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$1.75 MARCH 1984

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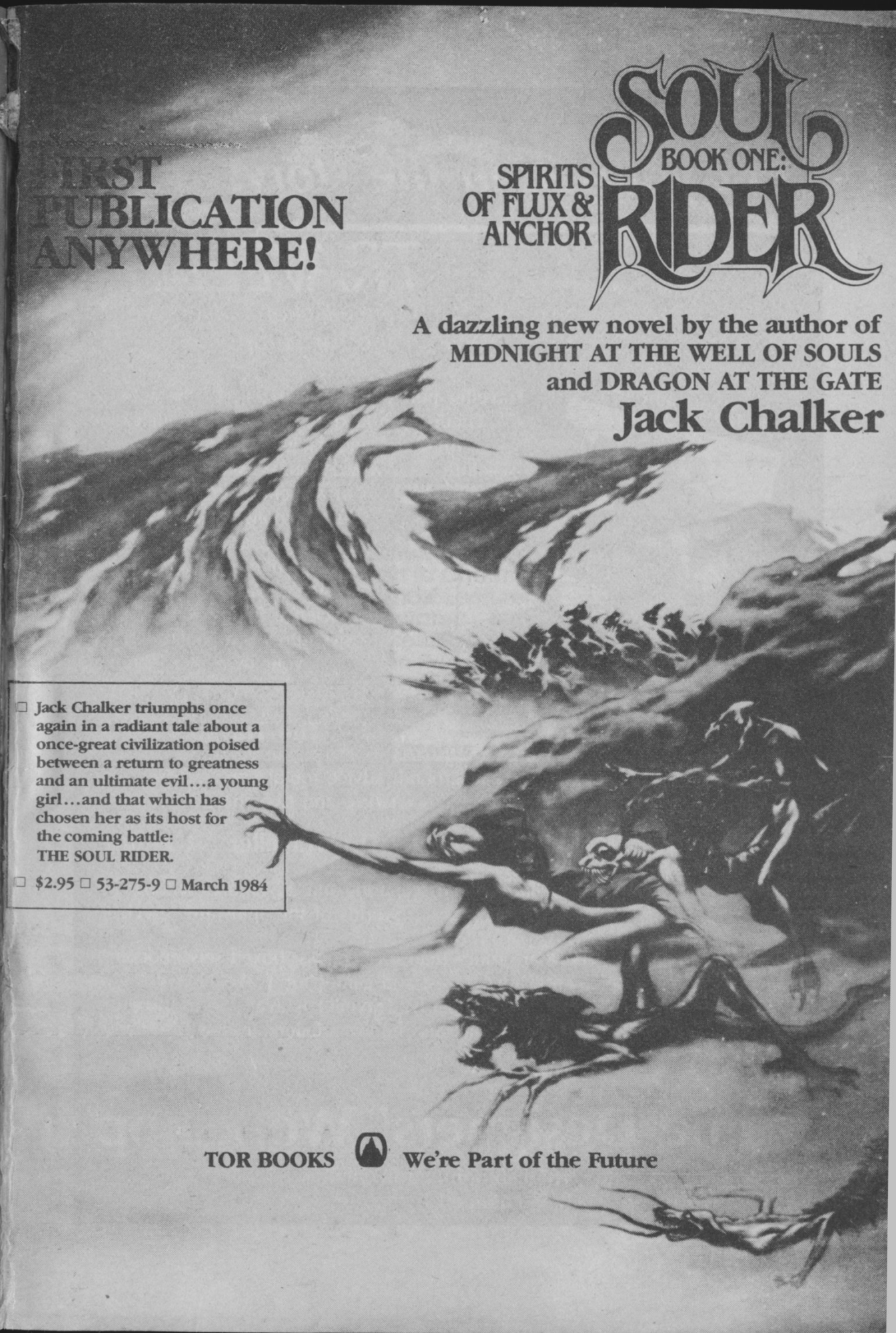
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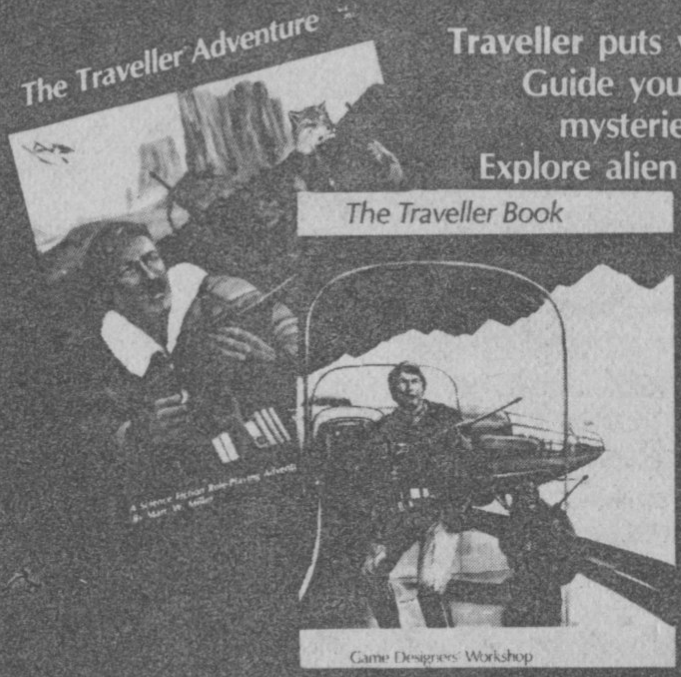

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Short Stories

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EDITORIAL

SATIRE

by Isaac Asimov

Something is satirical when its purpose is to castigate what are perceived as the follies and vices of human society. Satire is an ancient branch of literature and a much needed one, for folly and vice are invariably prevalent in all societies and *should* be eliminated, and the options for doing so are few.

The most direct method is by physical assault—by revolution. The difficulties here are many, for folly and vice invariably support a few while making many wretched, and it is the few who (as a result) have the money, the power, and (most important) the support of tradition. Revolutions are almost always bloody and violent, rarely succeed, and when they do, the very violence and difficulty of the process leaves the revolutionaries with an almost paranoid need to oppress in their turn.

Nor can folly and vice be easily removed by sweet reason. As I say, folly and vice are usually sanctified by tradition; that is, by long usage; and the very people who most suffer under their ravages are most firm in being against any change, even those that would clearly better their existence. In fact, it is usually a few of those who benefit from folly and vice who, more sophisticated and better educated (and driven by guilt and shame), object to that which benefits them. That is why revolutions, at least in their early stages, are so frequently led by liberal and idealistic aristocrats.

What is left that is neither violent nor ineffective? Satire!

Of course, satire doesn't always do the job (after all, there is plenty of folly and vice rampant today in every society), and it sometimes helps lead to violence but, generally ineffective though it might be, it works better than anything else.

One proof of that is that satirists are almost always at odds with the societies they satirize. The "establishment" knows when it is stung and endangered, and responds by striking back, not with words (the deadly weapon of the satirist) but by the more immediately effective strategy of fines, imprison-

ment, torture, and even execution.

Since satirists are not particularly keen on experiencing such treatment, they generally avoid making the nature of their targets particularly clear. For that reason, they frequently make use of fantasy. Thus, Aesop's fables are a clear and direct assault on the follies and vices of humanity, but by doing this under the guise of telling little stories of talking animals, Aesop lured those who listened to him into laughing and nodding their heads wisely. By the time it occurred to them that it was they themselves who were under attack, Aesop was safely out of reach.

Well, then, what is the mark of satire? When is a piece of writing a satire and when is it not?

You might, for instance, tell a straightforward story of events exactly as they happened (or might have happened) and present pure realism, eliciting only the emotions one would naturally expect from that particular tale. That is not satire.

Or, wishing to make people angry at folly and vice, a writer might deliberately distort, making the folly and vice more apparent and ridiculous than it really is, so that the target might be the more clearly visible to those who, lulled by tradition and their concentration on narrow personal matters, would not see it otherwise. That is satire.

Almost all writing has elements of satire in it. Even in non-satirical fiction, villains are made clearly and self-consciously villainous in order to increase horror and suspense. In true satire, however, almost every element undergoes the necessary distortion, even to the point of reducing the tale to total non-realism.

The most effective English-speaking satirists were, in my opinion, Jonathan Swift, Charles Dickens, and Mark Twain. For those who wrote in other languages, Voltaire might well be mentioned with those three. And it is interesting that these satirists, two of whom flourished in the 18th century, and two in the 19th, all made use not only of fantasy, but of recognizable science fictional elements in constructing some of their satire.

Jonathan Swift published the book commonly known as *Gulliver's Travels* in 1727, and castigated contemporary British society under the guise of describing strange societies in unknown portions of the globe. The third part of the tale, which satirizes science itself, represents the closest approach to science fiction, and it is there that Swift describes the two satellites (as yet undiscovered) of Mars.

Voltaire, in 1752, published

Micromegas in which two visitors, one from Saturn and one from Sirius, visit Earth and comment on its follies and vices. Voltaire also mentioned Mars's two (as yet undiscovered) satellites and, as a result, the two largest craters on the smaller satellite, Deimos, are now named Swift and Voltaire.

Among Dickens' most famous tales is *A Christmas Carol,* published in 1843, which is one of the great fantasies of all time and needs no description. Remember, though, that it contains time-travel elements. And so did Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court,* published in 1889. Both are clear satires on contemporary society.

Obviously, then, science fiction lends itself to satire. By making use of invented societies with properties that invite satirical distortion, the writer can more effectively riddle his target in the here and now.

