siberia?"

"But—" Berdachev choked on the words.

"Yes, cold remedies. When there was the thaw between your country and the West, what came through the borders first? Spies? Weapons? Diplomats? No, my friend. *Consumer goods*. Records, movie fan magazines, clothing for the teenage market, cosmetics. And, of course, home remedies. Five years ago we were shipping *twenty-five hundred* brands of cold remedies to your country. Our advertising had most of your people in hysterics over the common cold. They felt—they *knew*— their lives were—not exactly in danger, but, shall we say—*lessened* because they had not been given access to these cold remedies under the old regime. They had that sense of constant malaise, of discontent, that is the dream of every advertiser. Twenty-five hundred brands. And we were preparing more, too. The market

had scarcely been scratched. With the climate the way it is, and so many working outdoors all year, the cold houses, we felt this could be the *big one.*" The stranger shook his head, remembering past glories. "You may not believe this, Berdachev, but I was a vice-president back then. Yes. Of foreign marketing. I had the big house. The expense account. It was all within my grasp. I had picked out a small palace here to have shipped back to the States, even. Then . . . well, you know the rest. . . ."

Berdachev glanced at the man. What an actor. Or else he was what he said he was. Tears stood in the stranger's eyes. His shoulders shook.

"You mean when they cured the common cold it wiped you out?" said Berdachev, sympathetically.

"Everything. The market collapsed. Oh, we tried. At first we denied it was a cure. Then we claimed it was a cure, but for only one kind of cold. Then that while colds were cured, it had not solved all the other problems—sinus, coughs, all that. But, it didn't work. Nobody would believe us. It was a tragedy, Berdachev. A tragedy."

"But the suffering it alleviated—why—?"

"Nonsense, comrade. *Think* about it. Suffering? You think all those people who called in sick every day with colds were *suffering?* All those children who had to stay home from school were *suffering?* All those who said they had the 'flu' and couldn't make their appointments, couldn't help out on some job, couldn't do all the things they didn't want to do anyhow—that they were *suffering?* Nonsense! The common cold, with our help, was a *boon* to the workers of your country. Better than a forty-hour week. Tell me, where is your sick leave now? Where are your trips to the infirmary now? When you want a hot toddy, what do you tell your wife now? Eh? You *see,* I'm right!"

Berdachev saw the fire of a prophet in the stranger's eyes. Yes; surely the man was right. When he put it this way, Berdachev was sure of it.

"So we need you," the man said, taking Berdachev's arm in a firm grip. "If you've got a cold—even a little one—well, with our help, with the greatest scientific minds of our age, why we can take your little cold and make it into a big one—maybe even—" The man's eyes glittered. Berdachev saw all the kingdoms of the world in those eyes. "Maybe even pneumonia! Ah, but that's too much to hope. There've been so many false leads—false hopes—these last years. Some of our top researchers were in depair. But, men like me, we *never* give up! Great things are not achieved by little men, or men

of little courage. And you, Berdachev, *you* could do it for us!"

Berdachev trembled. He could see the vision. He saw himself at the front of a vast phalanx—twenty-five hundred brands—every shape, every size, a rainbow of colors. The stranger paced beside him—both mounted on snow white chargers. His lance at rest, his head stuffy, his eyes watering, his nose runny. Yes, Berdachev thought. Yes. Yes!

"I agree," said Berdachev. "But not for money. I will do this thing for the workers of the world!" The Leader himself, if he could know, would be understanding, even proud of little Berdachev.

Berdachev glowed.

"All right," said the stranger, "but we must be careful. If the police find out . . . They'd hang us as saboteurs. Undermining the workers, they'd say. Do they care that the sale of overshoes is down? That the sale of shoes is down? That people no longer wear mufflers against a chill? No, they don't! All they see is that production of other things is up. Absenteeism is down. The collars are fastened more tightly on the necks of the oppressed. That's all they see. . . . So we must be careful.

"We'll meet tonight, Berdachev. In a bar I know of. . . ." And quickly they made their compact. Then, separately, they left the plaza and melted into the bustling city.

Someone was shaking his shoulder. Berdachev tried to swim up out of his deep sleep, but it was hard. He dreamed he was enthroned as a hero of the workers. He, Berdachev, had struck the telling blow. Factories were warmer, drafty buildings were being repaired, shelters against the rain were going up, workers in the fields rested during the rains again, carpenters sat out the drizzles, baseball games stopped when the rain fell, hockey players were bundled up again!

But still someone was shaking his shoulder. He opened his eyes. It was his friend Fyodor, from the factory, and that crone who lived next door. He sat up.

"Berdachev, my friend," said Fyodor. "We've come to warn you. The police are on to you. They know about the—*you know*. And they're on their way here."

"Your *wife* told them!" chimed in the crone.

"My wife?"

"Yes, Berdachev. You talk in your sleep. And apparently they only needed that confirmation. Someone informed on you, it seems. Quick! You must get up and away from here before they—"

There was a thunderous pounding on the lower outside door of the building.

"The police! We bolted the door, but it won't hold. Quick, Berdachev. Our comrades at the factory have a hiding place for you. We must escape at once! You, too, mother. They'll suspect you, too."

"Her?" said Berdachev, leaping into his trousers and thrusting his feet into his work boots.

"Of course. Her home remedies for colds—honey and mustard and vinegar—all the others—were famous in this district until they cured the cold. Now—well, they've been watching her. Just bad luck you had to be right here next door to her. Come on!"

They sprinted down the back stairs. There were three more workers there, waiting with a truck. They started at once and speeded up as they neared the end of the alley.

There was a tank there, its turret rotating toward them. The truck swerved. Suddenly another truck, with more workers in it, careened around a corner and into the tank. As it crashed, men leaped from it and climbed the tank in a flash, tumbling down into it.

The gun did not fire.

The truck with Berdachev had to crash three barriers in the first mile. Its radio crackled with bulletins about Berdachev, the sneeze, the daring daylight escape, the threat to the state.

Finally they turned into a back alley. It was nearing dusk, and they parked the truck in the shadows of an old warehouse.

They all went inside, after clearing through two sets of watching guards.

"What is this place?" said Berdachev when they had got inside.

"Do you know what a union is, Berdachev?" said a man rising from a chair deep in the shadow and coming toward them out of the gloom.

Berdachev shook his head.

"Ah, Comrade, I think you do, but you are afraid to answer, even here. Never mind. This is the headquarters of a union. *All* of us here are hunted men, like you. But our lives mean little now. *You*, Berdachev. *You*, on the other hand. Your life could mean everything."

"But, I—"

"Hear me out, Comrade. You sneezed today. With luck, with determination, with careful planning, with sacrifices from us all, *that sneeze can be heard round the world!* Do you understand me? If you *do* have a cold you can do more for our movement, for our goals and aspirations, than any other hero of our generation."

"But—"

"Hear me out, Comrade. The efficiency experts are even now skulking through our factories. No excuse for low production they say. The managers raise the quotas of work day by never ending day. Tired? Who cares if we get tired and run down? There is no cold to fear—no flu. To get a slowdown you have to have something *really* wrong with you. You have to end up in the hospital. Isn't that so, Comrades? The hospital! The working conditions are deteriorating. There is no concern for drafts, wet floors, cold buildings, long hours, any of it. Because we don't get sick! Who needs machines? Machines have to be cared for, oiled, greased, tended to. But we workers? We're healthy—always healthy. Tired, yes, but healthy. All the old diseases are gone. But at least we had the cold. Then, even that was gone. Gone . . . but," he fixed Berdachev with a gaze full of hope and triumph, "perhaps not gone forever. Hey, Comrades? A cheer for our Berdachev here!"

They gave it willingly.

Berdachev was stunned by it. All these comrades. To them *he was* a hero.

There was a tremendous crash and the wall of the building trembled. Then, slowly, with a massive sound of splintering, it gave way. Through it came a wave of giant tanks and armored cars, all bristling with guns. They stopped and disgorged troops. All battle hardened. Browned, tough, professional. Swiftly they surrounded the little group around Berdachev. Resistance was useless.

Through a path cleared for him a Marshal in full uniform came toward Berdachev. He stopped before Berdachev and looked him up and down. Then he turned to his aide and said, "Vasilly, *now* we have met the Enemy! Let the annals of our Corps reflect that today was our greatest triumph!"

Quickly they led Berdachev away. When the crowd outside saw him—and the crowd was afterwards numbered at more than forty thousand, all gathered by the mere *rumor* of the capture—they cheered. All of them. The late news headlined the story. The next day it was known in the West.

By noon the next day the diplomatic channels around the world were awash with but one name.

Berdachev!

When they told him, Berdachev could not believe it. He was stunned into silence by the very thought of it. He trembled to his very soul. Physicians had to be called to administer restoratives.

He, Berdachev, was to be questioned by The Leader himself!

They ushered him into an audience room. It was long, the ceiling high; tall windows admitted the sun's rays which flashed on the golden tapestries and crystal chandeliers of a former, bygone, and decadent age. Berdachev walked slowly and carefully the length of the room, ignoring the glitter about him. For at the far end of the room, seated behind a simple table, on a simple wooden chair, was The Leader.

Berdachev stopped just in front of the desk.

The Leader examined him. Looked Berdachev up and down. Then he said to Berdachev, "So you are the man who sneezed."

Berdachev nodded, dumbly.

"Well, Berdachev, what shall we do with you? You are a hero to the workers, but the health ministry wants you dead. The labor secretary wants you in Siberia, but only if you are kept isolated from the other workers. The army wants you for weapons research. The physicians are mixed. The nose and throat people want you kept, the people in research want you done away with since you may indicate that they were not quite so invincible as they said.

"It goes on at great length, you know. And it is not just our government, either. That capitalist you met in the bar yesterday? Oh, yes, we followed you from the first. That—"

"Was it the—"

"Eh? Oh, yes. The dog *was* wired. That's how *we* found out. The workers learned from some old woman who heard you; the health ministry got their information from a phone tip—some young boy called them. . . . At any rate, now there are foreign governments involved. Many want the cold brought back. Some for historical reasons, others because they consider it a sort of vanishing species, I gather. Some want the money to be made from the human misery: tablets, pills, syrups, all the rest. You understand. . . . The question though, is up to me, now. What shall we do with you, Comrade?"

Berdachev was stunned. It had come down to this final moment then. He stood mute before his judge. Sweat broke out on his forehead. There was a draft from somewhere.

Suddenly, for the second time in his life, he sneezed.

The Leader, his face contorted with fury, leapt from his chair, came round the table and seized Berdachev by the throat. "You *dare* to do that to my face, insect?" He shook Berdachev until the little peasant began to gurgle; then, abruptly, he released him, letting him fall into a miserable heap on the floor.

He stood over Berdachev for a moment, calming himself; then he straightened his cuffs, smoothed his hair, returned slowly to his

chair and sat down. He said, patiently, "You really *don't* understand what this is all about, do you, Comrade?"

He sighed wearily and began to explain. "That capitalist swine talked. We have ways—unpleasant ways—of making men talk. In his case it was the threat of dosing him with *each* of his twenty-five hundred cold remedies that made him break. In his confession he swore that you were only an innocent dupe; and so you are, Berdachev. I see that now. A simple peasant who has become the tool of the capitalists, the imperialists, the revisionists, the counter revolutionaries, the ultra—"

"No, Excellency!" Berdachev said, protesting, "I never met a one of any of those groups. All I have is a little cold. My feet got wet, and—"

"Silence!" The Leader shouted. His eyes pierced Berdachev. Then his wrath subsided again. "You're carrying a disease, all right; one that would bring misery and unhappiness to this workers' paradise of ours. But it's not your cold. That is a mere petty bourgeois infection. No, only a few men, men of special vision—like myself—see the true threat that you represent.

"It's your *sneezing,* Berdachev. That's the threat. You're a Pied Piper, Berdachev. A Siren. A Lorelei. Your sneeze is the Midas Touch of counter-revolution. If *you* can sneeze at the regime . . . well, you can be sure that others will try it, too.

"So . . . I must put a stop to your sneezes, once and for all. To protect my beloved people I have to overcome my gentle inclinations and act ruthlessly—and in secret. Those within the government who are too ambitious might someday use you against me. I must check their ambitions, confuse them, keep them guessing, and wondering."

The Leader has meanwhile put his hand into the drawer of the desk and was gripping something there, drawing it out, but keeping it where Berdachev could not see it.

"So, Berdachev, you must not leave this palace again."

The little peasant seemed to shrink away at that. He closed his eyes, sure now that his end was near. His heart desolate, he wished only that he had taken his old mother's advice and worn his overshoes *every* time he went out in the rain.

"Take this!"

Berdachev opened his eyes. The Leader held no weapon. All that was in his hand was a small brown bottle, which, as Berdachev stared at it and began to think about what it might contain, seemed to grow sinister before his eyes.

Poison! The word burned itself into his brain.

"No," Berdachev said, pleading, "I can't. Please, your Excellency—"

"Take it, I said!"

Berdachev was shaking all over. He could not even speak now. In dumb show he resisted the bottle thrust upon him.

"You're afraid of a little bottle? . . . Oh, all right. I'll take some first," said The Leader in exasperation, and, unscrewing the bottle's cap, he took a long draught of the menacing liquid it contained. He made a terrible face and put his hand to his throat, choking. "Ugh," he said, "it *is* awful stuff. Here; now it's your turn. Drink up!"

"What—what is it?" said Berdachev as he took the bottle gingerly.

"Some wretched cold remedy that capitalist pig said might actually work. Since I was applying hot mustard plasters to his chest when I asked him about it, I think his information is reliable. Oh, it's safe; stop worrying! I tried it last night on all the members of the party central committee. Not even one of them died." The Leader sighed, heavily.

Turning back to his desk, The Leader touched a button hidden in its ornamentation; a hidden door slid silently open in the nearby wall.

"Now get out of here, Berdachev—and mind you take your medicine. I want that cold of yours cleared up at once. In three days I've got to make a speech on the State Network to four hundred million people from all over the world. I've got to deny that this whole thing ever happened and then explain the whole incident away somehow.

"All we'd need to make this a *complete* disaster is for me to—for me to—"

The Leader had stopped talking and was clutching at his throat. His face began to redden and he seemed to be fighting for his breath.

Violently, he motioned for Berdachev to leave.

Terrified, Berdachev scuttled toward the door. *Poison,* he thought, it *is* poison. As soon as I leave he'll take the antidote. It's a trick.

He went out and the secret door slid shut behind him.

Is he taking the antidote? I've got to know, Berdachev thought. He looked swiftly around him; there was no one in the shadowy corridor. Furtively he tiptoed back to the door and pressed his ear tightly against the panel, listening intently.

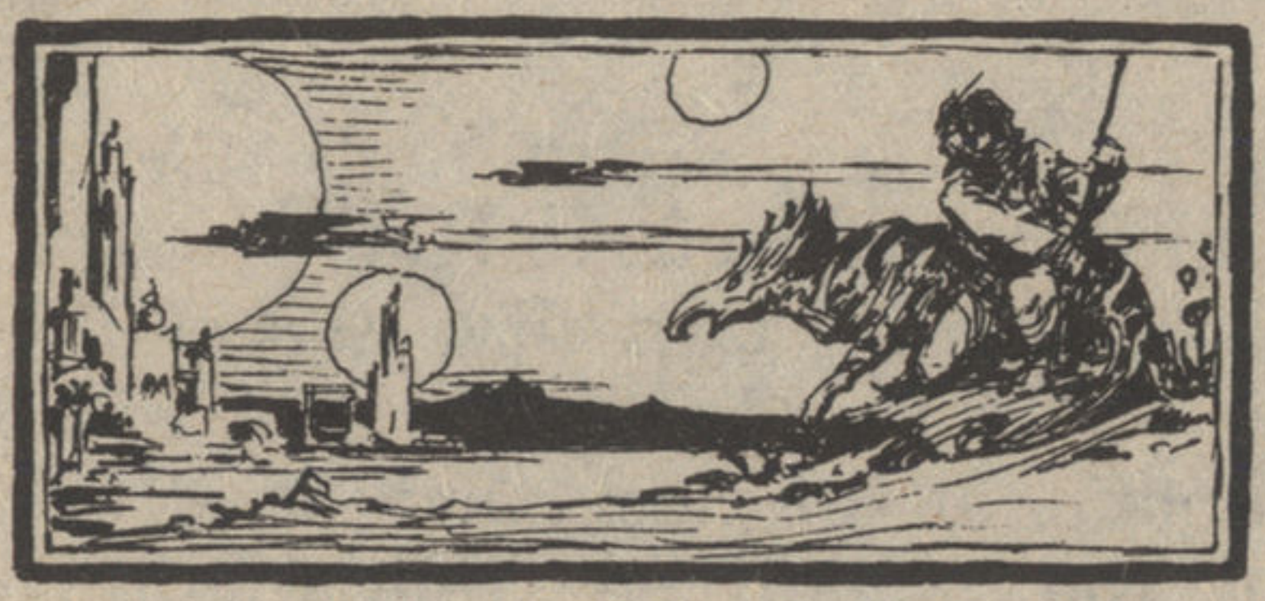
A puzzled look crept over his face and he stepped back from the door, staring at it wonderingly. For some moments he stood silent; then understanding came to him in a wave. A sly, peasant's smile stole over his face. He *knew* now what disaster The Leader feared most.

He had *heard* it strike The Leader down.

Perhaps now the entire regime would fall. Perhaps not. But he, Berdachev, holding the dark bottle in his hand, felt only a blessed relief and a sense of coming peace.

As he slowly opened the bottle and lifted it to his lips he even felt some pity for the great man on the other side of the door.

For, faintly through the door panel, there came the sound of still another volcanic sneeze.



CHARIOTS

A traveler from Omicron Tauri
Descended and, blazing with glory,
  Gave ape girls some winks
  (von Däniken thinks)
Creating the first UFO story.