I don't indulge in satire very often myself, being content to take each society at its own valuation and to feel that decent and reasonable human beings can make almost any society bearable. Other SF writers frequently write satire, however, and one such satirist who springs to mind, and whom I much admire, is Frederik Pohl.

Satire isn't easy to do. The line that separates effective demolition of a target from

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Please do not send us your manuscript until you've gotten a copy of our manuscript guidelines. To obtain this, send us a self-addressed, stamped business-size envelope (what stationery stores call a number 10 envelope), and a note requesting this information. The address for this and for all editorial correspondence is *IAsfm*, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Avenue, NY, NY 10017. While we're always looking for new writers, please, in the interest of time-saving, find out what we're looking for, and how to prepare it, before submitting your story.

clumsy and offensive burlesque is a narrow one and it is up to us to select the good and reject the bad. This is difficult in itself and is made the more difficult in that the targets of the satire invariably disagree with our criteria for such selection.

One savage satire that we printed was "Soulsaver" by James Stevens, in the September, 1983, issue. It was, in our opinion, a hard-hitting and effective satire on self-righteous religious hypocrisy—a target that is by no means a new one. (The most effective satire of this type ever done was Moliere's *Tartuffe,* a play that was first produced in 1664 and that got Moliere into a great deal of trouble.)

It was not to be expected that there would be no objection to this satire. We received a letter, for instance, which contained the following sentence: "Although I do admit that some vocal and NOT representative Christians have helped to force that stereotype upon the general public, I feel it is the job of publications (responsible publications) to not perpetuate those stereotypes."

On the contrary, it *is* our job to strike out at folly and vice wherever we find it. If, as the reader admits, the target of the satire *does* exist, then why should we close our eyes to it? I am perfectly willing to admit that those who lend themselves to the stereotype are not rep-

resentative of all, but then the more representative portions of Christianity should be bitterly offended by those non-representative few who hold them up to ridicule, and should fight them vigorously. If they do *not* do so, then the job is left to us. For instance, does the reader who took the trouble to write to us to object to the story ever take the trouble to write to some of the unctuous television preachers to object to their perversion of religious principles?

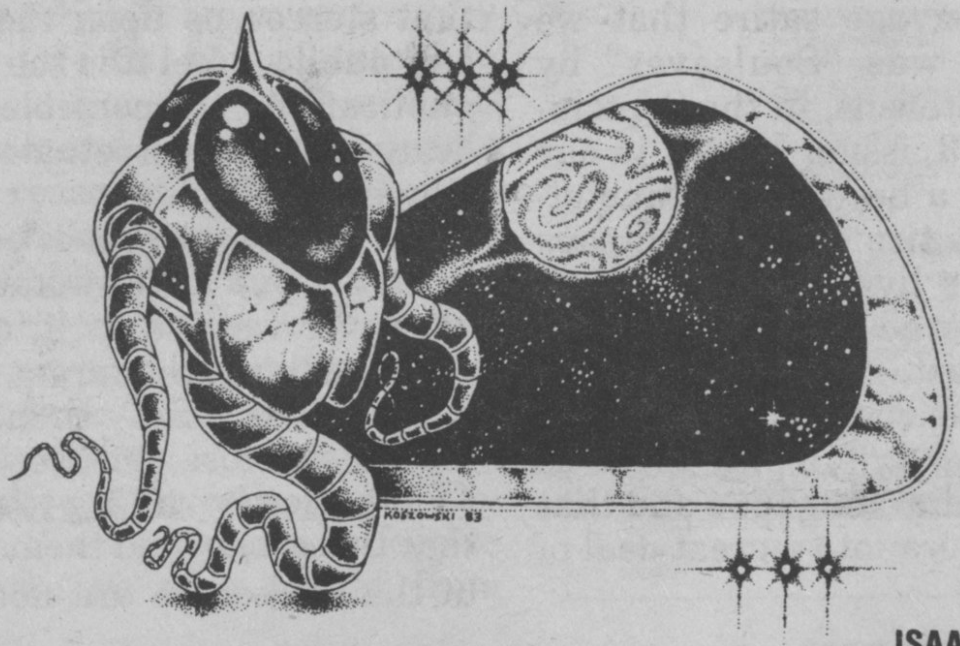
The reader goes on to say "I can understand that you and Shawna might not personally hold 'conservative' Christian beliefs, but I DO think you should exercise more sensitivity toward those of us who do possess such a faith."

That would be dangerous. If that were a proper way of behaving, then all satire would be dead. It is not only " 'conservative' Christians" who are sensitive. All human beings are, and no target of satire (including myself, for I have often been satirized in science fiction) enjoys the process.

Shall we refrain from any satire on Communism or Fascism because we would then be insensitive toward many people who accept such doctrines —perhaps very sincerely and idealistically? Shall we refrain from any satire on racism or on oppressive societies because there are those who sincerely believe in racism and oppression and who would feel wounded if we made sardonic fun of them?

And if we do kill satire, remember that there are elements of satire in just about everything that is written. To exercise "sensitivity" would be to institute a thoroughgoing system of censorship.

Sorry! The reader means well, but what is being asked for is totally undesirable. ●



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LETTERS

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

I have just finished reading "The Peacemaker" by Gardner Dozois in the August, 1983 *IAsfm,* and I feel compelled to write. It is one of the finest SF stories I have read in a long time. It alone is worth the price of the magazine.

It builds steadily, from the description of Roy's surroundings to the catastrophic flood, and finally to the horrifying conclusion. Mr. Dozois has brilliantly captured a dark side of human nature. Thank you for publishing "The Peacemaker."

John M. Whiteside
Stratford, CT

And I'm sure Gardner thanks you for your kind words, and Shawna thanks you for your approval of her judgement in accepting the story.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov:

I write this letter to warn your readers of the hazardous perils of letting one's subscription lapse!

For two years I was a happy subscriber. Alas, gentle Doctor, I neglected to renew my subscription. (Divorce tends to have odd side effects.) When I had recovered from "post divorce syndrome," I knew it was time to pursue the important things of life again, namely, reading quality science fiction in your magazine.

I sent a subscription request to your offices in Greenwich, CT, which was the most recent address from my last issue. I received my envelope back, marked "Addressee No Longer at This Address." Okay, I had lost Round 1, but I wasn't giving up.

Round 2. I went to the magazine rack at my grocery store. They had *Analog* but no *IAsfm.* Well, I figured, it's the middle of the month so *IAsfm* has undoubtedly sold out quickly; I'll just wait until next month.

Round 3. Early the next month I searched the racks again. No luck. I then tried two other supermarkets in the area. Nope. I bought an *Analog* hoping you'd have an ad in it. Nope. Despair—had you gone to the Big Publishing House in the Sky?

Round 4. I called the "toll-free 800 number" advertised in *Analog* and asked if they also carried *IAsfm.* Yes. (I was closing in on the scent now . . . you still existed!) They told me it would take 6 to 8 weeks until the first issue arrived. I waited. Weeks. No magazine.

Intermission. While waiting through Round 4, I kept a lookout as I passed the racks in the store.

When I received the Publishers' Clearing House list of magazines, I looked for you. Ah, but you were still playing hard to get.

Round 5. Next, I found an ad for *IAsfm* in the classified section of *EQMM*. I sent my check to the P.O, box listed in New York. I received the envelope back, marked "Addressee Unknown." (At this point my mother was insisting you were a figment of my imagination.)

Round 6. The next month I found another ad in *EQMM*, this time with an address in Ohio. Hope springs eternal . . . I posted my check. (Mother: "You're chasing an illusion.") Two weeks later I received my bank statement. What's this?! A cancelled check to *IAsfm* cashed May 31! Has ever a simple bank statement brought such joy? I began to stake out the mailbox in earnest now. This was the final countdown: let the waiting game begin! It might take weeks, but I'd been training hard these past months and was now in peak condition. (Mother: "I don't care if you do have a cancelled check, there's no such magazine.") The weeks dragged on . . . June . . . July . . . is this how the Maytag repairman feels?

July 13, 1983, a date which will live in postal infamy. (Me: "Mom, you'll never guess what came in the mail today.")

The 6-round decision after reading: winner and still champion!

Thus my eight-month quest ended. I hope that all your subscribers take heed when they receive their renewal notices.

Marianne F. Purcell
Chatsworth, CA

A true horror tale in which the villains are the distributing system, the postal service, bureaucracy, and the general operation of Murphy's Law. The moral is: Renew Your Subscription.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov,

I saw your request for your readers' opinions on what sort of material they would like you to write. As you've guessed by now, I do indeed have a strong opinion about the matter. First let me say that I believe that my several shelves of books by Isaac Asimov—all of which I have read at least once—qualifies me as an official Reader of Isaac Asimov. I have not written sooner because I was so certain that many readers would feel the same way that I do. I felt it was unnecessary to burden you with another letter. But alas, no one has articulated what I consider to be the overriding argument.

I have, of course, enjoyed all the types of writing by you that I've read; however, I recognize that unfortunately you can write only a finite amount of material in your lifetime. So I ask myself: If Dr. Asimov were suddenly removed from our presence (God forbid), which type of writing would I miss the most? Thus it becomes clear to me that the answer is your science fiction. As much as I enjoy reading works of yours such as the *Guide to Shakespeare,* the *Guide to the Bible,* and scientific expositions, ideas similar to yours (although surely not as lucid and entertaining) have a possibility of being expressed by other writers. But your fiction is another matter! Who could even dream of the tales that would come from your imagination if you spent all your writing efforts on science fiction? Such writing is irreplaceable. You will surely make valuable contributions in whatever field you choose to write, but I would like to see you devote your time to science fiction. There will never be another writer that can produce the SF wonders that you are capable of writing.

Have a long, happy, and healthy life.

Sincerely,

Lewis D. Blake III
523 Morreene Road
Durham, NC 27705

Your analysis of the situation is clear, logical, and compelling. Worse yet, Doubleday agrees with you. I'm afraid I'm in the minority and will have to go along with the majority.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. A.,

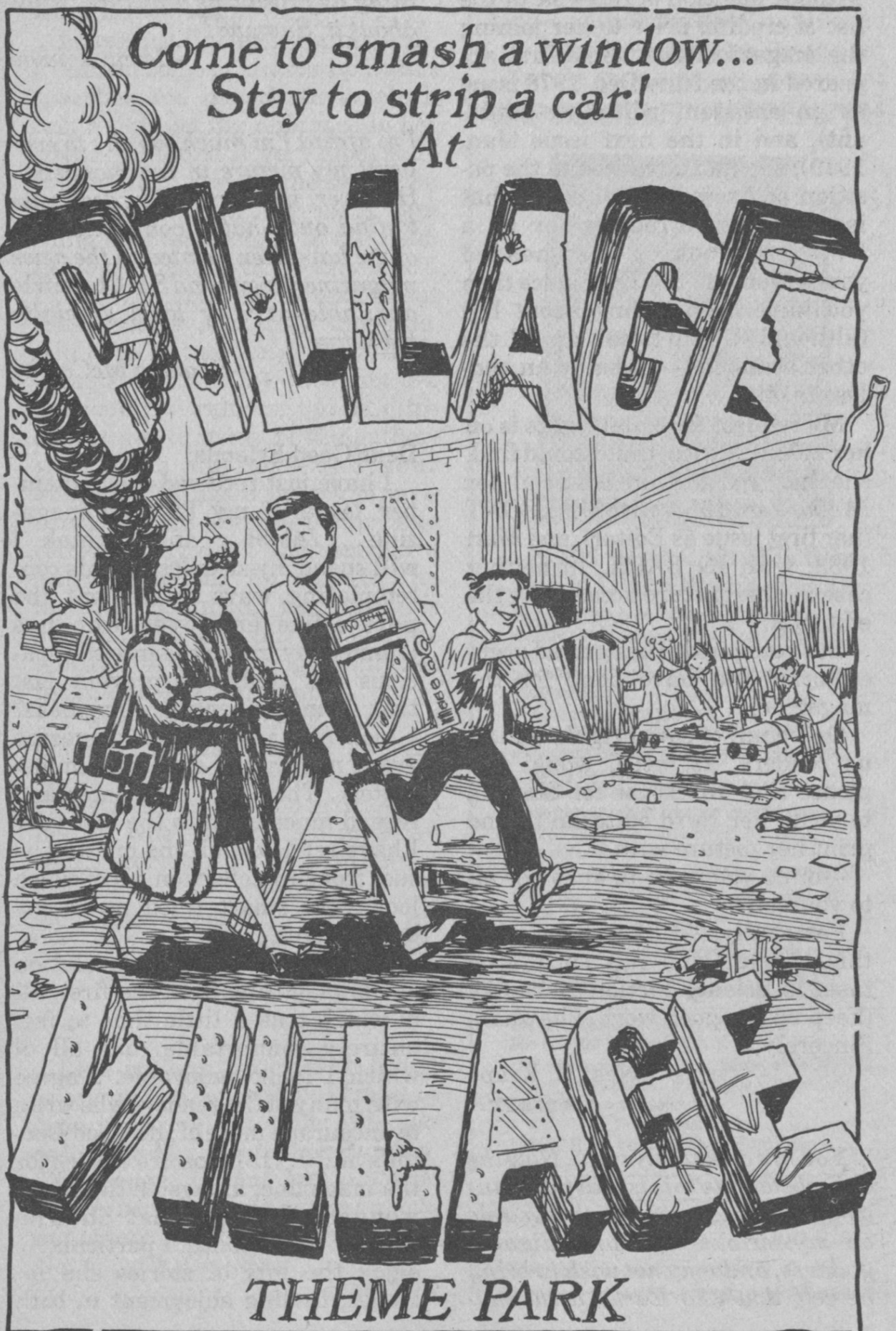
Fair is fair.

You claim to be in favor of equal rights for women.

Well, I'd like to request equal rights for a particular woman, and for us readers as well, male or female.

In the Letters department of the September, 1983 issue of *IAsfm,* you refer to "... the beauteous Shawna ..." (p. 18). You have been raving about her ever since she joined *IAsfm*—or, to be more accurate, she was on the job a whole month before you raved about her editorially!

I have eight issues of *IAsfm*


Come to smash a window...
Stay to strip a car!
At
PILLAGE
VILLAGE
THEME PARK

without mention of Shawna in the list of credits, prior to her joining the magazine. Her name first appeared in the Nov.-Dec. 1978 issue as an assistant editor (co-assistant), and in the next issue (Jan. 1979), she had advanced to the position of Associate Editor. In that issue you referred to her as a " . . . good-looking red-headed young woman . . . " Ever since then you have been raving about her (although I didn't look up all the other occasions—probably an endless task!).

My request for equal rights is on her behalf. Twice, that I could find, she has written an editorial for *IAsfm:* Jan. 1983, with UP FRONT (her first issue as Editor), and Mar. 1983, with IN BACK. In neither case did her picture accompany the editorial.

But your picture has graced every editorial you have done for the magazine.

On behalf of equal rights (for all us readers, as well), would you please find an excuse for Shawna to write her third editorial (!) and print her picture with it.

—or do you want to keep her all to yourself?

Personally, I'd like to see what this woman who has such good taste in Science Fiction looks like (keep up the good work, Shawna!). Sincerely,

Neal H. Krape
York, PA

You are absolutely right. Now the only obstacle to this is that the beauteous Shawna may relish her role as mysterious and unattainable goddess, and may not wish to bring herself down to Earth with anything as prosaic as a picture. What about it, Shawna?

—Isaac Asimov

I'm afraid I'm much too shy to ever print my picture in the magazine. However, if you're really desperate to find out what I look like,photos of me have been printed in the news magazines Locus *and* S F Chronicle *available at your local specialty bookstore.*

—Shawna McCarthy

Dear Good Friends;

I have just received the September issue of my favorite magazine . . . *IAsfm* . . . and I think I will spend my sleepless nights contemplating ways to torment the post office employee who has jammed my magazine into the spacious box rented to prevent just that from happening. Any ideas? I look forward to your magazine every month and devour it immediately. Then I go back later and reread much of it. In the last year I have retrieved all the missing issues from my collection, all of which look very smart lined up in my bookshelves.

There is an apparent evolution of the magazine from the first, all of which took a little time to feel entirely comfortable, but all of which I found enjoyable. I agree with many of the readers who write to encourage more of the Good Doctor's and J. O. Jeppson's stories for the magazine, alongside the many wonderful stories that Shawna chooses each month. I particularly enjoy the mix of stories she includes, finding enjoyment in both

"SF" and "fantasy". A well-written story is all I ask.

I have just finished reading a collection of some of Ursula Le Guin's speeches and introductions which cast a light on her approach to her writing. I found it very enjoyable. It puts me in mind of the series you were including in each issue, profiling different people in the field. I enjoyed those articles very much. I find it interesting to read about these people and their thoughts. (Up here in the Maine mountains these stimuli to my thoughts are particularly welcome.) It is difficult to get to many of the gatherings from up here and your magazine brings a breath of civilization to an otherwise enjoyable retreat. Why don't you consider a quiet gathering up here in the mountains, during the fantastic summers or autumns? It is quite a beautiful area, though many are intimidated by our winters.

I am afraid I have rambled enough. Thank you *all* so very much for a consistently satisfying collection of stories and articles! No matter what mood I am in, I can find a story to curl up with. Many thanks.

Your loyal reader,

Claudia A. Reynolds
Rumford, ME

I see nothing wrong with trying to organize a convention to meet in beautiful Rumford, Maine. We could call it the Mainvention or Rumcon. The trouble is that I couldn't go myself because I don't travel much, but others might be delighted to go. Get to work, Claudia.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov,

In answer to the inquiries as to how to remove the mailing labels from your magazine (or any other ones).

I put my hand-held hair-dryer on high. Point it at the label for about two minutes. Gently peel one corner loose and it comes right off.

It does sometimes leave two faint white lines where the label pulled the color with it but I can live with that better than the label.

I truly enjoy your magazine and have enjoyed your works for years. Sincerely,

Elaine K. Pierce
15950 Vanowen #1
Van Nuys, Ca 91406

See the advantages young women have. Now I don't own a hair-dryer, but fortunately Janet does and I'm sure she wouldn't mind my borrowing it.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov,

After reading your story "Saving Humanity" in the Sept. 1983 edition of your magazine, I felt I must write and tell you of my own experiences with teleklutzism.

My teleklutzism manifests itself only in my kitchen, but the havoc it wreaks is pretty nearly complete. Glasses crack, plates shatter, and casseroles chip spontaneously upon my approach. I don't believe I own an intact coffee mug. Just yesterday I was burned by a hot blueberry while trying to keep my son's pancakes on a plate that had decided to commit suicide. Not only that, all my carving knives are operating (literally!) under the impression that my delicate little hands are plump rock cornish game hens, ready to be hacked to bits.

I have suggested to my husband that we avoid this unpleasantness by taking all our meals out, thus doing away with a need for the kitchen. He doesn't seem to like the idea.