—Penny Tegen

COMING SOON TO A THEATER NEAR YOU

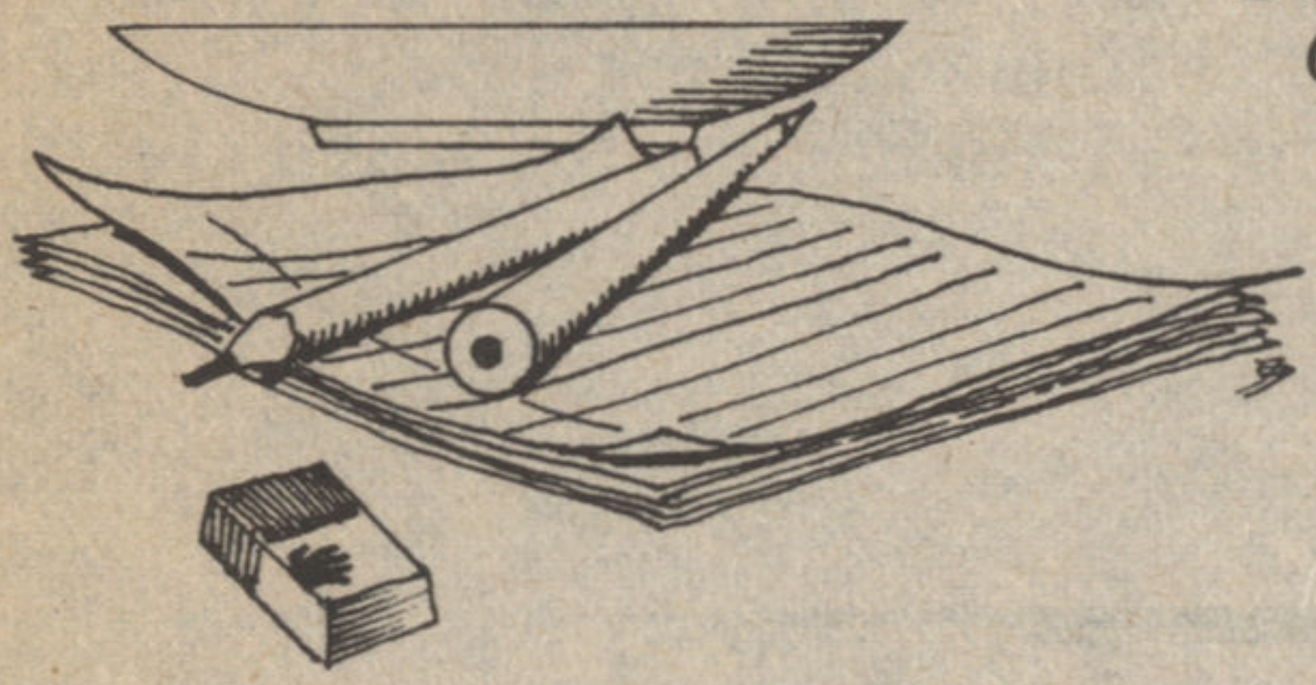
The creatures from far Ophiuchus
Have gleefully threatened to nuke us;
  Well, if they *do* bomb us,
  I hope that they promise
To sell the film rights to George Lucas.

—F. Gwynplaine MacIntyre

AUTHOR PLUS

by Elizabeth Anne Hull & Frederik Pohl

art: Jack Gaughan



During the World Science Fiction Convention just past, in Boston, Mr. Pohl threatened to take up short story writing again; and Lo, this arrived on our doorstep. Ms. Hull tells us that this is her first SF sale, and Mr. Pohl insists that this is not a horrid pun

H. G. Van Veinlein never went to Hugo awards ceremonies, not even when they were in his own city. Especially tonight. All the time he was retyping the next to the last chapter of his long overdue novel he was glancing at the clock. Now was the time for the Big Heart award, now the Gandalf; now they would be giving the Best Fan Writer and Best Artist and all the other trophies that went to the people he didn't know, for reasons he didn't care about. He took the last page out of the typewriter, judged it was now safe to put the phone back on the hook, and disinterred it from under the heap of raincoats and sweaters where it had been screeching at him. He went back to the manuscript, correcting typos with a pencil; and before he had quite finished the phone was ringing.

He picked it up gingerly."Herbie!" the voice squawked. "You're not here." Since that was obvious, he didn't answer. The voice didn't identify itself either, but H. G. knew an editor when he heard one. "Hello, Laura," he said.

"You didn't deliver the novel as you promised, either!" That was also obvious. And expected. He braced himself for what he thought would come next.

It did. "And you didn't win either," she said cruelly. "It went to Larry Larrison again."

He attempted a light laugh. "Why, that's fine," he said. "He deserves it—"

"That's what you said after the Nebula, when Spiven and Kornball won again; and what I want to know, Herb, is when you're going to win one? Not to mention when you're going to turn in that manuscript that's now eighteen, no, I'm wrong, nineteen months overdue?"

He said, "I've been having a little trouble, Laura. But you'll have it tomorrow." I hope, he added after he hung up.

He went sadly back to his desk, his eyes going to the blank space at the top of his bookcase which he had kept empty for a dozen years, for the awards that simply didn't come. It wasn't fair! Every writer needed help. Larrison was known to use a word-processor. Spiven and Kornball had each other, and what did he have? He sighed deeply, picked up a yellow pad of ruled paper, wrote across the top "Chapter Ten— Conclusion." And, on the way to his sad bed, he opened the door and left it, as always, on his doorstep, along with two soft lead pencils, an eraser, and a saucer of milk.

A MILLION SHADES OF GREEN

by J.O. Jeppson

art: Tim Kirk

This writer has (she says) a difficult husband who threatens mayhem when she brings home another plant, since all the greenery is filling up the apartment.

After a frigidly protracted winter, a procrastinative spring generates in many Manhattanites the strange need to consult psychoanalysts—who are then assumed to be happily making money hand over id because everyone else is unhappy. Nevertheless, the Psychoanalytic Alliance luncheon club was far gone in gloom.

Even a casual glance at the faces of those members of Pshrinks Anonymous who were morosely toying with their Veal Chops Venera sufficed to prove that making money isn't everything and that, like normal New Yorkers, Pshrinks get depressed by a long winter too.

"Hell's bells," said the Oldest Member. "I hate snow in April."

"It's only April first," said one of his more obsessively logical Freudian colleagues, "and snow on April Fool's Day is not uncommon."

"Then it behooves us not to be fools," said an Eclectic with a notably recent tan. "One must accept things as they are."

"Oh? Then why did you spend the last three weeks in the Caribbean?" said the Oldest Member grumpily, spearing an overcooked Asparagus Anaclitic.

"Why not? Any successful Pshrink could do the same," said the Eclectic, ordering another Bourbon Bleuler.

As the Oldest Member scowled and cleared his throat with an ominously bass rumble, one of the female Pshrinks tapped him lightly on his impeccably tweeded forearm.

"Did I ever tell you," said the Interpersonal, "about the conversations on early spring that I had with a Martian?"

"Pay no attention to her," said the Oldest Member.

She reached down to touch a large, flat, rectangular package wrapped in brown paper, leaning against her chair. "Since we are all eager to see spring, perhaps it would be of interest if I explained how important all the various shades of green can be. . . ."

"I think I'll smoke," said the Oldest Member, grabbing his cigar from his breast pocket.

This time the Interpersonal did not need to admonish him, for the job was done by the other non-smokers, whose militancy rose with every new medical article on the subject.

"Very well, I abide by the rule," said the Oldest Member, "but I'm leaving. Lunch is appalling, the company is depressing, and my wife

made me wear my galoshes today."

"I want to hear about the conversations with a Martian," said one of the younger Pshrinks.

"Is it a story full of boring adjectival descriptions about spring?" said another P.A., who was known to be writing a novel.

"Verbosity is an epidemic disease in spring but I'll try to control myself," said the Interpersonal, turning to the Oldest Member, who had risen. "Please stay. This is a true story, more or less, and I think you've heard about this particular Martian."

The Oldest Member groaned and sat down.

No matter which month spring picks for actual arrival [said the Interpersonal], there are always early signs that the season is about to explode: the willows around the boating pond vibrate with color; shoots pop up from underground bulbs; any city tree that has survived the winter begins to look hazy as its buds swell and crack open; male pigeons—like most males—puff up and strut.

Many years ago, at just this time of year, I first met a patient I will call Mr. M. He was a little dumpling of a man, with the face of a slightly demented kewpie doll . . .

["What's a kewpie doll?" asked the Youngest Member, the token psychiatric resident.]

. . . and those too young to remember kewpie dolls should be sad that they missed those appealing little creatures. Mr. M had the same air of innocent knowingness in his cherubic face, as if he could be pleasant to have around no matter what mischief he might think up.

I was on my first job out of residency, running a locked psychiatric ward at one of the local hospitals. Mr. M had been in many psychiatric wards since his premature discharge from the army, but he had only recently moved to New York. To the surprise of the admitting office personnel, when they told Mr. M that he was being assigned to the ward of a certain doctor I shall call Blank, this newcomer of a patient promptly fell prone on the floor and sobbed.

Since Mr. M was supposed to be actively hallucinating and potentially suicidal, the young doctor on admissions duty that night decided not to strain things any more than they were. He assigned Mr. M to the other locked ward—mine.

When I arrived next morning to see what flotsam had been cast up on the shores of our little hospital universe during the night

shift, I found Mr. M operating with whimsical reasonableness; organizing a patients' work committee, starting a ward newspaper, acting as if there were no earthly reason why he had ever been admitted. The aides were already muttering about how overcrowded the ward was, especially with patients healthy enough to be on one of the open wards.

"According to the admitting office diagnosis," said the head nurse, "he's hallucinating, but he won't say what."

At that point Dr. Blank entered my office, looking over his shoulder as was his wont. He was a tall, thin, nervous ectomorph who for years had been running the other locked ward with discipline honed to a fine art. Residents assigned to do therapy on his ward complained that Dr. Blank never saw the patients personally unless in the presence of strong male aides and nurses equipped with instant injectables.

Dr. Blank was, of course, not a Pshrink. He was merely an adequate administrative psychiatrist who never intended to open a private practice.

"I see by the daily admitting roster that you've got Mr. ——," said Dr. Blank. "Watch out for him. I had him as a patient in an Army hospital. Once when he was working in the kitchen he scraped all the mold off the old bread, made a ball of it, and threw it at me. And you know how allergic I am!"

Dr. Blank's allergies were legendary. He permitted no plants to adorn his ward, and was constantly inspecting for possible molds. The staff tended to say that Dr. Blank was allergic to anything alive.

I dragged out Mr. M's skimpy admitting chart. "What's the matter with this patient?" I asked timidly. Dr. Blank was also notorious for disapproving of female psychiatrists, and of Pshrinks. I was already the first and rapidly becoming the second.

Dr. Blank sneezed, glared at the plants on my windowsill, and said, "That patient thinks he's a Martian." After this stunning announcement, Blank hurried out.

Now during my recent psychiatric residency training, I had finally discovered science fiction—late, I admit, but since I read fast I soon caught up and had covered the field. Martians were a bit old hat, but I hadn't met one yet.

"Send in Mr. M," I said to the head nurse.

"By himself? The admitting note says he might be dangerous."

"I think I'd rather talk to a Martian alone."

Mr. M bounced in. He was intelligent, literate, amusing, charming, and reluctant to talk about the Martian, who seemed to inhabit

a portion of Mr. M's body roughly in the area where the spleen normally hangs out. Furthermore, Mr. M said I was not allowed to talk directly to the Martian.

He cocked his head on one side and said, "I hear you're not a bad Pshrink. Tell you what—I'll relay messages to the Martian if you behave yourself and don't get too nosy."

"Nosiness is part of my trade," I said.

"Does it upset you?" said Mr. M solicitously. "If you want to talk about it I'll be glad to listen. I've got until the ward meeting when I want to get a vote on new curtains for the day room. . . ."

"I want to talk about the Martian," I said.

"You would. It's not polite."

"That has nothing to do with. . . ."

"Now now, temper, temper. Try to understand that the Martian doesn't approve of me going to hospitals."

"What does he approve of ?"

Mr. M shrugged, his face blank.

I waited.

"The Martian," said Mr. M suddenly, in a whisper, "doesn't approve of me much at all."

"Why not?"

"I'm inadequate."

There was another silence. I could hear the head nurse and the ward secretary moving just outside my door, staying within shouting range in case I needed help. They were both bigger and stronger than I was, and since my arrival on the job they'd been trying to fatten me up.

I knew the patients' meeting would start all too soon. "Okay," I said, "but how can anyone be inadequate for a Martian?"

"He says I don't understand the full importance of capturing all the things that can be lost. I've tried—gee but I've tried. Everyone says I'm efficient at almost everything. Everyone but the Martian."

"What things that can be lost?"

"Like spring. Like the life on a planet. Mars is dead, all rocky and deserty, but it wasn't once."

Remember that this was long ago, before Voyager sent back pictures and took samples. In those days many respectable scientists still hoped that Mars possessed some plant life, if not higher creatures hiding in underground cities or wooded valleys.

"I always go crazy when spring starts," continued Mr. M. "The Martian plagues the devil out of me, and no matter how hard I try, I can't oblige. Sometimes I do crazier and crazier things, and I scare

myself. I feel so sad. . . ."

"Let me speak to this Martian," I said firmly, for Mr. M's protruding lower lip was beginning to tremble, and I didn't want Dr. Blank to find out that I'd failed to keep Mr. M from sobbing his heart out on my floor.

"He doesn't want to talk to you. He says to ask you what you want to find out."

"I want to find out why the Martian picked on you."

There was silence while Mr. M shut his eyes and his lips stopped quivering and started to move silently.

"He says it's because I could be a great artist."

"How does he know that?"

There was a longer silence. I will not, from now on, report the entire three-way process of communicating with the Martian, but you should remember that it proceeded in this manner.

"He says he's not actually sure, but it seems I have an unusual ability to perceive variations in colors."

"Is that true?" I asked.

Mr. M smiled. "Perhaps. The few paintings I've sold were to people who admired the colors. Actually this is a terrible problem to me. I can never make a painting exactly the way it should be—oh, I'm not fussy about line and arrangement and all sorts of things like that, for I think I do them well enough and it's an individual matter, but it kills me not to get colors right. I resent the Martian's insistence that I can do it even better. The colors, I mean."

"Do you act crazy to prove to him that you can't paint better?"

"That's crap."

"Only you know that."

"I'm fifty-nine and I don't know anything. I suppose you think you know everything. How old are you?"

"Twenty-nine," I said. "Right now I don't know much because you won't tell me much. I don't know anything about Martians and even less about painting."

"Maybe you'll learn," said Mr. M, suddenly the cheerful, grey-haired child who had been bustling about the ward. "But the Martian says to tell you not to try to be so smart-ass. We bet that you can't get along with Dr. Blank any better than we can."

"Well. . . ."

"Don't worry about it. Dr. Blank can't help being a prick. He's scared of me, you know, because I'm freer than he is, even if I am possessed by a Martian every spring."

"Aha!" I said, intending to change the subject as soon as possible

because I didn't like Dr. Blank very much either, and might easily have been tempted to lie down on the floor and cry if I'd had to work on his ward. "So you're only possessed in spring?"

"Well, isn't that obvious? Oh—I guess you haven't gotten my old charts yet."

"No."

"You'll see. Only in spring." He paused, rolled his eyes upward for a full minute, and then smiled at me. "You don't get scared when I hallucinate."

"I thought you said you were inhabited by a Martian."

"But any Pshrink would say I hallucinate."

"True. What does the Martian say about that?"

"He's not interested, although it amuses him that you're the first psychiatrist who's wanted to talk to him."

"May I?"

"Just now he told me that he thought perhaps you could be trusted—eventually."

"Then can we get back to the subject of spring?"

Mr. M blinked. "I have to go to the ward meeting."

"Please, about spring. . . ."

"Have you actually sent for my old charts?"

"Of course."

"It'll take a while for them to come from all those other hospitals. In the meantime," he rubbed his hands gleefully, "I have so much to do here."

"But about spring. . . ."

Mr. M blew me a kiss and bobbed out of my office.

The charts did take a long time in arriving. I interviewed Mr. M once more before they arrived, but although he gave me a precis of his childhood, adolescence, and college years, he shut up on the subject of the Army, and refused to reveal what happened in spring.

"No, Doc. It's the Martian's problem, and I don't have his permission to talk about it, although I've given you a hint. Just remember that I've never hurt anyone or myself."

"Why are you telling me that?"

"Because the Martian wants me to work hard for an in-hospital pass so I can go to the Occupational Therapy section to improve my painting. In fact, he says you should give every non-violent patient a pass if the big brass won't let you make this an open ward."

So he'd found out what I'd been trying to do since I took the job. I knew that my chances of turning the ward into an unlocked one were nil, but I had succeeded in instituting in-hospital passes. I had

even begun to think of them as little bits of largess I could hand out as if from on high, feeling very important because Dr. Blank did not permit passes of any kind from his ward.

"Will your majesty consider giving me a pass?" said Mr. M.

Shamefaced, I said, "I'll think about it."

He laughed, a lock of fine grey hair falling down over one eye. He winked at me with the other, got up, and told me to study his records carefully when they arrived because he had explained his history enough already.

"Can't you at least tell me about spring?"

"I have to create pictures," said Mr. M in cheerful resistance. Then he pattered back to the ward to commandeer for himself all the available colored chalks, the only kind of art equipment allowed on a locked ward.

By the day his records arrived, Mr. M had produced several exceptional pictures in chalk, on upside-down pages of the New York Times classified section, which provided a gently weird background for his work. I decided that he was not exactly a totally abstract expressionist because one could detect tongue-in-cheek renditions of various human frailties that made you smile when you saw the pictures.

I studied the records carefully. Mr. M had been a successful commercial artist before World War II, when he was shipped to North Africa during that campaign in the desert. He was wounded slightly and although he apparently healed quickly, he became unable to draw maps and other things assigned to him in his special duty. Gradually it was apparent that he was talking feverishly to himself and he was sent to a hospital for observation.

There it was noted that he could write or draw with his dominant hand—the right—but could color only with his left. Nowadays we would say that his right and left cortical areas (the intuitive and logical sides of the brain, corresponding to left and right hands in right-handed people) had become psychologically separated in his art.

He became obsessed with certain paints and one day ate them all, necessitating gastric lavage. He told the doctors that a Martian made him do it. To use an unfortunately popular medical expression, everything progressed rapidly downhill after that, and he stayed hospitalized for some time.

Mr. M then spent many years in V.A. psychiatric clinics, receiving psychotherapy which seemed to work in spite of Mr. M's reluctance to divulge anything of significance about his problems. Mr. M was

able to earn a living as a mail-sorter in the post office, he volunteered his services as an art teacher to disabled veterans, and had a blameless life—except that once a year he would have a brief psychotic episode requiring another brief hospitalization.

In spite of the voluminous records on Mr. M, I felt that I still didn't know what had really happened to him. I consulted Dr. Blank.

"I don't want to talk about that guy. It's all in the records."

"It isn't."

"It was a long time ago and I can't remember much."

"Weren't you in North Africa during the war, too?" I asked.

"Great place. My allergies disappeared—until I was reassigned to that hospital where Mr. M threw the mold at me, saying I could try blue-green algae if I couldn't be enthusiastic about green life."

"Green?" I asked, mostly to keep the conversation going in an approved Pshrink manner.

"Um, yes. I wanted to give him shock treatment, but he was committed to a Veterans' hospital here in the Northeast, one that was out in the country surrounded by repulsive vegetation full of pollen and molds. Apparently he thrived there, for he was eventually discharged as cured—but of course we know better."

I was still persevering on green. "I don't suppose that it was green paint that Mr. M ate?"

"All the green paints."

"But why?"

"He has an idiotic obsession with the color green," said Dr. Blank with a sneer. "He claims veteran's benefits on the grounds that the desert warfare turned him into a nut. He should be put away."

"You mean you don't think he's malingering?" (It was one of Dr. Blank's favorite diagnoses.)

"I thought he was at first, but you should have seen him on my ward after he threw the mold at me. He was soon talking only to his Martian, and the colors in his pictures got duller and duller until one day he painted on his bedsheets—can you imagine what with?"

"Yes," I said, feeling confident that under my competently enlightened management, Mr. M would do no such thing on *my* ward.

Dr. Blank rubbed his long bony fingers as if he were trying to join Lady Macbeth's cleanup campaign. "You'll be well-advised to keep Mr. M locked up and, better yet, recommitted upstate. I think he's dangerous."

"But what about the Martian?"

"I trust that you mean Mr. M's hallucination. He would never tell me, or anyone else, much about it, but I once overheard him mut-

tering that he was under assignment. It was so ridiculous that I never wrote it in the chart."

"Are you saying that he imagined a Martian had hired him to do something?"

"Yes. I think the job was to paint the kinds of green that appear in early spring." Dr. Blank sneezed. "Allergens, all of them. The man's psychotic."

"But not everyone likes the desert."

"I loved it."

"Why are you here in the Northeast, then?" I said with my usual uncontrollable curiosity.

He squirmed in his chair. "My mother lives in a townhouse here in the city—and needs me. We have dinner together every night, she's thrown out the potted palms that she used to have, and . . . look here! You're not paying attention to the problem of your crazy patient! Keep him locked up. You're young and inexperienced and have never been in a desert—have you?"

"No."

"It takes a real man to live in the desert," said Dr. Blank, turning to the papers on his desk with a gesture of dismissal.

I went back to my ward and sent for Mr. M.

"Why did you avoid telling me about your real problem with spring? It wasn't in the records, but you must have known that Dr. Blank would tell me about your preoccupation with shades of green."

"Ah. My strange obsession. I've been in so many of these hospitals that I know the jargon. The Martian thinks the language is silly, but I rather enjoy it."

"Answer my question, please."

"Well, well, you're learning to be an authority figure!"

"And you are not exactly bucking for a work pass."

"I apologize, boss. The fact is that Dr. Blank is the real alien. As his allergist has undoubtedly told him, he was probably designed for a non-green planet—perhaps Mars as it is now. Perhaps he lives with his mother—yes, I know a lot about everybody—because no one else wants to put up with him. There aren't any plants on his ward and he's always washing himself and spraying his nostrils and he doesn't understand the Martian and me."

"He doesn't know that," I said.

Mr. M nodded and leaned forward conspiratorially. "The Martian and me—and possibly you—are part of the web of life that is planet Earth, and once was Mars."

"Are you sure it's Mars?" I asked, responding to the faint tingling

at the base of my spine that indicated I was being prodded by my psychoanalytic intuition—or possibly my overindulgence in science fiction.

There was a long silence while Mr. M massaged his silky grey hair with faintly green-tinted fingers. Then he heaved a sigh. "No, I'm not at all sure that it's Mars. I call him a Martian because he's been there, back when Mars was green, but I don't know—and I'm not going to ask—where he originated."

"But. . . ."

"It doesn't matter, you know. He's an intelligent person who worries about keeping a planet green. He hates deserts. He wants me to paint the spring greens so that humanity will never forget how beautiful they are and never want to lose them."

I nodded, since Mr. M's hallucination agreed with my sentiments. "A few minutes ago you said 'the web of life that *is* Planet Earth.' Did you mean it that way or did you mean to say 'on' Earth?"

"You're no kindred soul if you don't know that the web of life is Earth itself, coming alive, just as we are all parts of the universe coming alive."

"Yes," I said.

"May I have more shades of green chalk?"

"You may have a pass to the occupational therapy section, and I'll see that they provide plenty of green paints."

["If you're going to invent a story," complained a Pshrink, "couldn't you at least behave more analytically in it?"

"Go ahead and believe that it's just a story," said the Interpersonal, shoving her Orange Pudding Oedipus over to the Oldest Member, who was partial to it.]

All went well for a few days [continued the Interpersonal]. Mr. M bobbed in and out of the ward on his pass, busy reorganizing occupational therapy and making intricate plans for a magnificent art show starring work done by patients, as well as that of whatever hospital personnel he deemed had any talent whatsoever.

It was obvious that Mr. M was very popular in the hospital—except with Dr. Blank—and everyone exclaimed over his cheerful efficiency, his wit, and his ability to rouse enthusiasm in depressed patients. I began to imagine that Mr. M's salvation would be in getting some training that might sneak him into a permanent hospital position.

His request for an outside pass was casual. He just wanted to go

out of the hospital for a few hours and would be right back, for he had a lot to do in occupational therapy. Since he was on a locked ward still, it took a conclave of staff psychiatrists to pass on his pass. Only Dr. Blank voted against it, claiming that just because Mr. M no longer talked about his hallucinations didn't mean he wasn't having them. Since all of us knew plenty of people on the outside who hallucinated in a respectably quiet way, we disagreed with Blank.

The next day I was very busy with new admissions and hardly noticed when Mr. M took his pass and left the hospital for the few hours he had promised. I did not anticipate trouble, and I trusted that he would indeed return.

Which he did. I was working on charts and didn't see him.

The next thing I knew, my head nurse charged into my office as if propelled from a cannon. "You'd better come and look at our resident artist. He's back and he doesn't look good."

I found Mr. M sitting in his bathrobe in a dim corner of the day room, surrounded by crumpled sheets of the New York Times classified section, all covered with red chalk.

"Red?" I asked.

"Angry," he said, kicking at the papers with his child-like feet.

I took him to my office and said, "Couldn't you just tell me about it?"

"You're not an artist. You wouldn't understand."

"I'm part of the web of life, dammit. Tell me."

Mr. M wiped his eyes on his sleeve and shuddered. "It's no use. I can't do it. And I refuse to go back to those clinics for more therapy, week after week, year after year. I know what I'm like. It's no use."

I said nothing.

He blinked and scowled at me. "I went to Central Park for the whole day. Had hot dogs at the boat house. Saw migrating warblers all over the place. Spring is starting again, every tree bud beginning to open, every forsythia bush into yellow—that's all right, I can do yellow—but the damn greens are coming back and I swear the shades are more subtle and difficult than ever and I'm going to kill myself so the Martian will stop jeering at me because I'm a failure and I can't do it, I can't capture the million shades of green and I want to die. . . ."

"Whoa! Now we'll work on this problem and in the meantime you'll stay here where there isn't any changing green."

"I can see the trees in the hospital's front yard and. . . ."

"We will talk about them every day as they come into leaf, and

please go on painting."

"You can't be my therapist. You're the ward psychiatrist and you aren't supposed to do anything but administrative work, and the new psychiatric residents won't be here until July first, and the only ones in the hospital right now are over on Blank's ward. . . ."

"I admit we are short-staffed, but I will do my best."

"All right. I won't kill myself. It would upset the ward nurse anyhow, and I like him."

So Mr. M stayed on my ward, working in chalks on the New York Times. He had more colors than before because the occupational therapist thought he was adorable and bought some for him herself. He struggled on, and each day I tried to talk to him, while the Martian inside grew angrier and angrier, and Mr. M became more and more depressed.

Finally one day when the sun was warmer than usual and the trees were leafing out and it was clear that the early days of spring were moving on, I arrived at the hospital to find that Mr. M's painting for the evening before had been all in one particularly drab color. It was a stunningly violent abstraction, probably a masterpiece, but it smelled so we had to throw it out.

[One of the more fastidious Kleinians put down his napkin and rose, saying, "I see no reason to listen to this sort of thing over lunch."

"Don't split," said the Oldest Member. "Think of it as only a projection."]

"Didn't I tell you so?" said Dr. Blank in the staff lunchroom. "Now do you believe that he's committable?" One of his more prolonged sneezes exploded. "God, how I hate spring."

The next time I saw Mr. M for an interview the aides had to carry him into my office because he wouldn't walk. His head lolled on his shoulders, his eyes were vacant, and if spoken to, he cried.

"I don't want to talk to you," I said in desperation, wishing I were working at a place like Chestnut Lodge, where patients as sick as this could have intensive psychotherapy. "I want to talk to the Martian."

Mr. M snuffled.

Half an hour later, after I was hoarse from trying to be persuasive, Mr. M closed his eyes, looked as if he were asleep, but began to speak in another voice, deep and rich—so different that the hairs at the back of my neck seemed to lift.

"You want to know a lot," said the voice. "I permit you to ask a few questions."

I swallowed and hoped my voice wouldn't croak. "Were the greens on Mars—or wherever you come from—as beautiful as those of spring here on Earth?"

"More."

"Then perhaps nothing here will every satisfy you," I said, with pity.

"I hadn't thought of that before. Why hadn't I?"

"I don't know. Perhaps you're homesick."

"My friend was homesick for green when he was trapped in the desert, wounded."

"Yes," I said, trying not to breathe more rapidly.

"He's a good artist."

"Not good enough for you?"

"No. It makes me angry. I have to punish him—and everyone."

"We're only Terrans. We can't help it."

"You take your living planet for granted."

"Not all of us. Perhaps none of us, really," I said.

"Why can't you cure my friend and make him the perfect artist who can transmit to a picture all the million shades of green?"

"You tell me."

"You mean you can cure him but won't tell me why you're not doing it?" said the voice furiously.

"You know damn well I don't cure anyone. People who get well may do it with a lot of help, but they do it themselves."

"But he can't cure himself!"

"Yes he can. He does it every year, except in spring."

"Then I make him go crazy."

"So it seems."

"Go to Hell."

Mr. M suddenly seemed to wake up. He smiled at me and said in his usual lilting tenor, "You're getting to him, Doc. Give *him* hell."

I smiled back. "But you like the Martian. Nobody else has understood how you suffered during the North African campaign."

"That's for sure. You know—I think the problem is that both he and I go crazy every spring, out of love for all the greens, out of wanting to possess them permanently—and they never last—Hell, they never last, Doc! All at once they're gone and it's the deep uniform green of summer."

"Did you think, when you were in North Africa, that you'd never see the greens of our spring again?"

"Yes. A tank blew up near me and a piece of metal went into my eye. They took it out okay and my vision wasn't permanently damaged, but it could have been—I didn't mind the piece in my thigh or the scars from the burns I got, but to lose my eyesight—to think about losing it—did you know that the Martian can't see at all unless I look at things for him? That's why we have to go to the park every spring and study the shades of green and why he wants me to paint all of them. . . ."

"Let me speak to him again," I said.

"Okay, but tell him I'm only human and I'm doing the best I can—just like you, Doc."

Mr. M's eyes stared into infinity while I talked to his Martian, who for the first few minutes used only obscenities, the sort that men who are men learn in a desert army, as an obbligato to my conversation.

". . . so you see, sir, you're not being fair," I concluded.

"What the hell kind of psychiatrist are you, anyway? What's fair—about what happened to Mars, or about what's happening to Earth—desertification, destruction, stupidity. . . ."

"I think you want perfection," I said angrily. "A perfect artist. Maybe you should visit some other planet."

"I like this one."

"You need treatment—you know that."

"Humans need treatment!" he shouted.

"So what else is new?" I shouted back.

There was a long pause while Mr. M twitched the way animals do in their sleep when they are dreaming.

"What are you suggesting?" asked the Martian's voice, rather politely.

"Leave Mr. M alone for the rest of the year."

"I already do."

"You don't," I said earnestly, forgetting that quite probably there was no Martian. "You make him work at a job he's not suited for while you insist he must paint better than any human has ever been able to. Let him spend the year doing what he's good at and then. . . ."

"Then what?" jeered the Martian.

"Then in early spring tell him to go to a therapist and the three of you hash out the problem. There's a lot of green left on Earth, you know. You don't have to make us all miserable just because the universe is short on green in other places."

"The greens are vanishing from Earth!"

"We'll try to save them. You'll try. But asking for perfection makes the task impossible. Have you found perfection anywhere in the universe?"

He was silent. The corners of Mr. M's mouth bent upwards.

"How about it?" I asked. "Truce?"

"I'll think it over."

"You'd better." I closed the chart with a bang and felt more exhausted and incompetent than usual. Nevertheless, I knew intuitively that assigning Mr. M to more long-term therapy would be useless, although he was indubitably psychotic.

["Or the Martian was," said the Oldest Member.

"Why, I didn't know that you liked s-f," said the Interpersonal.

"Harrumph!" said the Oldest Member.]

Mr. M shook his head and rubbed his eyes. "I heard what you said to my Martian, Doc. He's stubborn and sort of stupid—a lot more stupid than I realized. But you tried hard."

"Thanks a lot," I said sourly.

"Maybe he can't help it. He's the last of his kind. Or perhaps the first—I don't know. I feel sorry for him. He's worse off than I was in North Africa."

Suddenly I felt inspired. "Why don't you take over his therapy, until each spring, of course."

Mr. M pursed his lips. "I think you're making a bargain with me. No one else did that before. I stay sane—until spring—and then I bring him in for therapy?"

"We could try it."

"I suppose it *is* up to me to cope with this alien, because he does like it here on Earth—I didn't know that before—and he's quite happy most of the year until spring comes—and goes, too quickly. What will you and I do every spring—review the progress I'm making on the Martian?"

"That's a good idea."

"Can I come to your private office? I'm sick of being a disabled vet."

"Okay."

"But I'm still worried about the million shades of green!" he said plaintively. A fat tear rolled down his cheek and his mouth crumpled.

"Teach the Martian how to enjoy them—in the brief moment of their existence. Being angry because they don't last will destroy

that moment."

He wiped away the tear. "I suppose you could be right."

"Thanks."

"But wrong, too, because—hey! yes!—the memory of the colors lasts forever!"

"Even if minds don't."

"That's your opinion. The Martian and I know better. Memories stay in the web of life somehow. Look at Mars!"

The Interpersonal stopped speaking and reached for the plate of cookies that went with the pudding she had rejected.

The Oldest Member smiled and even chuckled softly, but surprised everyone by saying nothing.

"That's the end of the story?" asked the psychiatric resident. "Aren't you going to tell us what happened after that?"

"Mr. M was discharged a week or so after the conversation I have just reported," said the Interpersonal.

"But he must have been still hallucinating," said one of the more orthodox Pshrinks.

"Not exactly. He never hallucinated actively again except for a week in early spring. Then, as he had promised, he came to see me in my private practice. He never had to be hospitalized again, mainly—I think—because he felt sorry for the Martian. He went back to commercial art for a living, very successfully, for the wild coloration his left hand painted became nicely integrated with the drawing precision of his right hand. He also had a few moderately successful shows of his kooky paintings, the sort that are both charming and humorous. He was a happy man."

"Did you ever get a painting?"

"I told him he shouldn't give me one and I shouldn't buy one because I didn't want anything to interfere with the work we did. That was my intellectual reason. Actually I was afraid to know what I would choose or what he would give me. It doesn't matter now, since he died last fall at a respectably advanced age, peacefully, in his sleep. He left me this in his will, and oddly enough, I received it today."

She unwrapped the rectangular object that had been beside her chair and stood up holding the canvas so the Pshrinks Anonymous could see it.

With a gust that blew out his silver moustache, the Oldest Member expelled his breath in what may have been relief. "He must have known that no one could have done it better."

The Interpersonal nodded. "Early spring—all the greens—on canvas. I shall hang it in the entrance hall of my analytic institute so everyone can look at it and feel better."

The Oldest Member remained seated as the other Pshrinks left to return to their offices and the listening posts behind their couches.

The Interpersonal wrapped up the painting and said, "Care to tell the rest of the story?"

The Oldest Member grunted.

The Interpersonal adjusted her eyeglasses and peered at him. "I was given to understand that Dr. Blank eventually went into analysis."

"Um."

"He'd have been a tough case for anyone."

"Um. His analyst failed."

"I disagree," said the Interpersonal. "I heard that Dr. Blank ended up as a brilliant general-hospital administrator, having left psychiatry—clearly the wrong field for him."

"Um."

"It seems that he chose a therapeutic location for his new job. Wasn't it somewhere in the southwest—in a desert area?"

"Some allergies are better in the desert," said the Oldest Member. "Some humans are more alien than others, I suppose."

"I've often thought that if there were aliens from outer space lurking around, it's probably because they're in love with our living planet. Of course, that cuts down on the drama, doesn't it?"

"Not at all. Come along," said the Oldest Member, rising. "Let's walk through the park while I smoke my cigar, and take a look at the million shades of green coming up through the snow."