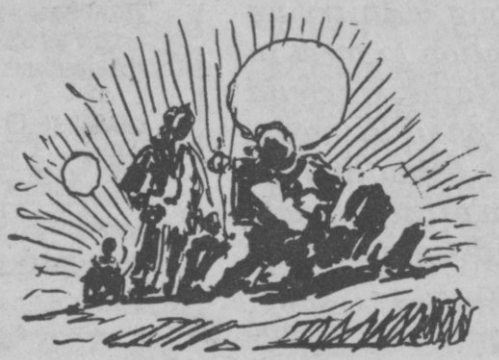
So, Doctor, do you see any hope for me? Couldn't Azazel telecommunicate a telecure for my teleklutzism? It shouldn't be difficult, I live right next door in Connecticut. You and he would have the undying gratitude of several dozen doomed pieces of glassware, plates, etc.

Admiringly yours,

Ronnie Mallory
Milford, Conn.

Unfortunately, Azazel is under the control of George and not of me. And besides, I can't help but notice that everything Azazel does seems to turn out to go wrong. I don't know why that is.

—Isaac Asimov



GAMING by Dana Lombardy

Deep Space Navigator by Tactical Templates Inc. (4567 Town Crier Road, Dept. 222, Lilburn, GA 30247) is a misleading title. It's really about deep space *combat,* using a plastic template to determine navigation (movement) and weapons firing. This is an innovative feature because this is the *only* game I know of that uses a template to determine play.

The game comes with the template, two pads of ship design sheets—one for a star destroyer, the other for a smaller fighter craft—a 12-sided die, an 8-page rules folder, and several sheets of "asteroids" used in the advanced game. Not provided, but necessary, are sheets of blank paper (no game board or playing pieces are needed in this game), and a fine-tip felt pen for each player.

The first step is to design your own spaceship, using the sheets provided. You have 20 units of shields and 10 units of armor to make a star destroyer, and 12 units of shields and 10 units of armor to make a smaller fighter. These are assigned by a letter code "S" and "A" into any of the 12 sectors that form a circle around the ship—two rows deep for the fighter, and four for the destroyer.

In addition, the larger destroyer gets two lasers, one photon beam, one Ion cannon, and two missiles. Fighters have only one photon beam each. The destroyers also have a bridge, two engines, and a fuel cell—all in fixed positions printed on the design sheets.

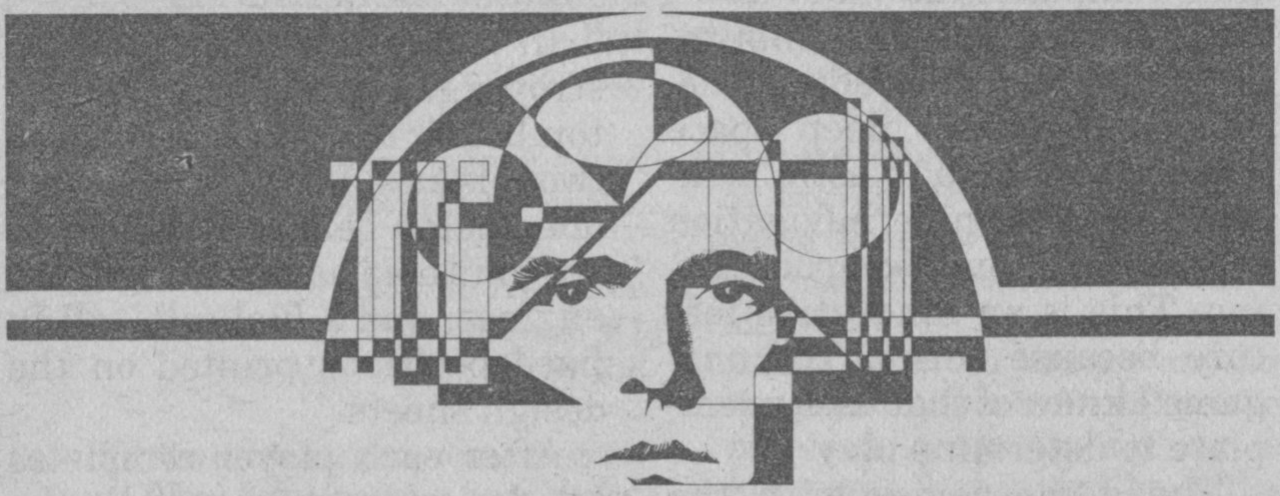
After each player completes his design, each then rolls the die, and the highest roller gets to launch his ship first. Using the template, mark your move distance up to a maximum speed of eight. The initial launch consumes no fuel, but maneuvers and changes in speed will cost fuel. How much fuel is used is determined by a scale on your ship design sheet. For example, if you decrease speed by "two" and turn "one" increment to the right, that's a change of "three." On the fuel scale for a destroyer, a change of three shows as five units of fuel used.

What this looks like on the paper is a line with dots indicating your positions each turn. It may take you a while to get used to this method of play, but

(continued on page 168)

MARTIN GARDNER

ON TO CHARMIAN



It was early in 1983 that IRAS (Infrared Astronomy Satellite) was launched. Information from the satellite created something of a stir later that year when it suggested that a swarm of unidentified objects, possibly a solar system, was orbiting the star Vega. IRAS II created a much bigger stir late in 1988 when it reported evidence of a tenth planet, moving in a highly eccentric orbit, far beyond the path of Pluto.

Was it really a planet? Some astronomers argued it was more likely a cluster of asteroids, others that it was a tiny black hole. It was not until many decades later that the spaceship *Bagel,* on one of its missions to the fringes of the solar system, finally confirmed that the object was indeed a planet.

The planet had earlier been named Iras, after the acronym of the satellite that first discovered it. Iras turned out to have a size and mass slightly larger than Mars, but smaller than Venus. While the *Bagel* was circling it, taking measurements of its size, rotation, orbital direction and velocity, and photographing its icy surface, Tanya occupied herself with some word play involving the planetary names. Tanya was the teen-age daughter of Colonel Ronald Couth, the officer in charge of the ship's computer.

First Tanya tried finding anagrams for the names of the planets, but none was very interesting. The letters of MARS rear-

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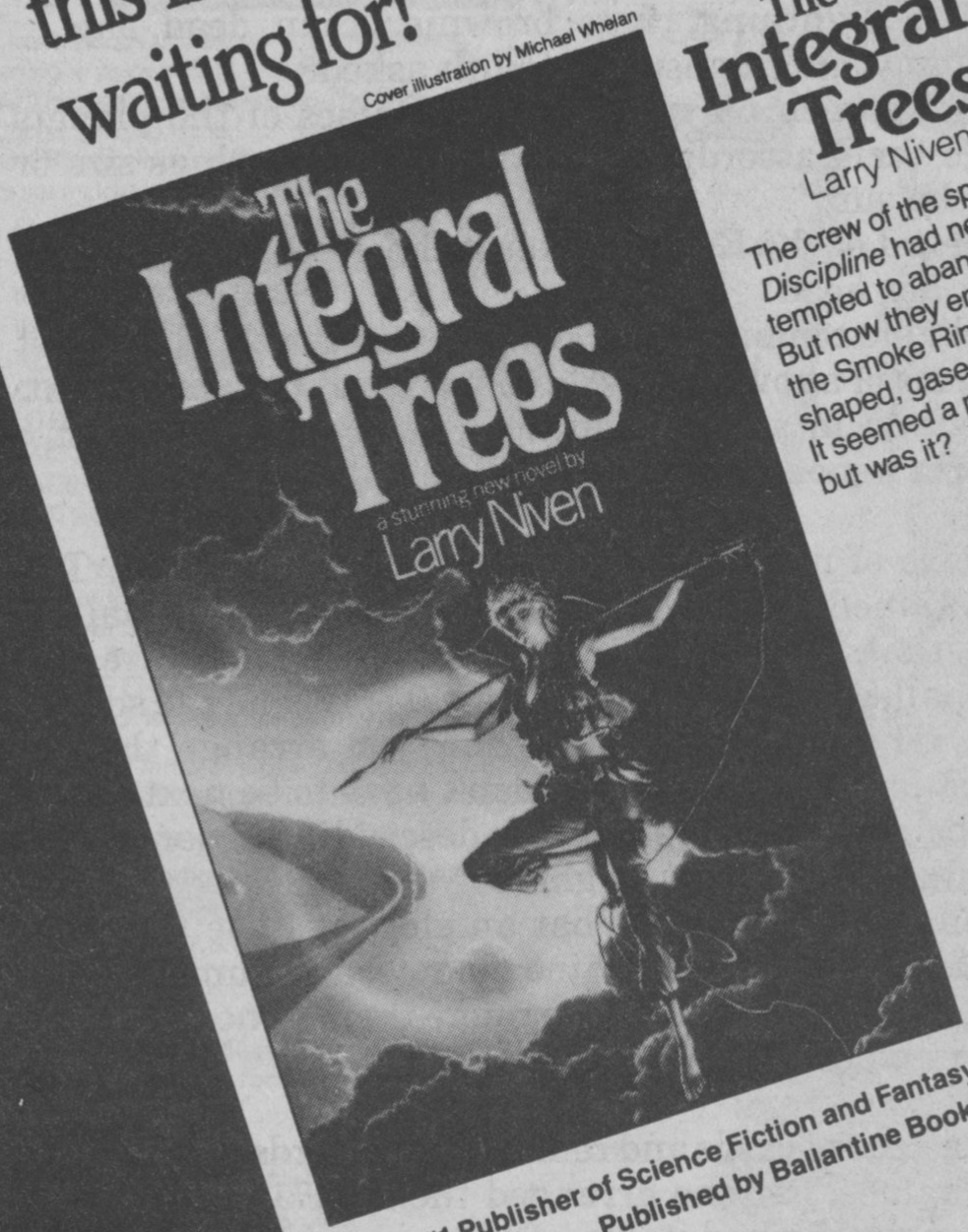

Cover illustration by Michael Whelan

The Integral Trees

Larry Niven

The crew of the spacecraft *Discipline* had never been tempted to abandon their ship. But now they encountered the Smoke Ring, a doughnut-shaped, gaseous envelope. It seemed a paradise . . . but was it?