THROUGH TIME & SPACE WITH FERDINAND FEGHOOT X!!

by Grendel Briarton

art: Tim Kirk

Mirage Press, Mr. Briarton's publishers, are threatening to unleash another volume of Feghoots upon us. Meanwhile . . . enjoy!

In 3227, the Society for the Aesthetic Rearrangement of History presented its coveted Tempus Award to Ferdinand Feghoot. "Mr. Feghoot," said Dr. Corydon Bramahpootra, its president, "by going back to 1819 and saving Reverend Sylvester Gerbil of the London Missionary Society from the enraged natives of Navinavi, you prevented the South Seas disaster that followed his death in all other continua. Besides, armed only with a fowling piece and a boar spear, you held the primitives off for five hours until the return of your time-shuttle. You are truly a hero!"

Feghoot accepted the award—an antique alarm clock in amber—to tumultuous applause. "I wasn't really heroic," he said modestly. "I just didn't like the alternative."

"*Dear* Mr. Feghoot!" shrilled a small, twittering news person. "Those dreadful savages were supposed to be *cannibals*—would they really have *eaten* you?"

"Well," he replied, "their cannibalism wasn't only for protein. It was ritualistic. If they admired you as an adversary, they would gobble up just certain parts—to acquire your strength, wisdom, and courage."

"The *beasts!* Didn't you just simply *loathe* them?"

"Why should I?" said Ferdinand Feghoot. "They were men after my own heart."

EARTHCHILD RISING

by Sharon Webb

art: Frank Borth

I.

Children. Long lines of children in the gray dawn. Soldiers silhouetted in the mist. Barbed wire.

It started on August 1—the day before Kurt Kraus's fifteenth birthday. The day was hot and muggy from the morning's early rain, but a breeze cooled him as he rode. His narrow bike tires shushed through the shallow puddles, echoing the slap and chop of Tampa Bay against its restraining sea-wall.

The little bike radio picked up the street beacon, "*. . . Swann Avenue. You are now entering Old Hyde Park. . . .*" He switched off the receiver and steadied his oboe case with a touch as he veered left, wheeling abruptly back in time. His bike tires jogged unevenly now over the brick-lined street of the restoration.

As he rode past the old-fashioned shops, the smell of fresh hot doughnuts hung in the air. He slowed and eyed the bakery tentatively, but he was late. He didn't have time to stop. Maybe later he would. After rehearsal.

A bell clanged behind him. He swung his bike toward the curb as the bright yellow trolley clacked down its track in the center of the street.

He stopped for a moment, watching as the car paused and discharged several people. Two of them walked toward him, a girl with red braids and a clarinet case, and a tall thin boy about Kurt's age. Late too.

He waved and pedaled on, turning his bike onto the grounds of the old brick junior high school that was now the Wilson Arts Consortium.

He got off under the shade of an ancient live oak and pushed his bike into the lock-slot. When it engaged, he dropped a coin into the machine and pocketed the key he received.

Grabbing his oboe case, he jogged around the building to the side door of the auditorium. He didn't hear music. Hadn't they started?

He darted into the open door. The members of the Tampa Youth Symphony spilled from the stage into the aisles in knots and clumps. No one was warming up—no scales, no arpeggios. Few of the instrument cases had been opened, and Mr. Hernandez was nowhere in sight.

He stopped, clutching his oboe case, staring in puzzlement around him. "What's going on?"

A few heads turned toward him, students from his ninth grade

class at Consolidated. A girl holding a silver flute said, "Haven't you heard?"

"Heard what?"

"It was on the news all morning," said an olive-skinned boy.

"Last night, too," said another. "Late. None of us slept after that."

"Imagine," said the first girl. "We've been eating and drinking the stuff and we didn't even know— And all the time we were changing."

Kurt grabbed the girl's arm. "What are you talking about?"

"You really don't know?" She looked at him in surprise. "I'm talking about the process. The Coalition sent World Health all over the world with it—even out to L-5 Center. And nobody knew."

"That's because of the renegades in Argentina. They got the process too," said an olive-skinned boy. "They gave it to everybody in their country. WorldCo couldn't hold it back when *they* had it, could they? There'd have been a revolution."

Kurt frowned in annoyance. "Hold what back? What are you talking about?"

The girl's fingers caressed the silver flute. "The process. We're all immortal now."

Her words didn't make any sense to him. "What are you talking about?"

"We're not going to die. We're never going to get old or sick. We're all going to live forever."

"Not *all*." A young man about twenty turned toward them. His fingers tightened and relaxed over the handle of his violin case. "Not all," he repeated. "It only works on kids." He looked at each of them in turn. "Kids your age. Or younger. Nothing's changed for the rest of us."

Kurt looked at him. The young man's words echoed through his mind. . . . *Nothing's changed for the rest of us*. . . . The full significance of those words seemed to elude him and yet there was something wrong with them, something utterly wrong. Because if they were true, then *everything* had changed.

Slowly, he walked up the steps onto the stage. His mind rejected what he had heard—pushed it aside to be examined later on. He came to his chair and sat down. For a moment, he looked out at the empty seats of the auditorium. The sun shone through the tall windows and sent rectangles of light to play among the shadows. The sun seemed very bright to him, the shadows very dark. He opened the shabby black case, stuck his reed into a little tube of water, and began to fit his oboe together.

He examined the music set out on his stand—Khachaturian's *Masquerade Suite,* Sucharitkul's *Rebirth.* He placed his reed and began to warm up.

The door clanged open at the rear of the auditorium and rumbled shut. Jorge Luis Hernandez walked down the center aisle clutching his briefcase. At the sight of him, the knots and clumps of players dissolved and moved toward the stage. Instrument cases snapped open, shut.

Hernandez stepped to the podium, opened his case, and removed a stack of music. He spoke to no one. As the orchestra began to warm up, he riffled through a score, set it aside, and opened another. He stared at it, his head bent over the music. Broad fingers slicked a wavy mass of thick white hair. He stood like this for some time, then he tapped three times with his baton. Kurt sounded an **A** and the musicians began to tune.

When they had finished, Hernandez shifted slightly. A silence came. Seventy pairs of eyes stared at him. Fingers touched wooden bows and silver keys. He spoke at last, his soft accented voice carrying over the hush. "These day— These day is one to be always remembered." He looked from one to another of the young musicians. Sunlight glistened on the moisture in his dark eyes. "We will play the *Rebirth* now. We will listen to what it tells us."

He lifted his baton. It moved. Concentrating, Kurt began to play the opening solo. The haunting notes of his oboe hung in the warm air. String basses and 'cellos began to throb below his song in almost imperceptible accompaniment. A flute conjoined, and then a muted brass choir. Gradually the sound grew and swelled into a celebration, an exultation, of life.

Then it was over. Jorge Luis Hernandez stood for a long moment with his head bowed. When he raised it, a bright tear traced down his face. "Thank you." He shook his head slowly from side to side. "Who will conduct you in a hundred years? In two? You will be magnificent." His hands dropped to the score. He closed it and placed his music in the briefcase with hands that trembled. "I cannot go on today."

He turned and walked down the steps and down the center aisle, sunlight glinting on his white hair. At the door he turned and looked at them once again. "Thank you." The wide door clattered in his grasp and he was gone.

Kurt stepped out into the blaze of late morning sun. Carrying his oboe case, he walked toward the back of the old building. He wasn't

ready to go yet, to leave the feel of the old part of town. He moved to the shade of a wide live oak and sat on a cracked concrete bench below it. Dark roots ran through the gray dirt. A sprig of grass struggled at the end of the bench.

Three little girls skipped rope on an empty tennis court. The rope snapped its rhythm in counterpoint to the thud of small feet.

"O-ver, o-ver. Evie-ivy o-ver.
O-ver, o-ver. Evie-ivy un-der."

The game broke up when one was called to lunch. Two of the children headed arm-in-arm across the court. The other, proprietor of the jump rope, swung it in a lazy loop over her shoulder and walked toward the alley that led to the front of the building.

He stood up then and picked up his case. In the distance, the little girl stood looking at something on the ground in the alleyway. As he drew closer, he saw what it was. In the rippling shadows a large toad sat half-in, half-out, of a shallow puddle. It had a piece of bread in its mouth, scavenged from someone's cast-off sandwich. Its mouth stretched comically over the bread. The little girl grinned.

Ahead, a truck rumbled into the alley. It sped up suddenly and she jumped back in alarm. Just as suddenly, it stopped. Inside, two young men looked out at the child.

"Watch out," she said. "You'll squash him."

One of the men spotted the toad and pointed. The truck began to move slowly toward the puddle, toward the toad.

"Don't. No, don't!"

The wheels rolled over the fat body of the toad, stopped, rolled back, rolled forward again.

The little girl's hands curled into fists. Shock glazed her eyes. "He wanted to live," she said. "He did. He wanted to live."

The truck rolled back and forth, back and forth again, flattening the body of the toad into the damp earth. The two men laughed a long time before they drove away.

He had never thought about the inevitability of his death before except in the most abstract of ways. He thought about it now—now that it would never happen. The hot sun drenched his skin with warm sweat and tightened his dark hair into thick tousled curls.

He looked at his hand, wide fingers gripping the handlebars of his bike. They would always look that way, he thought. Maybe bigger, as he grew, but always strong and brown from the sun.

Always. He tried to understand it. He had lived for fifteen years; he would live always. In the sun. But suns died. They lived and

died, didn't they? They blew up and burned out. The whole Universe was going to die.

It made him uneasy thinking about forever. It somehow shrank him to a speck. He pushed that part away, that big incomprehensible part of *always*, and substituted something manageable—he would live for a hundred years. And after that he would live for another hundred.

The blare of a horn startled him. A huge food transport thundered down the road nearly on top of him. He was in the wrong lane! He darted to the right. The transport cleared him by mere centimeters.

How could he have been so stupid? He hadn't paid attention at all. Heart pounding, he veered quickly into the bike lanes as a red and silver bubble bike sped past.

He could have been killed. He considered the thought. He could be squashed, mangled, cut up, shot. It was shocking. Someone who could live forever—longer than the sun—and never age could be snuffed out in an instant by a transport. Smashed flat like a toad under a wheel.

He paid attention after that, guiding his bike carefully along the wide boulevard. The hot sun glittered on the bay, but his sweat felt cold against his skin.

TampaTran disgorged a clot of passengers as he pushed his bike into his lock-slot. He looked up anxiously, scanning the group, looking for his parents. The passengers dispersed and spread by twos and threes toward the cluster of buildings.

He felt relieved that he hadn't seen them, and he felt a little ashamed to be relieved. But he wasn't ready yet. Not yet.

He pressed his card against the door scan and went in, pressing it again to summon the elevator. They were probably still at the hospital. The treatments took a long time.

He felt the familiar tightening in his stomach when he thought of his father—the hateful combination of pity and love and helplessness. Now, nearly every morning showed a change. He could sense the tumor growing when he looked at him, when he saw the lines of his facial bones protrude as the flesh fell away. His father—his monument—Richard Kraus. Now he spent his evenings at bars or drinking quietly in his study. He spent his nights with the red narcotic medeject that squatted on the night table, and when the narcotics failed, with shadowy walks through the darkened streets. His father.

It wasn't fair. Tears swam up in his eyes and he blinked them

away. He wanted to see him, wanted to talk about today and what it meant. But not just yet. Not yet.

The econdo was empty. It was warm inside, unpleasantly so. He jabbed absently at the summerstat as he always did, but it resisted his touch. His mother had locked it at 25 degrees. Next summer when the Ruskin fusion plant opened he intended to set that stat at two below icicle.

A tail thumped in welcome. Committee stretched and grinned his most charming doggie grin. Kurt rubbed the shaggy little head, and then, stricken with hunger, went into the kitchen. Committee, sensing a possible handout, trotted alongside.

He rummaged through the cabinet in search of nourishment and settled on a family-sized packet of stew. He pulled a bowl from the dispenser, clattered it full of stew pellets and stuck it into the bubbler. While he waited, he pawed in the drawer for a spoon and finished off half-a-liter of chocolate ice cream. The hairy aggregate, Committee, thumped his tail and was rewarded with the dripping remains.

The bubbler buzzed. Kurt extracted the stew and devoured it, washing it down with two glasses of milk. He tossed the empty bowl and glass in the recycler and deposited his dirty spoon in the sink. Committee plopped down on the floor and licked his paws. Kurt looked at him curiously. Did it work on dogs? Committee was only ten months old—not full grown yet. Maybe it worked on dogs too.

He went into the living room and keyed the computer for **IMMORTALITY.** He watched in dismay at the volume of flexi-sheets that poured out of the machine and fluttered to the floor. He'd never be able to read that much. Punching the **OFF** button, he gathered up the heap and thumbed through it, pushing discarded sheets into the recycle slot.

. . . the renegade band, La Sesenta, disseminated the Mouat-Gari Immortality Process to the millions of Argentina. Fearing wholesale insurrection, the World Coalition empowered the World Health Organization to alter the people's food and water supplies. . . .

. . . ineffective in adults. According to the individual stage of maturation, some children reach physical adulthood as early as thirteen, some, not until after seventeen. . . .

. . . process insures perfect replication of DNA in the body's cells. This, combined with the inhibition of the inflammatory response causes the body to resist infection. Invasion by bacteria and viruses still occur, but the body, in effect, ignores these agents. . . .

He pushed another handful of sheets into the recycle slot, but still

there were more:

. . . exception of trauma and certain poisons. Some metabolic and genetic disease processes will progress with fatal result in spite of the age of the child. . . .

. . . Mouat-Gari incorporates birth-control. Special inhibiting medications must be taken to offset the infertility the process confers. . . .

He found what he was looking for:

. . . with the exception of certain of the great apes, the Mouat-Gari has no effect on lower animals. . . .

He scratched the dog's ears. Committee moaned in pleasure. Letting the flexi-sheets drop to the floor, he gathered the dog to him, running his fingers through the rough coat. He thought of how fleeting some things were. He thought of his father. He sat there for a few moments petting his dog, staring at the flexi-sheets, but not seeing them. Finally, he focused on the one that lay on top:

COPENHAGEN—Within hours after the news of the Mouat-Gari process dissemination, a pilot aimed his small two-seater aircraft bearing a warhead of explosives into the midst of a children's concert here.

There were two hundred eight victims of the resulting explosion and fire. Seventy-eight died, the pilot among them.

He left a recorded message: "Hell's demons hold them by the process. Only death can give them back to God."

Kurt tried to practice, but the piano seemed hateful to him just then. He stared at the keys and at his broad tanned fingers above them. He had to get his practicing done before his parents got home. His father would need to sleep then.

He tried again, but he couldn't concentrate on the Bartok Suite. The notes evaded his fingers. It was a relief when the door opened; it was a tightening of his gut too. Not yet. He didn't want to see his father yet.

But it was his older brother Eric, wearing his track suit and muddy shoes, tossing his card, his towel, his lunch sack on the table, spreading an air of cheerful disarray. A smile bent his lips and creased the corners of his gray eyes when he saw Kurt. "Hello, old timer."

A half-smile crept over Kurt's face in response, "You too. Old timer."

"Then you've heard."

He nodded, then looked away. "Does Dad know?"

Concern crossed the clear eyes. "I'm sure he does—by now." He plopped down on the piano bench next to Kurt and swung an arm over his hunched shoulders. "He'll be happy for us. I know he will."

"We're going to lose him." He felt the arm give him a rough squeeze. He tried to smile. "Nothing's the same is it? We're going to lose all of them—Mom, Grandma—all of them after awhile."

"We always knew that, didn't we?"

He thought about it, "I guess so." But there wasn't much conviction in his voice.

"And we've got each other. We'll always have each other." Eric gave him a playful shove, "Now move over. You've hogged the piano long enough. You're not the only virtuoso, you know."

Kurt grinned, got up and settled on the couch as Eric began to play a Chopin etude. As he listened, his critical ear asserted itself as it always did. Eric's technique was sloppy. He was fairly musical, but not enough—not enough to charm an audience into overlooking his deficiencies. Kurt watched Eric's long fingers sweep over the keys, then he looked at his own. He was better. He had more talent, more music in him.

His mother knew it too from the time he'd been old enough to sit at the piano, and later when he'd blown the first tentative notes into an oboe. She'd never said so; she didn't have to. He could see it in the way her dark eyes shone when he played and in the way she pushed him, giving him harder and harder music to play, until the day she said she'd taught him all she could and sent him to Dr. Rouk at the university.

A discord clanged on Kurt's ear, but Eric played on, ignoring the finger mistake. Kurt's fingers moved on his lap undoing the error, racing on to bring the piece up to tempo. He wondered what it would be like to change places with Eric, see with his eyes, hear with his ears. It didn't seem possible that Eric's ears functioned the same as his. He considered the thought. He wouldn't want to change with him—really. And yet, if he could have just *some* of the things Eric had—the free and easy way; the quick sense of humor that spilled over to cheer other people when they were down; the way he had with girls. Girls. How did Eric always know what to say to them? He *never* did. Only later when he was alone would things come to him—all the funny witty things he should have said. Everybody thought he was aloof. Well, it was better to be that way than stupid, wasn't it? It was better to keep his mouth shut than to let a bunch of dumb words fall out. But, maybe when he got to be sixteen, like Eric, he'd be more like him. He stared at his brother for a moment and then sighed. He wouldn't want to bet on it.

Committee's ears perked, sending one to stand erect in splendid asymmetry. He gave a welcome bark and ran to the door. Carmen

Kraus pushed it open, holding it for her husband.

Eric stopped playing and swiveled on the piano bench to look toward the door.

Richard Kraus. He moved like a puppet with stiff wire for strings. He leaned on his wife for support. With breath that came fast with exertion, he spoke. His voice barely carried to Kurt.

What had he said? "What, Dad?"

"Hot. It's hot." The words were an exhaled sigh. He slumped into a chair and looked up at his wife, "Honey—"

"I'll get it." She moved toward the bedroom and in a moment was back carrying the red medeject kit. She handed it to him. He pressed the lever and a drinking tube popped up. He sucked deeply. He sat then, not speaking, not moving.

Kurt twisted uneasily. It seemed to him that the silence was heavy. Like sound waves too low to hear, slapping against his face with a slow and steady rhythm. "Did—Did you hear the news, Dad?" he said against the silent breakers.

His father's lips rose in a part-smile, quavered, fell. "I heard." He sucked again from the drinking tube, rose, and walked slowly into the bedroom.

Carmen Kraus' dark eyes looked stricken. "He's tired. So much pain—" She smiled brightly at Eric, at Kurt. "It's wonderful news. He's just tired." She fled to the bedroom to see after her husband.

That evening while Richard Kraus kept to his room, the boys and their mother ate a light supper and stared into the little holo set on the table. The news was predictably all about the Mouat-Gari process.

There were other news stories too—the stock market crisis, and the homicides. There had been eleven murders in Tampa since midnight. All of the victims were less than eighteen years old.

II.

On the next night, Kurt's birthday supper was interrupted by a shooting down the hall. The two little Gomez girls lay dead, victim of an uncle who baby-sat while his sister labored in Women's Hospital with her third child. For reasons of his own, he had first killed the children's cat, strangling it slowly with his belt.

As police led the man away down the long hall punctuated with half-opened doors and startled faces, the man looked at Kurt. There was a half-smile on his face and a look in his eyes that the boy would

never forget—a look that suggested triumph.

When the police had gone, the people slipped into the halls, each just outside his own door, to talk in low shocked whispers while the little cake with its fifteen candles stood forgotten in the kitchen.

The incident was mentioned on the late news, but the lead story concerned the fire-bombing of the Temple Terrace recreation department during a puppet show. Seventeen children were dead, forty-seven injured.

Mention of the fire-bombing made the late national news, but the story was eclipsed by two other fire-bomb episodes, one in a summer camp near Aspen, the other in a children's hospital in Memphis. There were similar incidents in Budapest, Kobe, and Christchurch.

Within the week, national news had ceased calling the incidents murder. A new euphemism entered the language—deprocessing.

By the tenth day, one hundred ninety-two children had been deprocessed in the Tampa Bay area.

III.

The world declared war on its children. In an attempt to regain control, the shaky World Coalition mustered its troops. Government propagandists penned soothing homilies, suggesting that the process might soon be effective for everyone. Sales of liquor and mind-altering drugs were severely curtailed. Strict curfews were enforced. The ranks of law-enforcement agencies, not immune to the war against the children, buckled under the work load. The deprocessings continued.

Religious leaders, deadlocked in internal strife, temporized as a relentless Shiva stalked the land.

When WorldCo's propaganda failed to defuse the situation, the government, in response to the people's cry of "Do something," overreacted. Operating under the theory that a media spreading news of violence throughout the world promulgated more, WorldCo silenced networks and wire services. The media, hobbled by the bureaucratic blanket that muffled world and national airwaves, gave out only such messages as WorldCo deemed fit. No news of outside conditions reached the city now, and so the attention of Tampans turned inward, feeding more on rumor than on fact, as local news sources tried to cope with the problem.

Though traffic continued to flow through the main arteries of Tampa, the sidestreets, the yards, the playgrounds took on a look

of neglect. The opening of school was delayed indefinitely while the teachers, faced with economic ruin, gathered in grim-faced sessions with union leaders.

Pregnant women, afraid to enter the hospitals, panted in labor in their homes behind locked doors, attended by those they trusted. Often their trust was betrayed. Pediatric wards filled with trauma cases.

Psychologists and psychiatrists at the University of South Florida attempted to explain the anomaly, producing conflicting theories, while marauding bands of young men prowled through the streets with knives and chains.

The public outcry grew. Law-abiding citizens demanded that something be done. The mayor of Tampa collapsed with a bleeding ulcer. The beleaguered police, caught in the middle between a polarized populace, walked off their jobs in large numbers.

For a short time, Tampa grew quiet and then as economic conditions worsened, outbursts began again. People who had never before contemplated the reality of death were forced to examine their lives. Small groups made not quite sane by jealousy and rage spread their hysteria.

The sick fire smouldered, sputtered into life, flamed, smouldered again. It crept into the roots of the city and consumed them. The terror spread. No child was safe.

Weeds began to press green sprouts through the dirt hollows under playground swings.

Moko, the chimpanzee, sat hunched in her cage in the deserted Busch Gardens and mourned the death of her baby, killed by a single shot as he clung to her fur and suckled.

IV.

Kurt blew into the nearly finished oboe reed, and listened critically to its high-pitched crow. It felt stiff. He unfolded his round-tipped reed knife and began to scrape the lay of the reed with the razor-sharp edge. Across the table, Eric shuffled dog-eared cards and dealt himself another hand of solitaire. In a few minutes he tossed the cards in an untidy heap and looked at his watch. "I wish we could have gone with Dad."

Kurt looked up sharply, "You think he'll be all right, don't you?"

Eric stared at the pile of cards before he said, "You know, they said they wouldn't do the implant early. Because of the risks."

Kurt nodded. They wouldn't do it unless—until the pain couldn't be controlled any other way. He tried to imagine the little wires snaking into his father's skull. He'd be free of pain then, with the push of a button. But being free of pain meant not much more time. Not much more. He felt tears spring to his eyes. Embarrassed, he stood up and strode briskly to the window to hide them. The grounds below were deserted. He could imagine thousands of other kids looking out through layers of window glass onto empty yards and playgrounds. It wasn't fair. His eyes squeezed shut. He wanted to be at the hospital with his father. He wanted to hold his hand, tell him it was all right, tell him— Tell him he loved him.

He stood at the window for a minute or two, then he spun around. "I'm going out."

Eric's mouth opened, then closed before he said, "That's pretty stupid."

"I don't care. I'm going."

"Where?"

"I don't know. To— To Grandma. I'm going to see Grandma."

"Why?"

"I don't know." His voice rose, "I don't *know*." He threw open a drawer and found his lock-slot key.

Eric was up, moving to his side, "Are you sure?"

He pressed his lips together. He nodded.

"Want me to go with you?"

He shook his head and turned toward the door, then stopped, went back and picked up the little folding reed knife and slipped it into his boot. Then, as Eric watched silently, he opened the door to the hallway and was gone.

He turned his radio off and pedaled silently through back streets and alleyways toward Old Hyde Park. Once he wheeled past an old man who stared at him with shocked eyes and said, "Go home, boy! Go back home."

He came to a section of old wooden houses that turned their faces inward to a paved courtyard. He jumped off, shoved his bike behind a sprawling hibiscus bush and clattered up the steps and across the gray porch of the old house. He pulled open the sagging screen and tapped on the door.

A pair of sharp eyes peered through the little window. The door wheezed open. "Kurt! Good God. Kurt." The old woman seized him by the arm and hustled him inside. She pushed the door shut and locked it. "What are you doing here?"

He didn't know what to say. He stared at his feet and at the rug that had been blue once, but was now a faded indecisive gray; he stared at the walls with their sagging shelves filled with books and magazines; he stared at the ceiling where an industrious house spider toiled against gravity. He looked anywhere but at her face. Why *had* he come?

When at last he brought his eyes to hers, he felt a hard lump growing in his throat. He broke into unexpected tears and found them abjectly humiliating. Without wanting to, he began to babble, exposing parts of himself he had thought well-covered—the parts that were still frightened little boy. It mortified him that the words came tumbling out of his mouth as if they had a will of their own. His needs, his hopes, and overall—above all—his fears. His daddy was going to die—and he was going to be left alone in a world too bent out of shape to recognize.

She hugged him to her and then held him at arm's length and searched his face, "Oh, Kurt." The top of her head reached only to his nose. Sharply intelligent gray eyes peered out from a wrinkled face translucent with age. She was seventy-eight and not his grandmother, but his great-grandmother. He had never known his grandmother. She had died when his father was born.

She bustled around setting things right. She ensconced him on a hard chair in her kitchen and set her battered copper kettle to boil on the old stove. She would "fix him a cup of tea" because tea was her panacea for all ills, real and imagined. She filled his hands with cookies from a cracked ceramic jar in the shape of a leering frog, and when his mouth was full and crumbs dotted his chin she asked him questions. While they talked, the water boiled away to nothing in the kettle until, with a loud crack, the spout fell off and clattered onto the stove top.

"Dammit to hell!" She leaped up, scurried to the stove, and snatched at the pot. On inspection, the bottom of the kettle was black, but apparently intact. "Melted the solder." She deposited the remains in the sink and turned on the cold water tap. A cloud of steam rose and enveloped her face in a billowing cloud. "Damn. I've had that pot for forty years." She held the spout up to the kettle, fitting it back for a moment. Then she laid it in the sink with a rueful grin. "I guess I got my money's worth."

"Can you fix it?" He felt vaguely guilty as if the ruin of the teapot was his fault.

"Probably not. Anyway, I have another one." She opened a cabinet below the stove and rummaged around, head and shoulder disap-

pearing inside its murky interior. In a moment she reappeared bearing a dusty battered box. A shiny chrome pot emerged. "Had it for years, but I never used it before." She rinsed it, filled it with water and set it on the stove. "Bet it won't last like the old one did, though."

She sat down next to him, patted his hand, and suddenly began to chuckle. It was infectious. He felt a smile creep to his lips. "What's funny?"

"Me. Crazy old woman. Why would I need a pot to last another forty years? That would make me a hundred and eighteen then, wouldn't it?"

He kept on smiling, but his eyes widened, and they felt wet to him. His lips began to tremble and he caught the lower one between his teeth.

"Now I've done it," she chided herself. "I've gone and made you feel bad again." She patted his hand briskly causing it to thump against the table top. "Well, don't pay any attention to me. Crazy old woman. I never was any good at being a grandmother." She fumbled for her cigarettes, removed a crumpled one and lit it.

He watched, fascinated. The end of the cigarette was bent at a crazy angle, but it seemed to draw well.

"I never was any good at being a mother either," she said through a cloud of smoke. "Never had any training. I would have made a pretty fair violinist, but when I got married I had to take an executive position—First Vice-President in charge of the children. The Peter Principle at work. It's a helluva thing to trust children to incompetents." She chuckled and thumped his hand fondly, "Fortunately, they seem to turn out pretty well in spite of it."

He grinned at her. "I think the water's boiling away again."

"Hell and damn." She leaped up and yanked the pot from the stove, then began to pour it, bubbling, into the cups. Suddenly she stopped, set down the pot, and stared out of the window at the street beyond.

"What is it?"

A hand prodded the air in his direction, silencing him. Something held her, something in the yard that caused her eyes to narrow and made a little lump of muscle tick at the angle of her jaw. She backed away from the window toward the hall, then she was gone. He heard the creak of a closet door on its hinges and then a muffled thump. When she came back, the sun glinted against black metal in her hands. She fished bullets from a little cardboard box and inexpertly loaded the antique Luger.

"What is it?" he whispered. He felt a creeping along the back of

his neck like a cold breeze scurrying through his hair. "Who's out there?" He got to his feet and moved toward the window.

"Get back."

He fell back into the shadows, then cautiously peeped out. He saw five of them, five men with guns and rusty-looking chains slung from wide belts. They stood at the corner of the house across the way. A thick-set man with dirty blond hair and pudgy fingers squeezed the last of his beer into his mouth, then tossed the empty polybag toward a Brazilian pepper bush. It hung for a second on a branch, then flopped to the alleyway below.

He heard the snap of the Luger being cocked. She can't hold off five men with that thing, he thought in dismay. She was going to get them both killed. "Grandma, no!"

"Sh-s-sh. It's all right. I had it worked on when all the trouble started."

"Grandma, please," he whispered urgently. "They don't know I'm here."

"Where's your bike?"

"I hid it behind a bush."

Some of the tenseness went out of her face. "Thank God." But her hands still gripped the Luger. He could see the hard angle of her jaw through the translucent skin. He saw it tighten, relax, tighten again. "Scum," she said, staring out of the window. "Goddamn scum."

The men were laughing at something, a loud braying laugh that bellowed across the little yard. Then they were moving, walking away toward the west with the sun glinting on the loops of chain. In another minute, they were out of sight.

Her breath came out in a little sighing gasp; her shoulders sagged. She laid the gun on the counter top and looked at him with a face crumpled into a thousand folds. "I lost my Linda when she had your daddy. I'm going to lose him too. But I'm not going to lose you." She began to weep, and this time he was the one who patted her hand and awkwardly caressed the thin stooped shoulders.

When charcoal shadows crawled beneath the moon, Kurt left his grandmother's house. The branches of the hibiscus rustled in the darkness as he extracted his bike and wheeled silently toward the street past black houses with yellow window-eyes. No porch lights shone.

He kept to the side streets, pedaling quickly, casting frequent glances over his shoulder. An owl cried from somewhere just behind

him. Cold rippled down his spine.

He could smell the salt bay ahead. He avoided Bayshore Boulevard and rolled quietly down back streets under the night shadows of live oaks hung with beards of Spanish moss. Warm air rising from the land rushed toward the cool of the bay. The breeze whispered through the leaves and the moss-curls causing tarry shadows to creep and shudder in the moonlight.

Light suddenly splashed from an alleyway and washed the street just ahead of him. He veered sharply, skidding to the right along the gutter nearest the alley. Backpedaling, he slid to a stop, crunching a pile of dry oak leaves under his tires.

The light bobbed and swung toward him, away, toward him again. His heart pounded in his ears. No place to turn off. No side street, only driveways. He'd have to turn around. He slid off the bike, turning it back. He moved in a creeping arc, praying, cursing silently, as leaves shattered in his wake exploding the silence.

Light sprayed over him. "Got one!"

He leaped on the bike, pedaling frantically as something hissed through the air.

The length of chain sang against his ribs snapping two of them as it wound in tight embrace. His breath escaped in a high-pitched wail before clenched teeth choked it off in an agonized spasm.

Off balance, he veered to the left, gripping the handlebars savagely as if to contain the pain. The chain fell away and clanked to the ground in stop-motion action as if each link struck pavement separately.

His legs pumped in nightmare slow motion. Each breath shrieked against the stab of his ribs. The bike crawled.

A shout behind him—meaningless syllables buffeting—"St–ah–ah–p-p-p h–h–h–i–m-m-m. . . ."

Whine. A hot whine. It buried itself, its whine, in the flesh of his shoulder. Hot. Hot. Keep going. Got to keep going. Hot. Dark street. Dark place. Dark . . .

He never remembered how he got home. He remembered compulsively pushing a blood-stained bike into a lock-slot. And then—What then? Crouching. Crouching in a room— Elevator? In the elevator. Sick in the elevator. His shirt was off.

He dabbed at his mouth with his shirt, trying to wipe away the sour vomit. Blood trickled down his chest. His pants were soaked. Oh God, his pants were soaked. He rubbed at the wet with his wadded shirt, staring at it foolishly as it turned to red in his hands.

The elevator opened to the night-lit hall. He teetered toward his door. How to open it? He swayed in confusion. Had to use his card, but his pants were wet. Couldn't he— Knock. He could knock. His fingers splayed against the door in a sticky pat. Oh God, oh God. Please.

He leaned his head against the jamb. Please? His fingers stretched along the unyielding door. He drew them up into a red claw that scrabbled against it.

The door fell open.

He swayed in the entrance. "Mama?"

Carmen Kraus stared at her son. Her mouth twisted open, her throat muscles worked, but the scream aborted in a horrible gagging sound.

"Mama. Help me—"

It was Eric who pulled him into the room. Eric who stood staring for a moment and then eased him to the floor and ran for towels. He threw a pile of them beside him, pressing one against the wounds, sliding another under his head. "We've got to get him an ambulance."

She stared at Eric as if he spoke a foreign language.

"Call an ambulance."

She began to shake her head. It moved back and forth like a wind-up toy.

"Mama!"

"I can't, I can't, I can't." She pressed both fists against her face as if to stop the terrible shaking of her head.

Eric pressed Kurt's hand against the wadded towel. "Hold it. Mash hard so the bleeding stops." He scrambled to his feet and ran to the telephone.

Carmen Kraus stood over Kurt. White streaks curved around her mouth and nose enclosing them in a blanched parenthesis. It seemed to him something to focus on. The mouth was a dash within the parenthesis; it began to work, "I can't. I can't go back there. Don't you see? Don't you?"

He clutched the wadded towel to him and stared at the mouth, at the white lines that punctuated it. Sweat trickled over his scalp drawing dark hair into damp curling tangles.

"I've already gone to the hospital today. I sat at a bed. I can't go back there. You can't expect me to go back there." Her voice grew fainter as if she were going away, but the mouth still hung over him, moving, stretching itself into different shapes: O's and =’s, a thin dash. Then he couldn't hear the voice at all, but only the rush

of his own blood pulsing in his ears, a shaggy windy sound that blew a faint F sharp through his head.

When the two men came, pushing a stretcher between them, he felt a hand clutching his. He came back from somewhere far away and looked up into Eric's face. "Grandma—"

"What? What, Kurt?"

"Grandma—" He strained to project his voice past the rushing note in his head. "Tell her— Tell her I'm all right."

The doors marked **EMERGENCY** splayed open. Hands lifted him from the ambulance stretcher to another. Someone switched on the stretcher radio receiver. Over the faint hiss of static, a woman's voice murmured in his ear, "*. . . welcome to Tampa General Hospital. Be calm. Do not be afraid. You will receive the best of care. Be calm . . .*" The voice dropped fainter until the message became subliminal.

Someone covered him with a red blanket. Then the stretcher turned crazily and jogged onto a track. Only half-aware, he felt himself moving.

Beyond a doorway, another radio beacon. The voice was saying, "*. . . now entering Triage Area One. A doctor or nurse will take care of you. You are in good hands. You are now entering Triage Area One. A doctor or nurse will . . .*"

A nurse peered down at him. She threw back the blanket, snapped a pulse cot on his finger and wrapped a blood-pressure sensor on his arm. The sensor tightened and he moaned. He felt the soggy towel peel away from his chest. The nurse sprayed something icy on his shoulder and ribs. Soft pink foam rose in a soothing blanket over his wounds.

"Can you tell me your name?"

He stared at her face. It blurred then focused.

"Tell me your name."