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ranged to make ARMS and RAMS, EARTH became HEART, IRAS backward was SARI, and by changing the T of SATURN to U, the letters would spell URANUS.

Tanya next tried listing the initial letters of the planets in their order from the sun: MVEMJSUNPI, and was startled to see the word SUN formed by consecutive letters. She was even more surprised when she listed the planets in order of size or mass (both properties give the same ordering)—PMMIVEUNSJ. Do you see the "beautiful" coincidence? The five consecutive letters VEUNS spell VENUS if you simply switch U and N!

When Tanya's father walked into the computer shack, Tanya was amusing herself by making lists of ten words that suggested the planets in order from the sun—for example, thermometer, armless, dirt, war, lightning, rings, brownie, ocean, dead, asp.

"Working on anything unusual?" Couth asked.

"Not really. I've been playing with the names of the planets when I arrange them according to some property such as size or distance from the sun."

"Have you heard of the Erdös-Szekeres theorem?"

Tanya shook her head.

"It's a remarkable combinatorial result," said Couth. "I can best explain it in terms of a row of ten soldiers, no two the same height. Suppose they stand in a row. The theorem says that at least k soldiers will form a monotonic subsequence."

"What's that?"

"It's a sequence of numbers that goes either up or down. The number k is obtained by taking the square root of the smallest perfect square that is not less than n. Suppose there are ten soldiers. The smallest square not less than 10 is 16, and the square root of 16 is 4. Therefore, no matter how you arrange the ten soldiers, at least four—of course they don't have to be next to one another—will be in either ascending or descending order of tallness when you take them left to right."

"I understand," said Tanya. "What an elegant little theorem! It means, of course, that if I select nine planets, and number them in order of size, it *will* be possible to arrange them so no four have their numbers in monotonic sequence."

"Precisely."

Tanya found a deck of cards and removed nine cards with values of ace through nine. First she arranged them 647193825. For a moment she thought she had it. No—6432 was a descending subsequence. Actually, there are many ways (how many I don't know) to do it. See if you can find a way before turning to page 46.

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Although we've seen her in collaborations (most recently with "Post Haste" in our February issue) it's been some time since we've had a solo piece from Sharon Farber. This story differs greatly in tone from some of her others, but we're sure you'll find it intriguing.

art: Ron Lindahn

by Sharon N. Farber

A SURFEIT OF MELANCHOLIC HUMORS

Letter; W^m Praisgode, M.D. of London, to Dr Tho: Sydnam
19 August, 1665

Dear Sir; Never wold I reproach your Leaveing. You have the Ladies and Children to protect and your Patients were left before you. So Pitiefull is the Devastation of our Metropolis. Of this Weeke last did perish 5,319 Soules of which 3,880 were of Plague, acc. to the Weekely Bills. Any Distemperature is feared as Pest, and the Victim foresaken. Yestereve was I summoned to Silver Streete to see a Man they did wish to shut up with all his Householde. Seeing he had rather the Dropsy, I took 3 oz. of Bloud, and he was much relieved. Fair Nonsense is to be heard. Plague is, they say, a Punishment, even as our Defeates with Holland, and they hearken to the Omen of the Comet of Last Yeere. Our Friend Mr Halley wold not term that a Portent, but he is fled as well. You knowe me a Man of Science, not Superstition. The Infection results of Miasmas from the Foetid Bowels of the Earth and the Conjunctions of divers Starres and from Odours of Carrion. Though the Dogges and Cattes have been killed by Order of the Lord Mayor so that the Rattes might be expected to Flourish, still do the Rattes die in great Multitude, from the corrupt and poysonous Vapours. The People are frighted and have turned against Jewes and Quacks and Forraigners, saying they spread Pestilence....

William Praisegood walked along Cheapside, past the fine Tudor row of the Goldsmiths Guild, now closed and empty. Houses were boarded up, deserted, or else had a red cross and *Lord Have Mercy Upon Us* painted on the padlocked door, and watchmen without. Refuse lined the street, stopping up the gutters, so that the odor reminded Praisegood of the laystalls outside the city limits. The entire world seemed quiet, except for the screams of the ill and the lamentations of the healthy.

The doctor saw another figure approaching on the empty street, wearing a long-nosed bird mask, and carrying the gold-headed cane of the medical profession. The man crossed over to avoid a rat-gnawed corpse, then noticed Praisegood.

"Will?" called the birdman.

Praisegood halted some paces from his colleague. "Aye."

"Will—'tis I, George Thomson. What are you at, standing here with no mask or posie to halt the effluvia?"

"What does it signify, George? Our physic is bootless."

The other studied Praisegood's ungroomed wig, his lined young eyes, his dejected stance, then backed away.

Praisegood gave a hollow laugh. "Fear me not, George. My melancholy is an old companion, not a symptom of the Pest." He spread his arms. "I am free of botch and token. But I cannot free my mind of the words of de Chauliac. 'Charity is Dead and Hope Destroyed.' "

" 'Sblood, Will, I cannot stand for this. There are few enough doctors left. You're needed! Look to your health. Send to me, friend—I shall give you of my own lozenges and preventative liquor."

Praisegood held out a reassuring hand. " 'Tis merely that my humors are imbalanced. I will bleed myself."

"Nay, you'll diminish your parts. Eat temperately, sleep well, and wear a powdered toad next your skin—my friend Sharkey has it so." He looked as if about to leave, then paused again.

"Will, I have a mind to anatomize a victim, that we may see wherein the Pest sits—in the organs, in the similar parts, whether it stops up the bile or inflames the dura. . . . Have you interest?"

"Aye!"

"Good; your friend Sydenham has not totally corrupted you. Now I must be off."

They parted, Praisegood headed east, walking aimlessly. Grass grew between cobblestones that had been worn smooth by coaches and porters, beggars and balladsingers. The setting sun cast a red pall upon the sky, reminding the wanderer of blood pooling under the skin of the doomed and dying.

"The Hand of God is upon us!" cried a voice. Praisegood looked up to see a madman, wearing only breeches. "A judgement, a visitation!" He approached the doctor, arms outstretched, a fevered glint to his eyes.

"Keep back," Praisegood said, holding up his cane.

"Repent. Own your sins!" the man continued.

Praisegood spun about and fled, the delirious man close behind, calling out endearing words. Turning into a lane, Praisegood ran headlong into a link. The torchman pushed him aside, cursing, and his fellow took Praisegood and pulled him to his feet beside the deadcart. They held the torch before his face. "What do . . . "

Their mare tossed up her head and snorted. They all turned to see the madman run forward, ignoring Praisegood, and leap into the deadcart. He lay atop the piled bodies and crossed his arms over his chest.

"Now am I bestowed aright."

The driver rose from a body he had been stripping of its val-

uables. "Get off," he commanded, grabbing the man by the feet and tossing him onto the stones.

"But see my tokens. I am dead," complained the fallen man. He pointed to the blackened, swollen glands in one armpit.

"Dead soon, I'll warrant, but too lively yet for our lot," a link said.

The driver stroked his chin. " 'ee may follow us, lad, so when 'ee falls, we'll be right by and take 'ee to the pit." They tossed the naked body from the street into the cart.

Praisegood watched them go, the laden cart with the fevered madman stumbling behind. One of the links was ringing a bell, and the driver called "Bring out your dead." They rounded the corner.

The doctor looked about. He was almost to Houndsditch. "Fool," he muttered. "Courting death as a man courts a maid."

He found an open tippling house near Aldgate. The tavern's former name was not known to him, but a freshly painted sign read *Deaths Arms*. There was a bright portrait of the patron, a crudely-drawn skeleton bearing an arrow and an hourglass. "Too many ribs," Praisegood muttered, and went in.

The tavern seemed as noisy and crowded as it might have been before the plague. It was filled with unemployed journeymen, ropemakers, seamen, porters, and bawdy women.

Praisegood paid for a mug of ale and found a seat, laying his handkerchief over the gilt canehead to preserve his anonymity. A large man was dominating the conversation, loudly mocking both the dead and the mourning survivors. Many of the drinkers had found employment as watchmen of quarantined houses or as plague nurses, and were openly bragging of the mischief they caused the captive families under their care.

A strumpet sat beside Praisegood. "Come with me, my gallant. I've the French disease."

He gazed at her through narrowed eyes.

"Ever'one knows pox keeps off the plague. Else why should we nuns still live and the schoolmaids not?" Finding no response, she put out a hand. "The pox lasts but a while, and 'tis easy cured by quicksilver from some quacksalver."