"K—Kurt."

Her soft fingers ran over his head, his neck. "You're going to be fine, Kurt. Just fine." Fingers probed his abdomen, his groin. A light blazed into his eyes.

The nurse pressed a button and gave the stretcher a shove. He trundled away.

"*. . . entering Trauma Area Three. Be calm. All is well. You are receiving the best of care. Be calm. All is well. You are receiving the best of care. . . .*"

The brilliant lights overhead danced insanely above him, then

everything went very black.

"Stop that." A restraining hand captured his flailing arm. "Lie still. You're going to pull out that tube if you don't lie still."

He blinked and tried to focus through a gray haze. Something stung his arm. He reached over to rub it.

"Lie still. You've got a unit of Hemodex going in that arm." The face of a young nurse came into focus. "You lost a lot of blood. That's what the Hemodex is for. You're going to be all right."

He tried to say, "Water," but it came out sounding like a croak. The girl seemed to understand though. She dabbed at his lips with something wet that smelled of lemon. "You can have some water in a little while. Now sleep."

He did.

He woke with a clear head and a fierce pain in his ribs, but he felt much stronger. He lay in a hospital bed and the nurse was removing the empty Hemodex container. "Feeling better?"

"Hurts. Can I have some water?"

She held a tube to his lips and he sucked deeply. Nothing had ever tasted so good. "Where's the pain?" she asked.

His fingers traced a path across his ribs and came to rest on a thick dressing on his shoulder.

She swung a coder from the wall. "Coming up. We'll get you some Endo—M." She pecked out a message on the coder and impressed it with a marker attached to her uniform. Then she touched the marker to the hospital bracelet he wore. A small door slid open in the wall. She took out the skinny tube inside and held it to his nose. "Take a deep breath." As he breathed in, she squeezed the tube. Pain stabbed in his chest from the breath, but it faded almost at once and receded in a dull haze. He felt lightheaded.

"You'll buzz for a few minutes," she said; "then you'll clear. Endo—M is great for pain. You're lucky. If it weren't for the process, you'd be hurting a lot worse."

He looked around the dimly-lighted room. "Where am I?"

"Four West. Pediatric Trauma and Orthopedics. I'll let you rest now. If you need anything, call me. My name's Betty."

She started to go, but he caught her arm. "Wait. My dad is a patient here. Richard Kraus. I want to see him."

She looked doubtful. "Nobody's allowed on this floor except staff, Kurt. Since the—the disturbances. Not even parents."

"He doesn't have to come here. I'll go there."

She shook her head.

"Please. He had surgery today—an implant. I don't even know how he is."

A line creased her brow, then smoothed away. "Well, I can find *that* out for you at least. What did you say his name was?"

He told her and she left the room. In a few minutes he heard her voice from the wall speaker. "Kurt. Your father's condition is satisfactory."

"I want to see him."

"I'm sorry. It just isn't permitted. Besides, your father isn't even in this section of the hospital. He's in the Hixon Oncology Wing. I'm really sorry, Kurt. But, he *is* doing all right." The speaker clicked off.

He felt his heart scurry into his throat. No one was in the darkened hall as he slipped out. He stopped and listened for the faint squishing sound of shoes against polished floor. He heard nothing. The clock on the wall whispered as its display rolled another digit of time away. Three twenty-two.

He felt as if he were breaking the law. No one had *told* him that he had to stay in his room. But it seemed that in hospitals all the rules were backwards. If you weren't told it was all right, then it wasn't. He had no idea what he would do if anyone caught him outside his room. He had no idea what *they* would do. The point was to stay out of sight because if anybody saw him they couldn't miss those baggy tossaway pajamas that marked him unmistakably as a patient.

He looked around in sudden dismay. He didn't know how to find his father. The nurse had said the Hixon Oncology Wing, but where was that? He knew what "oncology" meant—cancer, another word for cancer, the kind they hadn't learned how to cure yet.

To the left loomed an EXIT sign. That would probably take him to the stairs or to those motorized evacuation ramps. The elevators would be to the right then. He'd have a better chance with those.

He made his way up the hallway, staying close to the gray shadows along the wall. He heard a soft thump and then the squeak of wheels in need of lubrication. An alcove was just ahead. He darted into the darkened niche.

The wheels were coming closer. He looked wildly around. There were two doors in the alcove, one marked LINEN, the other said TRACTION. He pushed open the second door and slipped inside. He found himself pressed against an array of hardware. He backed into the closet, pulling the door just closed. In a moment, someone pushed

a stretcher into the alcove, turned, and left.

When he was sure that no one was still near, he opened the door. The stretcher stood against the opening. It glided to one side at the touch of his hand. He began to sidle past it, then stopped and ran his hand over the pillow and the thin mattress under it. The little radio receiver had wedged between the mattress and the side rails. He held it to his ear. Nothing. But that didn't matter. It would pick up near a beacon. It was going to lead him to his father.

He stepped off the elevator, glancing anxiously up and down the darkened hall. No one was around. He turned right and came to a T. The beacon whispered, "*. . . entering Hixon Oncology Wing. You are entering . . .*"

Behind a half-opened door, a light shone from a patient's room. He heard voices inside. He slipped past and the radio fell silent. Scarcely breathing, he scanned each door as he passed, looking for his father's name. He found it at the end of the hall.

He pushed against the door and it gave way at his touch. The room was dark, illuminated only by pink-hued streetlights shining through half-drawn blinds. The bed lay in stripes of shadow. He drew nearer, peering into the room, trying to see his father's face in the darkness. "Dad?" It was a whisper; it was a question. "Dad."

Richard Kraus stirred and looked at his son.

"Dad, it's me. Kurt. I came to see you," he added irrelevantly. He groped for his father's hand and found it. It felt dry and cool to his touch.

"Why are you here?" Richard Kraus's hand lay unmoving in Kurt's.

"I got hurt. But I'm all right now."

There was no response.

Kurt felt the silence thicken. "Dad, is everything all right?"

A short laugh as dry and cool as the hand he held came as answer. The silence pressed back, then the words, "Everything's *fine*, Kurt. Everything's *wonderful*. I even have a button to push to kill the pain." He laughed again. It ended in a spasm of coughing. The hand Kurt held pulled away and groped for a basin on the bedside table. Kurt held it to his lips while he coughed up a string of mucus.

Richard Kraus lay back against his pillow, catching his breath for a moment before he said, "I suppose I should ask how you got hurt." He turned slightly toward the boy. His face lay in shadow, with only a stripe of light across his lips. "Do you know something, Kurt? I can't really think about that now. I can't really care." His

mouth pressed shut, then opened again. The tip of his tongue slid along his upper lip. "That's one thing about being sick. It makes you look inside. After awhile what's outside doesn't matter anymore. You get selfish."

Kurt stared at his father and tried to understand how he felt. That must have been why he had never said anything about the process. He closed his eyes and tried to imagine what it was like for his father, what it was like to face the future and see it shrink down to months, then weeks, then less. "I've wanted to talk to you about—"

"About the rest of your life."

He reached for his father's hand again, touched it, felt it pull away.

Richard Kraus' lips pressed together, relaxed, pressed together again. "The truth is, Kurt, I just don't give a damn."

Kurt's face felt still and strange to him. He was glad it was dark in the room. He heard the drone of his father's voice; he heard it say, "I spent the last of my passion the day I knew you were immortal." The voice stopped, then started again, heavier and slower, in a tone the boy would never forget. "I wanted very much to kill you."

The words were knives and ice. *And Eric too?* the thought screamed. *And Eric too?* He sat in the blackness. He sat and stared and found a voice, lower, calmer than he would have believed. "Why didn't you?"

"I didn't have the strength."

He stood up. Suddenly an overwhelming weakness struck him and he clutched the back of the chair for support. He squeezed the chair with numbing fingers; he squeezed out the words. "I'm glad you didn't." His new-found voice was smooth ice. "Because, now I'm going to live forever. I'm going to watch you die."

He turned and walked to the door. He stood there with his hand on the knob, staring toward the bed, toward the silent man who lay there. Part of him wanted to take it all back, run to the bed and cry, "I didn't mean it." But something in him, something cold and rigid, held him back, and he opened the door and walked out.

V.

The bulletin had been repeated hourly for nearly a week on the world and national news. Broadcast in all languages, it was duplicated in sign language and subtitles. It emerged on flexi-sheets from

home computers. It was Brailled. The message assaulted the ear from public transportation speakers and interrupted piped-in music.

NOTICE

As a result of the current emergency, it has become necessary to admit all citizens under the age of eighteen years to protective custody. All children are to be taken to neighborhood collecting points on SAFETY DAY. Children will then be escorted to designated encampments by government representatives. This is a temporary measure. All children will be returned to their parents as soon as possible. Failure of adults to comply with this ruling or to hinder its enforcement has been declared by World Coalition a felony bearing the penalty of fine and imprisonment.

It must be emphasized that this is a temporary measure.

IT IS NECESSARY FOR THE SAFETY OF YOUR CHILD.

Mail-slots filled with directives:

TO PARENTS OF CHILDREN UNDER THIRTY-SIX MONTHS OF AGE

. . . will be cared for by skilled caretakers who have passed Government Standard Test 4098: Psychological Profile. . . .

YOUR SCHOOL-AGED CHILD

. . . from the ages of thirty-six months to eighteen years of age are to be accompanied by parent or guardian to neighborhood collection points. Each child is to bring no more clothing than he or she can carry without undue fatigue. Provide your child with a packaged lunch and personal hygiene items. Do not include large toys or other items. . . .

THE PROTECTED INFANT

. . . and formulas to be provided by special nurses who have passed standard psychological profile tests. . . .

YOUR HANDICAPPED CHILD

. . . up to the age of eighteen years, must be accompanied by parent or guardian to collection points designated HANDICAPPED. . . .

WorldCo allowed limited debate about SAFETY DAY on its airways. The debates were controlled, of course, weighted with logic and subliminal message. It was unfortunate, it was conceded, but necessary. It was to be a temporary situation.

Subliminal messages purred in every part of the world, in every language:

. . . Home in time for Christmas . . . for Chanuka . . . in time for

harvest . . . for festival . . . before the rains . . . before the snow. . . .

VI.

Kurt looked out of the living room window. In the live oak at the edge of the empty playground, a squirrel flirted its tail and nibbled at an acorn. Pink dawn colored the clouds to the east. Below the elevated tracks of TampaTran, a troop truck had discharged its cargo of soldiers. They sat on the damp grass under the big red-lettered sign:

SAFETY DAY COLLECTING POINT 76

It was almost time. His back-pack lay on the floor beside him. Not much space left, but he could squeeze it in. He turned to his open oboe case, pulled out the little reed knife, and slipped it into his boot. Snapping the instrument case shut, he slid it into the back-pack, pulled the flap over and latched it. Next to his pack, Eric's duffle lay half-open, a cornucopia of clothes and belongings spilling in disarray onto the floor. Eric was showering. Carmen Kraus still slept. She had stayed at the hospital until late last night.

Committee stretched, yawned, and wagged his tail. The effort served to exhaust him. He flopped flat on his belly, nose between paws, eyelids lowered to half-mast. Kurt scratched the dog's head between the ears and Committee's eyes slid shut. A sudden clatter and a female shriek from the kitchen brought them both to their feet.

"What's wrong?"

His grandmother stood at the counter pawing at a scattering of yellowish discs. One flipped on its side and rolled off onto the floor where it broke into a dozen pieces. The empty package next to the bubbler proclaimed—OM-LETTES.

She glared at the bubbler. "I hate those things. Believe it or not, Kurt, but when I was your age, a few people still kept chickens." She wrinkled her nose. "Now they don't even keep fresh eggs."

He rescued their breakfast and dropped the dehydrated discs into the bubbler through the clear plasti-port she had neglected to open.

She pressed her lips together in chagrin. "I was going to fix you boys a nice breakfast for your last morning here."

She broke off and turned toward the wall, blinking away the sudden moisture in her eyes. "Couldn't even do that. I should have stayed home."

Slightly embarrassed, he pulled out plates and poured glasses of

milk and cups of hot coffee.

Still half-asleep, Eric appeared at the door. He toweled his hair dry briskly as if that would rouse him. Kurt pulled out the pan and slid steaming Om-lettes onto the plates and put them on the countertop bar.

Four plates, three people. "Where's Mom?" asked Eric.

"Still in her room." Their grandmother rose. "I'll get her up."

The boys ate in silence. They were finished before the two women came into the room. Carmen Kraus' eyes were red and puffy. She had lost weight over the last few weeks and stress lines showed at the edges of her eyes and mouth. She looks old, Kurt thought in surprise. As old as his grandmother, in a way.

She ignored the food on her plate, and took only small sips of the coffee. Several times she seemed about to speak, but each time she'd look away, staring at the wall, or at the cup she held. Finally she said, "Aren't you two going to call your father before—before you go?"

"Sure, Mom," said Eric easily. "We'll do it now." He got up and headed for the living room, stopped, and looked at Kurt, "C'mon."

Kurt shook his head almost imperceptibly. He hadn't told anyone what his father had said. He couldn't. It made him ashamed to think about it. He shook his head again. They were all looking at him. He stared at his fingers, running the close-clipped nails against his palms.

His mother's voice was unbelieving, "Aren't you going to talk to your daddy?"

He felt old and at the same time he felt like a little kid. He wanted to cry, but all he did was shake his head.

Her voice rose. "You're leaving for God knows how long. And he's dying. You're not going to see him again, Kurt. *Not ever.*" Her voice was a shriek, "Now you get in there and call him."

He felt his jaw tighten. Cold trickled through him. He shook his head.

She slapped him with all the strength she had. He sat staring at her for a moment and then he stood up. "I can't, Mom." He walked out of the room and into the bathroom and locked the door.

He stayed there, locked away from them, until the wail of a siren signaled that Safety Day had begun.

A rise and fall of voices came from his mother's bedroom. He walked into the empty living room and looked through the window at the scene below. Already hundreds of people were gathering. He and Eric could be separated in that crowd. The thought was unten-

able. Committee trotted up and nudged him with a cold nose. He ruffled the dog's fur, and hugged him close. Then he went to a drawer and took out Committee's leash. The dog danced in delight at the prospect of a walk. "Not this time," he said softly. He wadded the leash and started to put it into his pack as Eric came into the room. "What's that for?" he asked.

"Just thought I'd need it." He squeezed the thin leash in his hand. It was something to tie the two of them together. He looked at Eric. "We don't want to lose each other—get separated or anything."

Eric looked at the leash, then back at Kurt, and nodded.

Their grandmother came out of the bedroom. "I guess it's time," she said. "I'll be going down with you. Your mother isn't feeling up to it. Now, hurry on and say 'goodbye.' "

When Eric kissed her, Carmen Kraus clung to him with pats and little cries. She turned a cold cheek to Kurt to receive his kiss. She didn't look at him; she didn't speak.

He squeezed her rigid shoulder. "Goodbye, Mom." When she didn't answer, he turned, picked up his pack and walked out of the room.

The guard barred the way with a rifle. "No one over eighteen beyond this point, ma'am."

The old woman clutched at the boys' arms. She seemed stricken. She looked from Eric to Kurt, then back again, "Well, this is where I get off."

They kissed her. Then Kurt took her hand and whispered, "Grandma, I couldn't call him. I just couldn't."

She searched his face and said, "If you couldn't, you couldn't." She thrust a brown package into his hands, "For you and Eric. For later."

He put the package in his pack and kissed her again, then he and Eric had to move on. Lines of children were boarding the TampaTran cars. Once they were pushed apart and lost sight of each other. When Kurt brought out the little dog leash, Eric clipped the other end to his belt.

They found seats together on a car, and fifteen minutes later, the train began to move. The children from the southern half of Hillsborough county were being relocated at the old abandoned army base, MacDill Field, not far from there.

Five minutes after their car started, it stopped abruptly. There were rumors of explosive charges on the tracks. When the train didn't move for several hours, the children on board ate their lunches. At sundown, soldiers came aboard with bottled water. There was no food. The children were hungry and the tiny restrooms

were beginning to smell. By ten that night, Kurt remembered the package his grandmother had given him. He opened it. It was full of the crumbly cookies that she always made. Most of them were broken.

He shared them with Eric, but when he tried to eat them, they seemed to dry his mouth and he had trouble swallowing.

Finally, the train began to move and they arrived at MacDill Field at three A.M.

VII.

Kurt lifted his pack to his shoulder again as the line began to move. He tugged at the dog leash. One end was clipped to his belt, the other attached to his brother's. "Wake up."

Eric, head cradled on a soiled canvas bag, opened his eyes. "Kurt?" He looked around uncertainly, shaking sleep from his head.

"Come on. There's food in the barracks up ahead. I can smell it." In the fine mist of rain, his black hair had tightened into thick tousled curls.

The line stopped again.

A little girl began to cry. Doubling her hands into small fists, she pummeled a girl of about twelve. "I'm hungry."

The girl dropped to her knees and captured the little fists. "I know, Cindy. I know." She hugged the child to her.

"Where's Momma?"

"Home." A look of pain came over the girl's face. "She's home."

"I wanna—wanna go home too." Gasping sobs stole her breath. "I'm hungry."

"I know. I know." The bigger girl fumbled at a sack and drew out half an apple. The flesh was brown, the skin shriveled. She looked at it longingly for a moment, then handed it to the child.

In half an hour the line began to move.

The outside door to the mess hall opened an inch. The soldier guarding the door said something to someone inside, then shouldered his rifle and stepped aside.

The door opened wide to a nearly empty hall. Other children still inside pushed out through double doors on the opposite wall.

The smell of hot stew came from the hall. Kurt, still leashed to his brother, pushed ahead, crowding into the space between serving table and steel railing.

The first of the children carried trays to the long tables, shoving body against body on rough benches, larger children helping smaller.

A fat woman in her fifties slopped stew into crockery bowls. Another woman cut bread in thick slices. A grim-faced sergeant prowled behind the serving line. A half-dozen other soldiers took up posts throughout the hall.

Kurt took his tray and headed in tandem with Eric toward a table.

"Jesus Christ!" The huge stew pot crashed to the floor propelled by a rifle butt. "Glass! There's ground glass in it!"

A soldier standing near Kurt upended his tray with a well-placed kick. A swipe of his hand sent Eric's bowl flying through the air. Other men ran along the tables throwing crockery to the floor amid sobbing children.

The two women in the serving line stood frozen under the aim of the sergeant's rifle. The floor ran with rivulets of gravy clotted with lumps of carrots and potatoes that glistened in the light with splinters of glass.

"Jesus Christ." The sergeant's hands were tight on his rifle. "Get

those kids to the medics."

Soldiers herded the group that had begun to eat toward the double doors. Someone else locked the incoming door. "The rest of you kids, sit down."

A little boy scarcely taller than the serving table, clutched his tray and stared bewildered at the two women. "I'm hungry."

The fat woman's eyes narrowed for a moment. Suddenly she began to laugh—silently. Without a sound, great shaking gales of laughter rippled through her body. As quickly as it had started, it stopped and her face twisted into a caricature of itself. She spat full into the little boy's face.

Kurt sat with his brother at the long table and watched as the soldiers led the woman away. He thought of the knife he carried in his boot. It wasn't large. The blade was only eight centimeters long, but it was better than nothing. He could use it if he had to. Thinking about the knife made him feel better.

After a long delay and a scanty meal, Kurt and Eric waited again. This time the crowded lines pushed toward a make-shift lab where a dozen technicians snapped on tourniquets and drew blood samples into glass tubes.

A young woman reached for Kurt's arm. He flinched involuntarily at the needle in her hand. "It's not poison," she snapped in annoyance. "It's only a needle. Empty. See?" Then she laughed. "You kids." But he didn't see the humor. The needle stung at the bend of his arm. He watched as dark blood ran into the tube. The girl pulled a numbered bracelet from a box and fastened it to his wrist. A plastic tape bearing the same number dangled from the bracelet. She twisted it off and attached it to the blood sample. "Memorize your number," she said. "And don't try taking that bracelet off." Ahead of him, a small boy wailed in pain and fright at the stab of the needle.

At the next stop, a thin-faced woman entered his name and number into a computer console. "See to him, will you?" With a jerk of her head, she indicated the sobbing little boy. He seemed to be alone, pushed along the line like a wisp of flotsam. Kurt stared at him. Blue-green eyes full of tears stared back. The child's chin twisted and he began to wail again, stabbing dirty fists into his eyes.

Eric knelt beside him. "Scared to death." He brushed tangled strands of coppery hair from the youngster's face and patted him on the shoulder. "You can stay with us." He picked up the end of a name-tag dangling from the little boy's shirt. *Sean McNabb*. "You

can stay with us, Sean. I'm Eric and this is Kurt. We'll take care of you."

Kurt felt a flash of annoyance. Didn't they have enough to worry about? Who needed to think about a kid on top of everything else?

The child's crying subsided to little sobbing gasps. He stared at Eric as a loud-speaker voice boomed into the room directing them toward sleeping barracks. The human wave moved on. "He's so little, we're likely to lose him," said Eric. "Give me your end of the leash."

Kurt stared for a moment, and then unsnapped the leash from his belt and handed it to Eric. He watched as Eric fumbled with the child's belt. "I'm going to tie us together, Sean. That way we'll know where each other is. See? No need to be afraid now."

Sean stared solemnly at the leash and blinked. Then he clutched at his groin and began to cry again. Eric took him by the shoulders. "What's the matter?"

The little boy threw his arms around Eric's neck and whispered in his ear. "He's got to pee," he told Kurt. "All right, Small Size. We'll find you a place." He slipped the youngster's pack from his shoulders and tossed it to Kurt. "Carry this for him. He's worn out."

Kurt slung the little pack on top of his and followed as Eric and Sean walked hand-in-hand ahead. He found himself resenting the child. He felt shut out—and the kid was barely more than a baby. It was stupid to feel that way. Unreasonable. But he couldn't seem to help it. He felt half-ashamed of himself—and even more resentful as he jogged along behind staring at the two of them until the child began to cry again. Concern grew on Eric's face. "What's wrong, Small Size?"

A trickle glided down the little boy's leg. "Aw Jesus, Eric. He's wetting his pants."

Kurt bunched the thin pillow against the iron rail at the head of his cot. He leaned against it and stared out of the barracks window at the first gray light of morning. In the bed next to him, Sean curled in a small-boy lump. Even in his sleep, his chubby fingers caressed the leash that tied him to Eric who lay just beyond.

Outside, past the treeless field dotted with narrow white outbuildings, a tall chain-link fence topped with three rows of barbed wire separated the children from the rest of the city. In the distance, he could hear the dull rumble of a transport. Probably bringing food, he thought. There were a lot to feed. During the night he had heard a muffled series of explosions and had seen the dull red glow against the horizon of another transport blown to bits. They liked to hit the

ones with food, he thought.

He was hungry. He had been hungry since he got here. He swung his legs to the floor and sat on the side of the cot. He moved quietly so as not to wake anyone. He surveyed the double row of beds in the gloom. No one stirred. He dropped to his knees and fumbled with his pack. He drew out a hardened piece of cheese wrapped in a wadded napkin. It wasn't more than two centimeters square. The juices flowed in his mouth as he looked at it. He chewed it slowly, crumb by crumb, making it last. It didn't satisfy. He felt his stomach grind against itself.

He stared at Sean's little backpack. Eric had tucked a piece of rye bread into it for the boy. He tried to imagine it—the sweet-sour taste of it. He needed it more than the kid, he told himself. The kid was small—not growing much now, probably. He stared at the little backpack, gray against gray in the semi-darkness, and then he looked at the sleeping child. He felt a scalding shame that fought against the impulse. Stealing from a baby. But, Christ, he was hungry. Maybe half. Just half. He reached for the pack and stopped. Outside in the hall came footsteps. The door opened. Lights flashed on.

Rows of boys stirred. Hands pressed protestingly over blinking eyes.

A small group of soldiers stood next to a man in civilian clothes who read from a list. "The following people are to come with me at once."

Billings—42067891
Castro—34257790
Curry—37165292
Hernandez—37642989
Kraus—41195890
Vogel—42839989. . ."

Kraus. Kurt stared at his bracelet. It wasn't his number.

"It's mine," said Eric, half-asleep, puzzled.

"What is it? What do they want?"

"I don't know."

The man began to drone the list again. One by one, the boys whose names were called gathered near the door. Eric got up, found himself restrained by the leash, and unhooked it. Sean stared at him with wide blue-green eyes and started to get up. Eric's hand on his shoulder stopped him. "I'll be back soon, Small Size. Go back to sleep."

He joined the little group of older boys by the door. The man checked his roll again and then led them outside.

Kurt felt uneasy, but he didn't know just why. He pulled on his clothes and made his bed, tugging at the sheets, tucking them into neat corners. When he was finished, he sat on the bed, wrinkling it again as he lay back and stared out of the window at the pink dawn. He whistled a tune that came to him. He blew the notes softly under his breath, so as not to disturb Sean who had gone back to sleep along with most of the others. Finally he dozed, but the uneasiness didn't go away. It stalked his dreams.

He awakened at a touch. Eric was looking at him with a face so pale, so strained, that Kurt was startled by it. "What's wrong? What's happened?"

Eric slumped on the bedside next to him. "They're sending me home. I have to go in a few minutes."

He felt the thrum of his blood rushing in his ears. His voice sounded far away as he asked, "Why?"

"It didn't take. The process— It didn't take." He raised his head slowly and looked at Kurt. "Some of us were too old for it. Too mature. I have to get dressed. Get my stuff together." He made no move to get up.

Kurt's fingers curled in his palms. He wasn't going to believe it. He had lost all the rest of them. He wasn't going to lose Eric too. He stared at his brother, searching his face, saying the first thing that came to his mind. "They made a mistake."

Eric's eyes widened for a second, as if Kurt imparted new information. Then he blinked, shook his head, said, "No." He stood up then and went to the duffle by his cot and began pulling out clothes. "At least I'll be with Dad. He needs me."

No. Damn it. *No!* "No he doesn't," he said aloud. *I* do, he thought. *I* do.

He watched unbelieving as Eric dressed quickly and stuffed his few belongings into the messy duffle. In the pale morning light the other five boys dressed too, filling bags and packs, stripping beds in quick motions. "You can't go out there. You'll be killed. They'll kill you."

Eric shook his head. "Not when they know about us. They're telling them now. We're on the news. They gave us these—" He tossed a bright orange armband onto the bed, and stared at it for a few seconds. Then he picked it up and wrapped it around his arm. He looked down at the sleeping boy. "You'll have to take care of Small Size." He picked up the duffle with one hand and slung it on his back.

Their eyes didn't meet. Kurt stared at the floor. He stood quietly as if he were the eye of a small, but violent storm. He wanted to lash out—to strike. He did, without warning. "Dad doesn't want you. He wanted to kill you. He told me so."

Eric winced, jerking his face away as if he'd been struck. He stood rigid as wood for a moment, and then turned and walked toward the door. And then Kurt was running after him, reaching for his arm, saying, "It isn't true. It wasn't you. It was me." The hot tears burned down his face. "It was me."

Eric stopped and looked at him. It was a look that Kurt would not forget—a look of mingled pain and love, and something else—regret. Eric's hand groped toward his, squeezed once, then released. "Goodbye," he said. And then he was gone and there was nothing left of him in the room. Just a thin bare mattress on an iron bed. It was as if he had never been there at all.

He lay on his cot after Eric left and stared at the wall. He didn't hear the early morning buzz of activity around him. He felt outside of it and utterly alone. The little hand jostled his shoulder once, then twice, "Kurt? Here, Kurt."

He looked at the solemn little face.

"Here, Kurt. Beckfast." A grubby little fist offered him a slice of stale rye bread.

He felt his stomach lurch from something more than hunger. He shook his head and turned away.

The child persisted, "Here, Kurt."

"I don't want it."

The little face fell. Then Sean plopped to the floor next to Kurt's bed. He looked at the bread for a moment and then put it to his mouth and began to chew.

A rumble grew in the distance. Closer. A shout went up from a group of boys at the other end of the barracks. "Look at that. He made it. Food!" The transport rolled slowly through the open gate.

Kurt stared out of the window. Beyond the gate he saw the smoke from a dozen fires. Some were the smoking remains of food transports. Others, smaller ones, were the camps of the disillusioned men and women who roamed the streets in search of prey in a world that was falling to pieces. As soon as soldiers rounded up one band, another took its place. He tried to imagine them. They blame us, he thought, as if we caused it all. As if we were the ones who wrecked the economy, and shattered their lives, and condemned them to die. But that was one transport they wouldn't get. The thought gave

him grim satisfaction.

In an hour, the wall speaker announced breakfast for his barracks. He had gone beyond hunger to a kind of empty sickness. He got up and walked outside toward the mess hall, ignoring the little boy who tagged along behind him, running to keep up, tripping at times on the dragging leash that dangled from his waist.

A low-flying plane suddenly broke under the clouds and skimmed the tops of the buildings. Someone yelled, "Look out!" Instinctively, Kurt sprawled into a ditch as the plane released its load overhead. Cushioned packages hit the field next to him. Then the plane was gone.

A crowd gathered around the scattered cargo. "Food," someone said. "No. Something else."

Kurt stared at the packages that littered the field. A few had ripped open tossing the contents in all directions. Seeds. Packages of seeds. Beans, squash, all sorts of vegetables. Groups of soldiers gathered the packages and carried them away. Seeds. They were going to be here for a long time, then. He turned away and headed to the mess hall. The little boy followed.

A group of children were leaving as they entered. They were handicapped. Profoundly retarded. With a start, Kurt realized that they would never grow up. Forever children. Never dying. Never changing. He pushed into the serving line automatically, and Sean followed. "Kurt. Where's Eric?"

Eric was gone—turning to dust. He stared at the vacant eyes of the forever children. Eric was gone.

The last food transport had carried a load of avocados. Nothing else. The one before that, dairy products. Milk, cheese, avocados.

Sean slipped in a tangle of bench and dog leash and managed to plop his tray onto the table next to Kurt. He drank his milk and ate his piece of cheese. His avocado, split in half, had only one bite taken from it.

Kurt pointed to it with his spoon, "Eat that."

Sean stared at it for a moment and shook his head. "It's bad, Kurt."

"Eat it anyway. Here. Put salt on it." He handed the shaker to Sean.

Obediently, Sean sprinkled the salt and took another bite. Then he leaned his head into the plate and began to cry. Strands of coppery hair fell into sticky green avocado.

"Cripes. Why are you crying?"

Blinking blue-green eyes wet with tears. A sobbing gasp,

"Where's—Where's Eric?"

As if in answer, a woman at the door called out, "Kraus. Eric Kraus. 41195890. Kraus."

Kurt scrambled to his feet. "What is it?" he asked the woman.

"Eric Kraus?"

"I'm Kurt. His brother. They sent him home a while ago."

She looked doubtful, then said, "Well, in that case, I guess you can have this." She handed him a sealed flexi-sheet. "Priority communication."

He snapped open the sheet. He read:

Dearest Eric,

Your daddy died this morning at six-thirty. I was with him. His last words were of you.

Mama

Dearest Eric. She wasn't even going to let him know. *Your daddy died this morning.* . . . His too. His daddy . . .

He wanted very much to cry, as if to cry would dissolve the sick hard lump he felt inside him. He wanted desperately to cry. He couldn't.

He wandered around aimlessly for the rest of the day, oblivious to the little boy who followed him. Finally, as the day lay down to rest in purple shadows, he went back to the barracks and pulled his oboe from his pack. He fitted it together and began to play while Sean watched from the next bed.

He found himself playing the opening solo of *Rebirth,* but the irony was lost on him. He thought only of the sound he made, a sound as somber, yet as beautiful, as the graying tones of evening around him.

When at last he paused, the little boy asked again, "Where's Eric?"

"Gone. He's gone away."

"Gone where?"

"Home."

Sean hugged his knees and looked at Kurt. "I'm gonna go home too."

"You can't."

His face crumpled. "Can. I'm gonna see Eric and Momma." Then he brightened. "My momma's pretty. Is your momma pretty, Kurt?"

He looked at the floor. *Dearest Eric* . . .

A woman wearing a uniform came into the barracks, pausing at

each cot, checking names and numbers. She came to Sean. "We'll have to reassign him," she said as if to herself and wrote something on her chart.

"Why?" asked Kurt.

"He's too young to stay here with older boys. We're reassigning to permanent quarters. He can't stay here."

Sean looked up at the woman with eyes wide and frightened. Then he crept away toward the door.

"But why? He doesn't know anybody else." Kurt found himself on his feet. He didn't understand why, but suddenly it seemed of vital importance to make the woman understand. "He's just four. He doesn't have anybody. Just me."

"I'm sorry. The only exception are family members. We're trying to keep them together."

"But he's my brother." He felt astonished at the lie. Why had he said it?

The woman looked at her list, "But you have different last names."

"We had different fathers." He saw Eric's face—as real as if he stood there. *His last words were of you* . . . "We had different fathers."

"Oh." She looked at him sharply and he met her gaze. "Well then, I'll assign you together." She moved on.

Somehow he felt proud of himself. Inordinately proud. He turned back to Sean's cot. "Did you hear that, little brother?"

But Sean was gone.

Uneasily, he stepped from the barracks, calling softly, "Sean."

The street lights of the camp cast pools of light outlined by shadow. Again, "Sean."

Across the field, a transport rumbled into the compound and stopped. The guard spoke to the driver. His back was turned away from the open gate.

Beyond, outside, Kurt thought he saw a small figure move away toward the shadows. He found himself running toward the gate, dodging behind oil drums and out-buildings, keeping out of sight. They'd stop him if they saw. They wouldn't let him out.

He stopped in the dark ten meters from the gate in the shadow of the transport. Light spilled onto the ground beyond. He heard the shift of gears. The transport began to move between him and the guard. He ran, heart pounding, toward the outside.

He slid into the shadows just beyond the gate. A campfire flickered through a clump of trees and bushes ahead sending fingers of light

through the low branches. He stared into the night, willing his eyes to adjust to the dark. He held his breath and listened. He heard a faint murmur of voices, and something else—the rustle of leaves. He stalked the sound. It paused, then moved again toward the light of the fire. Then he saw him, Sean, moving toward the circle of light. The leash dangled from his waist and slithered behind him through the leaves. The men's voices grew louder.

Stop. The thought screamed in his head. "Stop, you little dummy," he whispered. But he knew he wouldn't. He was going to go right up to them like a moth to the flame and ask for his momma. "Oh please, stop." He crept closer.

Sean stepped into the light of the campfire and gravely regarded the two seated men. Ice formed in Kurt's belly.

One of the men looked up, then rose in a half-crouch. His lips twisted into a smile, his voice was slurred. "A little pig— A little pig for the fire."

Oh God. Run. Why didn't he run?

The other man put down a nearly-empty bottle and slowly focused on the little boy. Sean stood with legs wide apart and stared. The

first man moved toward him. "Here pig. Here piggy." A gun shone darkly from his belt, but Kurt sensed with horror that the man had other plans for Sean.

A glimmer of surprise, then fear flickered in the wide blue-green eyes.

Oh run. For God's sake, run!

He ran—turning away from the outstretched hand, little legs pumping, tangling in the dragging leash. He fell to the ground and scrambled to get up, but a hand twisted the end of the leash and pulled him close to the man's face. "Do you know what we do to little boys around here?" His meaty hand covered the boy's throat, stroking it, pinching.

Sean's eyes were wide with terror. He shook his head, barely moving it.

The man laughed and, with a quick motion, unhooked the leash and wrapped it in a slack noose around Sean's neck. "First we tie them up like little pigs." He drew the noose tight. The other man laughed and swallowed again from his bottle.

Kurt felt a cold sweat break out and drain from him. Fumbling, he reached in his boot and took out the little knife, the blade rounded at the tip, but sharp as a razor along its edge. It opened in his hand.

He circled slowly until he stood behind the man just in the shadows. Then he leaped, flying like an animal at the man's back, legs wrapped around his waist, knife at his throat. The force threw them both to the ground.