"Begone," Praisegood snapped, glaring until she complied. If only life were as simple as the woman seemed to find it, he mused. Paracelsus wrote that a particular remedy exists for every disease, even as mercury arrests the pox that beset the shepherd Syphilis. If Praisegood were a Paracelsan, he would at that moment be in an alchemical elaboratory, searching hopefully for a specific cure for the plague. But while Praisegood admired Paracelsus' other views—that a physician should be ascetic, should travel widely,

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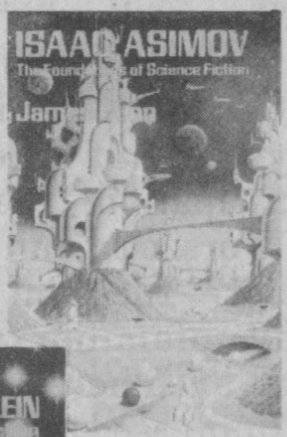

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scorn money, and treat the poor for free—he doubted the existence of Specificks.

He looked up as a man came down the stairs, pressing through the crowd towards the door. The ruffian moved to block the path, crying, "But here's the real cause of misery." All were silent in anticipation. "Foreigners. Belike 'tis they as brought the plague."

"Forsooth, can one nation call down the wrath of God on another?" the man answered with a quiet voice, accented in some way unfamiliar to Praisegood. "More likely 'twas the virtues I see displayed here, than any intercession of mine own."

Impressed by the foreigner's calm manner and neat appearance, Praisegood stood for a better view. The man had deep black hair, but a complexion pale as parchment, his lips a dusky hue. He was dressed in the old-fashioned way, with doublet and long coat; all his clothes were gray or black.

"It an't right," the big ruffian called. "That honest Englishmen turn blue and die, while Frogs go unmolested."

He swung a massive fist. The small foreigner caught it, closing his hand about the other's. Praisegood heard a bone crack. The large man fell, shrieking. The others moved closer.

Praisegood banged his cane upon the floor. "Stay! Let this gentleman pass or, I swear't, thy friend shall be denied physic." They paused. "No physician nor chirurgeon nor the humblest apothecary's prentice will give him aid, when I have published his wickedness. But allow this fellow to pass, and I shall bind up the hand myself."

The black-clad man left the tavern, walking proud as a king to his coronation. He stopped at the door, momentarily fixed Praisegood with his eye, and was gone.

25 August

Not an House in Twenty is unmarked by Plague, nor a Merchant in an Hundred still at Businesse. You would be surprist to see the River empty as it were with Ice, but for Boates with Corn. I have heard even the Curator of the College of Physitians is fled, and Thieves have made off with the Strongchest and Silver. Dr Burnet as I told you afore, Friend Thomas, took sick and declared it; and shut himself up in his House, which was very Handsome of him. After some Months, thinking himself well, he resumed Practise. But Burnet took Feaver againe and has perished. I have heard Laughter that a Doctor should die—of his own Medicaments they say. Now do such a Multitude lie dead that they may no longer be buried twixt Sun-set and Dawne, and the Waggons are always full.

William Praisegood walked homeward, his mind populating the desolation with accusing ghosts. "You're a doctor," they moaned. "What did you do for us?"

"I tried to help," his spirit rejoined. "I cannot stay the plague, but still there are the usual patients. . . ."

"You cure them but to die another death," the ghostly voices replied.

He thought of his patient Mistress Blackwood. Her two infant daughters, Mrs. Sally and Mrs. Alice, had been sent to stay with their uncle soon before that entire household fell to plague. The news of her children's deaths had sent Mrs. Blackwood into labor early, going two days without the aid of a midwife, for all those women were more lucratively employed as plague nurses and searchers of the dead.

When Praisegood had at last been summoned he had been forced to use the experimental forceps, a secret gift from his professor at Leiden. The baby was large and healthy enough, but Mrs. Blackwood had gradually lapsed into a hectic fever, which was unrelieved by purging or emetics. Today the doctor had called to find the babe suckling at a dead breast, and the father hysterical with grief. He had bled the husband two ounces, but the infant was beyond help—there were no wet nurses to be found.

A year ago this tragedy might have brought tears to Praisegood's eyes. Now he only shrugged it off, numbed to any further horrors, like a sheaf in the harvest.

The low evening sun and the shadows of overhanging houses turned the streets as dark as night, few windows glowing to light the way. As Praisegood began to enter one shrouded lane, an old woman hailed him from the shadows.

"Stay, sir, an' you value your life."

"How, goodwife?" He could see now that she carried the white wand of an examiner of the dead.

"A pestilent lunatic," she replied, "lying in wait by the bakehouse."

"Most likely mad from pain," Praisegood said. "Let me come on him cautiously and give my elixir of poppy."

"Sich will not be soothed," the old woman cackled. "He will salute ye and by his kisses give release. Already he hath greeted his kin and friends until none be unmarked. But Deacon hath sent for his brothers who are already with token, and they shall make him fast."

Praisegood thanked her and hurried on in another direction, passing his parish church. Part of the yard had become a com-

munal burying ground, a grave that had at first seemed ready to receive all the parishioners (save the parson, who had gone to the country as early as June). Surprised, the doctor noted that where that grave had been, now stood a hillock, and a new pit had been dug not far off. Ringed with warning candles, it gaped open like a lanced impostume, three men's height by four.

"Prepared to accept us all," Praisegood whispered.

A deadcart arrived. The bearer, beating his horse with a red staff, backed the cart up to the rim of the pit and discharged its load. Watching aghast, Praisegood saw the bodies tumbling down. The bearer appraised him.

"A cloak?" he asked.

"Pardon?"

"Buy a cloak, sir? Fine velvet for a gentleman," and he flourished the article in question.

"Knowest thou not, such articles carry plague? I've seen it oft."

"Dead men's clothes, their stinking carcasses, the air itself, matters not," the bearer shrugged. "Make the most of the breath you've left."

"Help!"

Praisegood leapt away from the cart. "How—"

The thin cry came again from the grave. "Save me. Is't there?"

The bearer snarled. "Another raving fool, b'God, masquerading as my stock." Noticing Praisegood's pallor, he laughed rudely. "Or a drunk belike, or oft-times a strick man thinks to save us the bother of burial and does it hisself." He took up a long shepherd's staff and walked to the pit's edge, holding out a candle.

"Bless you," the voice called.

"Take hold—Nay!" The bearer sprang back, making an old-wife's signal against the evil eye.

"Ar't ill?" asked Praisegood.

"The dead walk," whispered the man.

Praisegood took the candle from his trembling fingers. "No, 'tis as thou said'st. Some hapless victim entrapped in the ditch. . . ."

Wild eyes turned on him. "I saw him carried out from the inn, white as a virgin's shroud, cold as snow. When I took the buttons of his waistcoat, I cut him accidental—no sound or move did he make. No deader man have e'er I seen! The Warlock of Houndsditch . . . "

"For love of God . . . " came the voice. The bearer turned and fled. Praisegood looked uneasily at the gaping grave.

"Ha," he thought. "What would Tom say? 'Ghasties and spirits, Will? This is 1665!' " Taking a deep breath, he strode to the side

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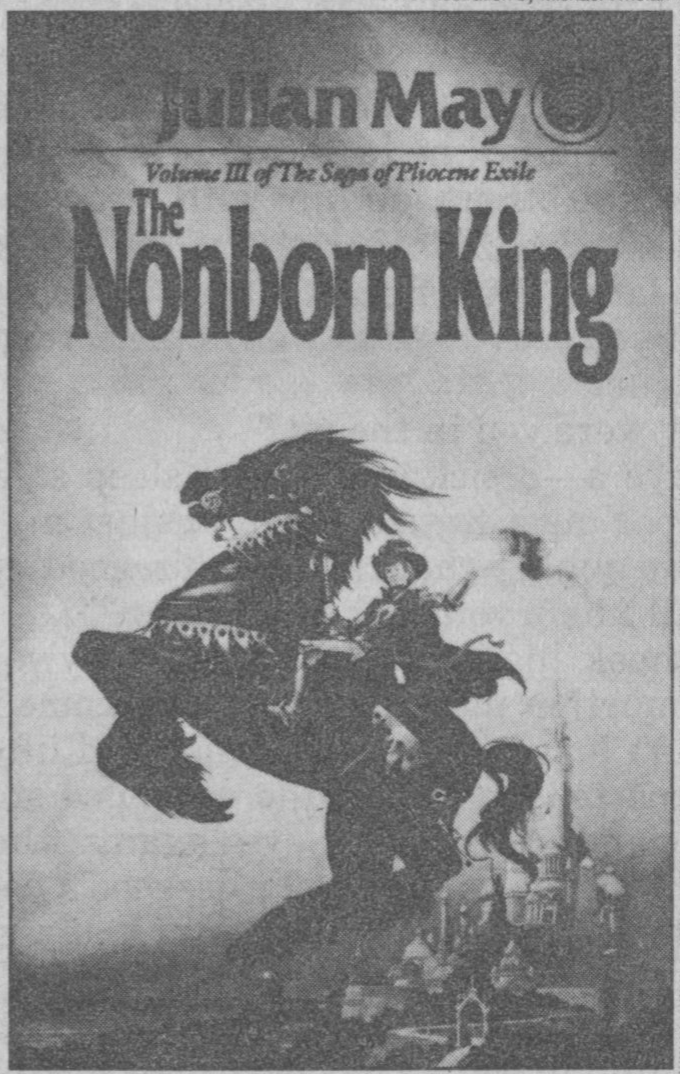

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of the pit and held up the candle.

"Who calls? Where are you?"

"Here," the voice quavered. Praisegood looked down into the noisome pit. The floor was a solid layer of dead bodies, naked or clothed or shrouded, each holding some haphazard position, the cadavers heaped at the edge where the cart had dumped its contents. Like a still pond they lay, with one half-covered man making feeble movements that set the other bodies quivering, ripples spreading along pale dead limbs. The man lifted up his head like a swimmer gasping for breath, and Praisegood recognized the foreigner from the Death's Arms tavern.