The other man stared in drunken fascination as they struggled. The knife bit into the man's throat. "Lie still or I'll kill you."

The man lay under Kurt's weight, breathing hard gasping breaths. With his other hand, Kurt grabbed the gun, and jumping back, aimed it. "Get out. Both of you. Get out or I'll kill you."

As they scrambled away, he scooped up Sean and began to run back toward the camp.

When they reached the fence, he lowered Sean to the ground and leaned against the locked gate for support. Air shuddered in and out of his lungs. Then he dropped to his knees beside the little boy and took the leash from around his neck. He started to toss it away.

"No. No, Kurt." The boy reached for it, and began to cry.

He took the tear-stained face in his hands. "It's all right. We don't need it anymore."

He stared at the woods, at the dots of campfire light that glowed against the sky. He could see their faces, all of them. He could feel their resentment, their hate, like a tangible thing. And then, like

smoke, he saw them gray and fade. He saw them for a moment as mist. Ephemera. Bones to ashes. Ashes to dust.

He turned toward the camp and shouted to the guard. Startled, the man ran to unlock the gate.

He picked up Sean. The little boy said, "I don't like it outside, Kurt," and buried his face in his shoulder.

He looked at the child he held. Only four, he was only four years old, and the only world he knew was dying. And suddenly Kurt realized that he would be one of the oldest some day. He was fifteen years old and he was going to inherit the Earth.

He stroked the boy's hair. It wasn't much of a world out there, he thought. Not much of one. "We'll have to build a new one," he said to Sean, and without looking backward, stepped through the gate.

LETTERS

Remember that our system for printing (or not) your address with your letter is simply this: if you put your address at the end of the letter, we'll print the address if we print the letter. If you don't put your address at the end of the letter, we'll put down only your city and state (unless, of course, you specifically ask us not to print even that).

The address for letters to the editors is the magazine's address in Philadelphia: Box 13116, Philadelphia PA 19101. Manuscripts go there also.

—George H. Scithers

Dear Mr. Scithers,

I want to congratulate you, Dr. Asimov, and the various authors who contribute to your magazine. The accuracy of information given in the stories, editorials, etc. is commendable when so many ignore the truth for shock value and/or attention grabbing. However, I must correct you on some erroneous information unfortunately relayed by your 19 January 1981 issue. In the story "Island Man" by R. A. Wilson, the emergency treatment for seizures given could lead to injury for a person having an actual seizure. Listed below are the approved steps for treating someone during a seizure:

1. Keep calm. Lay the person down. Remove glasses. Loosen tight clothing. Do not attempt to restrain the person.
2. Clear the area of hard, sharp, or hot objects. Place something soft under the person's head.
3. Do not force anything between the teeth. Attempts to prevent tongue biting can do more harm than good. Contrary to popular belief, the tongue is not going to be swallowed.
4. When the seizure is over, turn the person on his side to allow saliva to drain out of the mouth.
5. Do not offer anything to drink until fully awake.
6. A doctor should be called if the person has one seizure after the other, breathing does not resume after the seizure ends, injury occurs, or if it is the person's first seizure.

The Epilepsy Foundation of America has a motto, "Help Light

the Candle of Understanding." I hope your magazine can find the space to do this. As those who have seizures can attest, the improper treatment has caused many unnecessary broken teeth, cracked jaws, sprained muscles, dislocated joints, broken bones, etc. I would hate for your magazine's misinformation on this subject to cause further injury.

Sincerely,

Susan Young
Contact Person
Fayetteville-Cumberland County
Chapter of the Epilepsy Association
of North Carolina

Thank you. It is not a comfortable thought, but a necessary one, that even though one may not be one's self an epileptic, the person next to you may be.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Mr. Scithers and Dr. Asimov,

In spite of some of the comments I have been reading in your Letters section, I think your magazine is indeed good. Those who write in with objections (it's good but not great) or overblown praise are missing the point. If the stories and articles bring enjoyment to the readers, why pick apart the reasons for that enjoyment? Why pick nits? As someone said in a different context, it's you guys who analyze everything that take all the fun out of it. Attempting to chart the pleasure or ascertain *IA'sfm* place among other SF magazines is a useless task, perhaps best left to those who also enjoy checking books for typographical errors, and watching historical films for chronological inaccuracies.

Anyway: I enjoy the magazine; I enjoy Dr. Asimov's writing, even when it has flaws; and I will continue to read the magazine. I may even subscribe to it.

Next, could you please send me a copy of your MS format? That is, if you accept poetry in addition to stories. I have enclosed the required envelope.

Sincerely,

Carol H. Riley
APO New York NY

When it has flaws? *When on Earth does it have flaws?*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Sir:

I just received your December 1980 issue the other day, and I'd say that you've put together a better-than-your-excellent-average issue.

In particular, I liked Jo Clayton's "Companioning." After rereading it a couple of times, I went back to my stack of SF Magazines and dug out the back issues that the other three stories were in, and reread them all. I thought that this latest one was better than every other but the first, and I think the series is the best series you're running. I particularly like the way Ms. Clayton has tied this series in with her Diadem series, beyond a common setting with the first book.

What I didn't like in the story were the flashback sections in a different typeface than the rest. Your other typeface is much easier on the eyes. In particular, the italics in the second typeface were difficult to recognize as italics.

Another story of interest was J. O. Jeppson's "The Beanstalk Analysis," because of its being psychoanalysis-out-of-P.G.-Wodehouse. A pretty good story. (Though a casual reader might not know it, certainly the average dedicated subscriber would know that J. O. Jeppson is married to Isaac Asimov, a fact unmentioned in the introduction to the story.)

Other good stories were "Eight Ball Blues," "The Deicides," "Checkmate," and "The Adopted Father." As usual, the features, and of course the editorial, were excellent.

Less than good was "Bloodsong." I kept thinking while reading it, "Who wrote what?" I assumed that whatever dialog was linked to a "he said" or a variation thereof was written by Mr. O'Donnell, in view of Mr. Longyear's somewhat well-known dislike for "said-ism."

I don't understand why Ms. Vicki Carleton took your comments about *The Elements of Style* as an insult. It's really the only decent book on grammar available. I would be rereading my copy frequently if I knew where it was (which probably explains a few of my grammatical lapses). The next time I see a copy I'll buy it.

Robert Nowall
2730 SE 24th Place
Cape Coral FL 33904

We can't exactly mention the marriage every time her name comes up. Besides, there may be times when she'd prefer to forget (though she loyally denies that to be the case).

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Mr. Scithers:

I have been an avid fan of your magazine for the past few years, and I only hope that you keep up the good work. You beat the competition hands down.

The purpose of this letter is not to criticize the quality of the stories, editorials, etc. Rather, I wish to vent my feelings about, of all things, the use of foreign languages in stories. (Familiar words, such as the Latin *etcetera,* are OK.) The major area of my discontent is French. I have nothing against the French language; I'm sure it's a fine language, but I shudder when I see it printed on a page. Why? The answer is simple: I cannot, have not, nor will I ever understand a single syllable of French. Whenever I run across a cute French phrase: BAM! My concentration screeches to a complete standstill and I have to fumble through a French/English dictionary before I can continue. God forbid the phrase should contain a conjugated verb.

I realize that a mere letter like this will not stop authors from including foreign languages in their stories. I can only request that they will do so out of consideration. If they won't listen to me, maybe they'll follow the advice given by *The Elements of Style.* Even this Holy Bible for Writers frowns on the use of foreign languages. How about it, all you writers? Maybe Isaac Asimov can spread the word.

Er, well, since I have the typewriter out, I may as well ask for a copy of your manuscript wants and needs (a SASE is enclosed). Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

George Johnson Xavyrr
Denville NJ

The world we live in has grown exceedingly dangerous and complex, and one of the disadvantages under which Americans suffer is their linguistic illiteracy. You should welcome anything *that forces you to brush up on foreign words. It may be tedious but it is useful.*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear George and Isaac,

You should be more careful! When I read the line, "This issue of *IA'sfm* will be our last monthly issue," in the Dec. 1980 issue, I nearly had a heart attack! I might have dropped dead before reading the next sentence! Once relief set in, however, and I was able to wipe my perspiring brow with trembling hands, I was thrilled to find out that we would be treated to another whole issue of *IA'sfm* per year. Congratulations! I do hope that the increased issuance is indicative of higher circulation, which supports my oft-repeated contention that *IA'sfm* is a necessary alternative in the field of SF mags, and that you will take this into consideration before changing any of your editorial policies.

I have now joined the ranks (ever growing?) of aspiring writers who have had *stories* rejected by *IA's*. Although I agreed (and still agree) with your methods of handling submissions and rejections, I must admit there was some teeth-gnashing and impolite imprecations muttered when I received my own. However, I bought Strunk & White's *The Elements of Style,* and you WILL be hearing from me again!

One last comment: to all fellow letter writers out there—won't more of you consider putting your full address at the end of your letter? Some of us would like to write to some of you!

Cordially,

Avis L. Burgess
RR 5, Box 403
Penacook NH 03303

Heavens, what a narrow escape. Had you suffered an attack and perished on the spot, we would never, never, never have forgiven ourselves.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. A. and Mr. S.:

Please send a copy of your author's guidelines. My pet dragon eats rejection slips.

Three comments on the Dec. issue: 1. Gene Wolfe, who wrote "The Island of Dr. Death" should now write "The Death of Dr. Island," if this hasn't been done. Too good a title to throw away after one use. Besides, the two can be bound together and sold for double the price. 2. I particularly enjoyed Jack C. Haldeman II's "Eight Ball

Blues." The style, pace, setting, and characters were exemplary. The trick ending, however, was a disappointment, serving only to trivialize the rest of the story. 3. I greet with anticipation (joyous) the prospect of thirteen *IA'sfms* next year. Just when my three-year renewal takes effect. Keep up the good work!

Truly and sincerely yours,

Judith Lahore
2423 S. Spencer St.
Seattle WA 98108

Oddly enough, he has *written "The Death of Dr. Island." What's more, he has written "The Doctor of Death Island," too. They're all collected into one volume entitled* The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories and Other Stories, *from Pocket Books.*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Mr. Scithers,

For various complicated reasons, I just got around to reading "Peregrine: Perplexed" by Avram Davidson. Reading it has finally prompted me to write a quick note applauding your policy of including such "off-trail" fare in *IA'sfm*. (Other "unexpected-but-appreciated" stories that immediately come to mind are Pat Murphy's "A Touch of the Bear" in the same issue, "Travels" by Carter Scholz, "The Spectacles of Jorge Luis Borges" by Arthur Jean Cox, and "Storming the Bijou, Mon Amour" by Michael Bishop. I'm sure there are more, but my magazine collection is most of a continent away from me.)

Any chance of seeing part of Davidson's "Vergilmagus" opus in the magazine?

Sincerely,

Michael D. Toman
Los Angeles CA

Failure to appeal occasionally to "minority-taste" is what tends to make commercial television seem to be merely pap at times. Fortunately, we don't stand to win or lose enough on any one throw of the dice to make cowards of us.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov and Mr. Scithers,

Three cheers for the good doctor for his response to a reader's opposition to having articles like those concerning *ST:TMP!* (from your December 1980 "Letters.") Being an admirer of "Star Trek" as both television and science fiction landmarks, it was a pleasure to read the August 1980 articles (few SF prozines want to discuss the *ST* world) and hope you will do more of such reflective articles in the future (perhaps as a semi-regular feature?). I hope *IA'sfm* will be a magazine dedicated not only to new fiction talent but also innovative criticism and exchange of ideas.

Keep up the good work!

Sincerely,
Georgia M. Higley
Fairfax VA

Far be it from us to be print-chauvinists and to sneer at important aspects of science fiction simply because it is in another medium.
—Isaac Asimov

Dear Folks:

Thirteen issues a year! We must be doing something right. (We've known all along that *you* were doing it right!)

About the September issue.

As a Sunday dabbler I'm ashamed to say that SF art, especially pulp(?) art, passed by me until the too infrequent mentions in the letter column. Even the bio articles didn't do it. (It's been some time since you profiled an artist; I hope you plan to do more soon.) My apologies to the superb artists for thinking their work a minor adjunct and therefore ignoring it. If I had to choose favorites (thank goodness, I don't!), Alex Schomburg would head the list; I could spend hours studying the details in one of his illustrations.

Unfortunately, I thought the September cover was the least appealing of any of his work that I've seen. As for the five stories written from the cover—I hope you won't do it again. To see how different writers handled a single picture-premise was interesting . . . but not very. Of the five, I found only Sharon Webb's "Rare Bird" worth the effort. (I wish Webb would do more Bull Run stories after the manner of the first; it was the funniest of the lot.)

One suggestion for improving a very nearly perfect magazine. At the bottom of each page you print the title of story or article. Would

it be too much trouble to substitute the left-hand title for the author's name? It's a little thing but it would save a lot of back-flipping to remind oneself of the . . . perpetrator? [Done! GHS]

I wonder if Barry Longyear would consider doing a story about a mischievous dinosaur . . . not necessarily a *young* one? I don't like his Momus series but I love his writing and think he's at his best with intelligent reptiles.

Cordially,

B. Joni Harris

P.S. The newer typewriters have self-correcting keys. Are manuscripts with such corrections acceptable to you? [Yes if they lift off errors, not if they put white type on top of them. GHS]

6309 San Pablo, #246
Citrus Heights CA 95610

Strange, but I find such things as watching different authors work from a single premise of vast professional interest—but I'm never very good at it myself. I would try to figure out why, but I'm afraid I might discover the answer.

—Isaac Asimov

NEXT ISSUE

Mildred Downey Broxon, Jerry Pournelle, Barry B. Longyear, Bob Shaw, and Somtow Sucharitkul are just a few of the contributors in our August 3, 1981 issue. "Bubbles" Broxon, last seen in these pages in the May/June 1978 issue, is back with "Sea Changeling," a troubling and topical story we don't think you'll soon forget. Jerry Pournelle and Barry Longyear (along with "Ezekial" and "Wang 5/1") discuss the use of word-processors in the creative process, and Bob Shaw and Somtow Sucharitkul are up to their usual innovative standards. On sale July 7, 1981.

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We allow you at least 10 days for making your decision. If you do not receive the form in time to respond within 10 days, and receive an unwanted Selection, you may return it at our expense.

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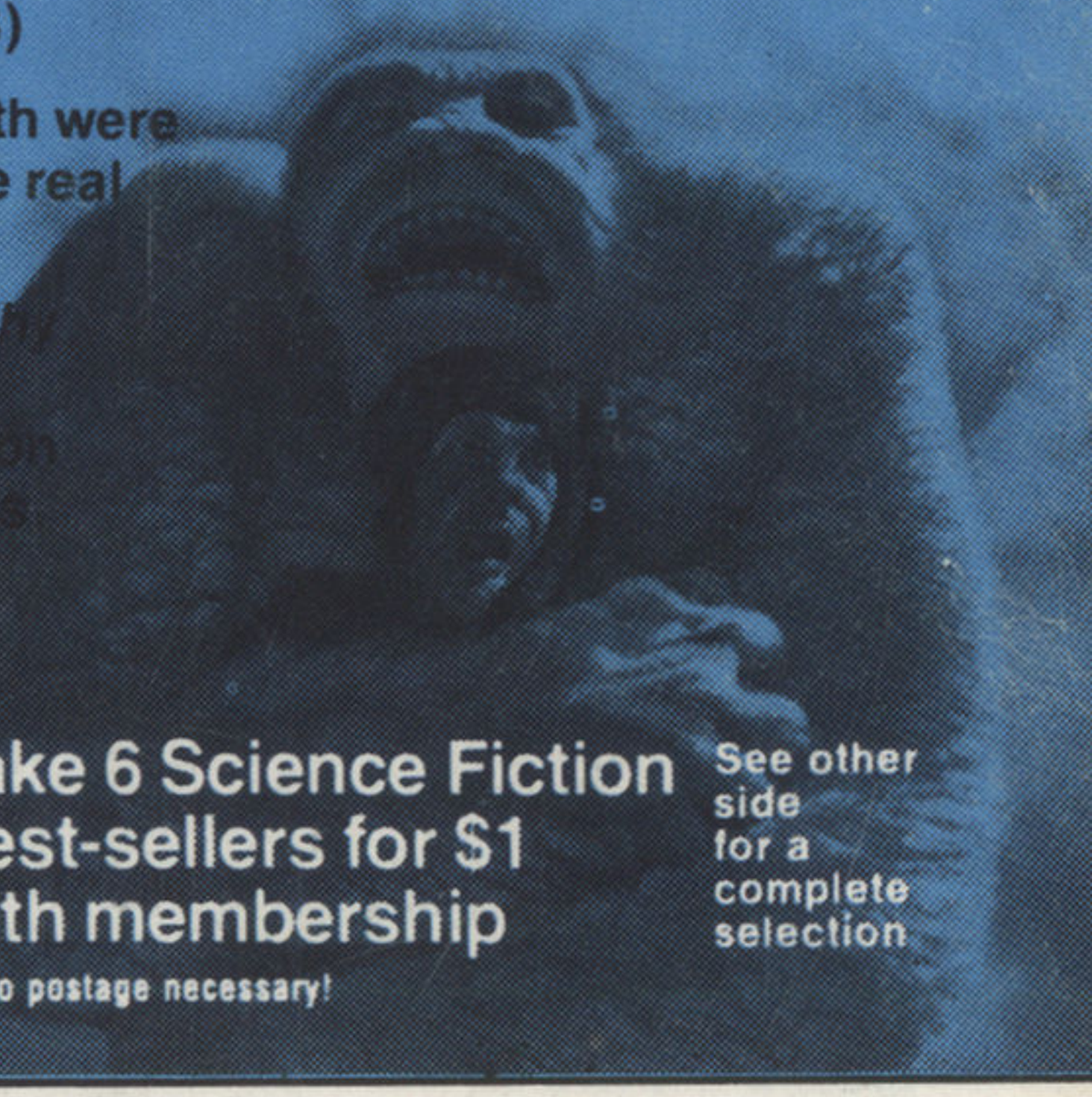

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