He lowered the shepherd's crook. "Catch hold." The man took the end. Footsteps sounded on the stones as the bearer returned with the deacon and another man.

"See?"

The deacon stood by Praisegood. "Thou'st been at the spirits, not seeing them, Alf." He nodded to the doctor. "You'll never land him alone." All together, they took hold of the staff and hauled up the man, until he lay at their feet gasping like a fish. Losing interest, the others left him with Praisegood.

Praisegood gazed after them. He had no wish to stay with a man so lately come from a plague-ridden grave.

"Will you leave me as well?" the foreigner asked. "I have not the plague."

"Why were you in the pit?"

"I have a—a sickness, that I sleep so deep I seem dead. The innkeeper must have come in against my orders." His voice had a sincere quality that raised Praisegood's pity.

"Shall I help you back to your inn?"

He shook his head. "No doubt they've stolen my goods, and would murther me before they'd welcome me."

"I can't leave you here." Praisegood lifted the man to his feet. He supported him along the darkened streets, the man holding up his hands to cover his eyes against the occasional glimpse of sunlight. They arrived at Praisegood's door to find a number of patients waiting. Seeing the doctor half-carrying a stumbling man in black, they backed away.

"Too much brandy," Praisegood cried heartily. "Here, lad, help me get him to bed." They deposited the man on Praisegood's own cot.

The apartment was dark and musty, the windows having been closed up against effluvia. Praisegood lit some candles and consulted with his patients, allaying their fears and ordering up

medications. As he saw the last patient, a plethoric asthmatic widow, he heard some stirring in the bedcloset. He bled the woman from her right forearm, bound up the wound, and escorted her downstairs, barring the door behind her. It was deep night.

"Now for my final patient," he called as he came back up the stairs. "Come forth. . . ." He stopped.

The dark-clad man stood in the midst of Praisegood's room. His face flickered black and yellow in the dancing candlelight. His eyes were wide and red, and he held the bowl that had caught the old woman's blood.

The bowl was empty, and his lips were red.

"Madman," Praisegood rasped, backing to the hearth and taking up a fire iron. All was silent, except for the distant sound of wheels on stone, and a lone wavering cry of "Bring out your dead."

The man stirred, putting down the bowl. He took one step forward. Praisegood held the iron between them, like a sword.

"It is a cure recommended by the doctors of Prague," the stranger said softly. "I must apologize for not asking permission. . . ."

"It is barbaric."

The man continued soothingly. "I had planned to consult English physicians, but found plague here and was trapped. . . ."

"We'd never prescribe human blood," Praisegood said, trusting the man in black, though he could not say why. He put down the iron. "Tell me your symptoms."

"But you're exhausted—"

Praisegood smiled. "The doctor's health is unimportant. But you're right. Plague has made me busy as a bee in a rose patch, where before I had so few patients as to crave charity myself."

"If I might stay the night . . . I would sit up a while and read your texts."

Praisegood paused, then said, "As you will." He could not cast the man out onto a curfewed street inhabited solely by the dead.

The stranger continued, "My disease is called a 'Cyclic Catalepsis,' or by some a 'Coma.' I sleep only by day, and look as a dead man. You will find no sign of breath, not even with the most cunning mirror. My pulse is so faint as to be immaterial, and I will feel frigid and stiff. But see—I am always cold." He held out his hand.

Praisegood grasped it. "I am William Praisegood, Doctor of Medicine."

"Guido Lupicinus. Your name is well-chosen, Doctor."

Praisegood went to his bed, but caution demanded he bolt the door.

Upon rising the next morning he found Lupicinus in a chair, Culpeper's translation of *Pharmacopoeia Londinensis* open upon his lap. The doctor tried to take away the book, but the sleeping man's fingers were frozen about it. He was indeed cold, without movement, pulse, or breath. Praisegood's first temptation was to declare the body to the parish searcher, but the signs were exactly as Lupicinus had described them.

"I give you until this evening to wake," he muttered.

He walked to Smithfield, the heat already oppressive despite the day's youth. St. Bartholomew's Hospital was a hive of activity, but Praisegood found time to query the apothecary Frances Bernard on sleeping sickness.

"Never heard tell of it," Bernard said. "Ask Gray," and they hailed Thomas Gray, the chief of Barts' volunteer physicians.

"Sleep as if dead? I'll tell you what it is, Will. You and I have not had a virtuous full night abed since May. Perhaps Morpheus, god of sleep, has given our surplus to your patient."

"Aye, 'twould be that," Praisegood grinned, and forgot the subject as he worked. While preparing to leave, he was summoned to see a young man with plague, whose buboes were firm and full of pus.

The surgeon attending him said, "An' we bring it out, he may live."

Nodding, Praisegood sent a messenger to tell his own patients he would be late, and he and the surgeon began the task of lancing the abscesses. The young patient screamed, fainted more than once, and lost much blood, but Praisegood went home pleased that he had rescued one man from a pestilential death.

His home was empty, his guest gone. Praisegood found a meat pasty and some ale laid out for him. "Not so dead after all," he said, and reread a favorite section of Burton while he ate. There was a knock at the door.

Lupicinus entered, bearing a heavy trunk. Praisegood helped him set it down. "You walk silently."

"A skill God has given me." He sat upon the trunk. "I went back to the tavern. They were displeased to see me. As I'd thought, they'd robbed me. Had I not already seemed dead, they would have split my skull as I slept." He grinned. "You see, I persuaded them to give me fair return."

Seeing Praisegood's guarded expression, he hastened, "Fear me not. I've been a warrior in my time, but have never harmed a

benefactor, or a friend. Except once, of need, in Egypt when my comrade took a fever . . . "

"Egypt? You've been there?"

Lupicinus smiled, and began a tale of that far country. Despite his youthful appearance he was well traveled, with many stories that were only mildly embroidered, not the fantastic tapestries woven by those who travel only in wishes and in books.

The waning summer was as pleasant as it could be, with the heat and the plague and the record death tolls listed in the weekly Bills of Mortality. Each morning Praisegood went to Barts, leaving a dead man in his chair. Each night he saw his patients, while Guido Lupicinus either went out walking or else helped with the physic. Then the men would talk of exotic lands and better times.

The dropsical widow came again, barely able to labor up the steps. Her son said, "She cannot lie to bed, but wakes gasping for breath."

Praisegood shook his head. " 'Tis an ill disease. I must bleed her now, to relieve her, but cannot revive the humors sufficient to cure her."

"I'll get the lancet," Guido offered, and he held the bowl as the blood rushed in, an eager cast to his face.

"See how thin and pale the blood is," said Praisegood. "You must give her dark wine." The woman began to breathe easier, and he sent her home with various medicinal powders.

The foreigner was still holding the bowl when he returned. "Will, th'art my friend and I would not disturb thy sensibility. Yet I must have this blood."

"The prescription was foolish . . . "

"There was no prescription. I lied to thee, Will. I must drink blood because I am a vampire."

"Vampire?"

Guido laughed. "They would know me for this in Italy or Hungary or even France, but your northern realm seldom hosts my sort. A vampire is a dead man who rises each night to seek blood."

Praisegood said, "You're delirious. Let me search you for tokens."

"If delirium it be, 'tis a lasting one. How old do I seem to thee? Thirty? Thirty-five? Thirty score years have I lived."

Praisegood smiled ingratiatingly. "And how did you become this—vampire?"

"I was bit by one. A lamia, my cousin."

"Then it is spread by direct contagion, as is measles?"

"Do not mock me! I am not mad, nor a fool." He raised the bowl

to his lips and gulped down the red liquid.

Praisegood turned away in revulsion, speaking to the window. "I was once called to consult with the parents of a youth who suffered Lycanthropica. He thought he became a wolf, and would get himself upon hands and knees, and howl and bay. He begged me to lock him up, lest he kill a child and rend its flesh. This was delusion, or 'hallucination,' we term it."

"Pliny wrote of men who truly became wolves," Guido said. "Forgive me, Will. I did not wish to discover thee my curse, but I needed the blood. I've not hunted these past few nights. . . . I honor thy learning, but do not let disdain of superstition dull thee to the truth."

He shrugged out of his waistcoat. The ribs stared through his pale, hairless skin. "Find a pulse, physician, if thou canst."

Praisegood took his friend's wrist. It was somewhat warmer than when he felt it that first morning, but there was no pulse.

He put his hand over the precordium, and at last laid his ear over the heart. There was no heartbeat.

The doctor sank into his chair and looked at the empty fireplace. "There must be a scientifical explanation," he said weakly.

Thomas my Friend, I know your Scorn for Anatomisation. Would the Pest gone and we might take a Bowle of Coffee againe at Garways and heere of your Theories. —Take manie Patients with the Same Disease, observe the Coarse of the Diathesis, you have oft tolde me. Of late I have observed an entire Hoste with the Contagion, as manie as there are Leaves in a Forest, to no useful Expansion of my Knowledge, and so shall take Liberty of recounting you of an Anatomisation.

We gathered in George Thomson's Yard. Sharky was there, the Alchymist who has beene in America, and Hodges with a Posie ever to his great Nose, and an Antipestilential Electuary. Young Kreisell who was at Bologna was ever quoting those Masters; and divers Others of curious Temperament attended. The swollen putrifying Carcasse was of a Servant Lad, an. XIV, dead two Days. The Wether is still warm and dry (a bilious Time). With such an awful Heate and a Foetor of the Bodie, we welcomed the Sulphur which Thomson burned below the Table. Thomson wold not have me here for Feare I catch Pest, till I swore I was now well-fed and wanted not Sleepe. Then Dr Kreisell quoted Salerni, viz: "Use three Physitians still, first Dr Quiet, next Dr Merryman and Dr Dyet." Sharky returned that Kreisell was wont to be Dr Merryman but had better been Dr Quiet. And so to the Anatomisation.

The Bodie was black and blew as if all Bloud was gone from the Veins into the Subcutaneal Tissues. We tooke first the Tokens, of which one in everie Groine, eache so big I cold not close my Hand round them, and More in the left Armepit and the Neck. They were firm and inside red without such Purulent Matter as dwells in most large Apostems. The Similar Parts were swoll and red. Next to the Dissimilar Parts, first the Viscera. The Liver was engorged but without Blemish and the Gallbag without Feculence or troubled Chylus. The Spleene I wondered to beholde, and Kreisell could not containe but quoth Paracelsus much, to see it huge as the Head of a Mastiff. It was an uncommon red Hue and brake into small Bittes as we removed it. The Stomack was swoll and contained Clottes and the membrum was red. Hodges was disappoynted for he thinks the Stomack to be the Centre and Metropolis of the Bodie to which the Pest's Venom is channelled, the Plantation and Nursery of all Feavers he said, and yet we found it lesse Remarkable than any other Organ.

Next Kreisell quoth W^m^ Harvey that the Heart is as King of the Bodie, and prognosticked we should find much ill Health there. The Intestines were as such: the Gutt, especial the Ilion, was thick and soft with manie Places black with Gangreene, and much festering Matter. So foule the Odour that I knew, if ever an Atmospheric Effluvium should catch me, it were then. The Lights were heavie and sagging with Bloud, in parts like Liver, though only yellow Humour with manie small Clottes could be expressed. The Heart was seeming Normal, at which Hodges directed much Laughter at our young Colleague for quoting so manie Authorities but having no Sense. But unabashed Kreisell quoth Horace —Nullius addictus jurare in verba Magistri. We dranke our Hostes Wine and so to our Homes and Practises. Of the Animated Wormes seen by Kircher in Plague, we found no trace not even with a strong Glass.

The windows of the crumbling half-timbered house near Exchange Alley were boarded up, but no cross or padlock graced the door to signify plague. Praisegood stared at the clapboard Merlinshead with its legend, *Here lives a Fortune-Teller.* The second word had been defaced to read *lies.* Another sign noted the availability of *Dr Sylvesters Universal Elixir of Sovereigne Virtue.*

The doctor sighed, then banged his cane against the door. Receiving no answer, he called, "Sylvester! Ope'!" and thumped again. Finally a voice came from inside.

"Desist. I've a gun."

"I an't a thief," Praisegood called. " 'Tis I, Will Praisegood."

There was a sound of latches being undone, and the door slowly

swung open. Praisegood faced an old man with a raised blunderbuss.

"Ha. Will indeed. You can't enter."

"I've no wish to."

"This is my sanctuary. No plague will find me here."

"Keep your home, uncle. I only desire the benefit of your learning."

The gun lowered, and the man peered outward, a bag of herbs held to his nose. "You want my knowledge? My nevvy, the learned physician? Next you'll say the dead walk."

" 'Struth, I shall. Tell me of vampires, Sylvester. A—a friend thinks himself one."

"Vampires, heh?" The old man chuckled and came out one step further, blinking in the sunlight. His skin was pale and dry, and a filthy coat hung over his bony frame.

Praisegood sighed, remembering the last time he'd seen his uncle. The man had been resplendent in the costume of a successful fortune-teller, with velvet jacket and a black cloak. "Look, Will," Thomson had said, "one of those ungodly quacks who list in *The Intelligencer.*" And Praisegood and Sylvester had each looked upon the other without acknowledgement.

"I do not feel at all well," Sylvester said.

"I have medicines . . . "

"And do I not, lad? If not my Universal Elixir, then I'd rather Anne Love's Pomander or See's Internal Balsam, than your approved pharmacopoiea."

"Peace, uncle. Vampires . . . "

"Vampires. Walking corpses who drink blood; accursed, evil beings. The French call them *Broucalaques,* and say they be men who have perished by violence, or were murthered unavenged, or took their own lives, or have eaten a sheep killed by a wolf. They say to stop them you must put a wooden post through their heart, or catch them in sun's light—you do that by scattering millet seeds, and the vampire is compelled to count them though the sun rises . . . "

"That's ridiculous," thought Praisegood, but he said politely, "What more?"

"The Roumanians say the vampire is the stillborn bastard of parents who are both bastards. The vampire's child will be a witch—on this, all agree. The gypsies think that a woman may marry a vampire, and he will help her with the cooking and housework. He is invisible, and only his child may see him. He

must sleep each day in soil from his native land . . . "

"Ah," Praisegood thought. "A particle of truth. For what is earth but cold and dry: a metaphor for the melancholic humor that prevails in these vampires."

The door began to close.

"Wait. Is there anymore?"

"Yes," the old man laughed. "He who is slain by a vampire, becomes a vampire himself." The door slammed shut.

5 September, 1665

Still the Plague grows. I cannot tell of the Horrors I see dayly, lest I disturb your Sleepe, and give you Dreames to reflect mine waking Houres. In its stead, may I give Discourse on a certain Condition I have of late been discovered. Vampyres, the Animated Dead, do exist. I pray you, Thomas, do not set aside this Letter and say—Will is Distracted, he hath gone Mad. I have met a Vampyre, a Man who walks and talks even as you or I, yet his Bloud is cold and thick and flows not, and he lacks any Pulsations. But I write to refute Superstition. Vampyres are not Magickal, but Diseased. As with all Scientifickal Subjects we may from a Bodie of First Principles deduce the Particulars. I shall theorize in the Principles of the Schools in which I am learned, though I have read Van Helmont's Indictment of the Humours. Perhaps our Friend Master Boyle might convince me the Vampyre has a Derangement of the Hydraulico-pneumatical Engine which is his Bodie, or even a Disruption of his Attoms, but I miss the Company of Rob[t] and must forge on myself. As none of the Authorities has touched upon this Matter, I must justify my Theorems by Conjecture and Inference alone, without benefit of Forebears, a Dwarf without a Giant's Shoulders on which to stand, Burton might say. And we have seen that the Authorities are not always Correct, for did not Dr Harvey shew that the Arteries carry Bloud and not Pneuma?

NOTES ON VAMPYRISM BY W[m] PRAYSGODE, M.D. (LEYDENSIS)

We know that there are basic Properties necessary to endow Life; these are an innate Heate, primitive Moysture, and innate Spirit. Also there are the four Primary Qualities, and any Derangement of them leads to Disease. Vampyrism is such a Disease of the Similar Parts and their nutritive Functions, being a Lack of Heate and Wetnesse (those Sanguine Qualities) and therefore a Compound Distemperature.

The Principle Cause of the Disease is an increase in Black

Bile or the Melancholllic Humour. The Accessory Cause is a Lack of the Pulsific Faculty. The Indispensable Cause is a resultant Weaknesse of the Liver and Deficiency in Sanguinification. From these Causes we may understand the Diathesis.

From the Increase in Black Bile comes the Vampyre's Preponderance of the manifest Qualities of Colde and Dry, and his Melancholllic Temperament. The usual Source of Black Bile is Foode, but there must exist an independent Supply in Vampyres, perhaps generated in one of the Organs. Than to prevent more Black Bile, the Vampyre will not Partake of Foode. But as Chyle is made from Comestibles which enter the Intestine, and Bloud is generated by the Passage of Chyle through the Liver (which is here Overloaded with Bilious Matter), so there is a further Decrease in Heate and Wet by those very Attempts to increase them, for no Bloud is made.

Though no Blood is generated in the Vampyre, still does he Require it, and so he must take it by Drinking the Bloud of other Personnes. For I am tolde that the Bloud of Animals, nor Wine or Elixirs, may not substitute. Upon drinking the Bloud of Man or Woman, a Vampyre gains more Moysture than Warmth, and becomes Flegmatic. Thus do Vampyres differ from Ordinary Men in that they commonly have two Temperaments. After taking their Fill they are safe to other Mortalls, and are like to Sleepe.

—So dead their Spirits,
So dead their Senses are
Still either Sleepeing,
Like to Folk that Dreame . . .

To become fully Sanguine would require all the Bloud of manie Men's Bodies. I must note that my Vampyre Friend prefers the Bloud of Women, not only that they are Weaker and so easier persuaded to give up that which he Requires, but by the natural Instincts of a Male. Though he lacks the cruder generative Desires, I have been informed. Alas that Woman's Bloud is colder and moyster than Man's, and so gives less Warmth than a Vampyre might crave. And the Suns Light they avoide, as it warms but drys and so Desiccates the unwary Vampyre.

That there is no Pulsific Faculty is understood by the Purpose of such Pulsations. The Dilation of the Arteries (such as is called Diastole) draws in Ayre to the Lungs to temper the Bodie's internal Heate. This the Vampyre does not Require, as he is already Colde, and so the Heart does not beate and the Arteries do not carry their Bloud to the Lungs. But the beateing Heart, as has long been known, produces Vital Spirits and so the Vampyre is deficient in these, and tries

again to Gaine them from Others.

Notwithstanding that the Vampyre is an Immortal Being, and so might seeme to have the perfect Balance of Humours. But as a well-paynted Hovel may seeme more attractive than a fine-built but less ornate House, the Vampyre's Superiornesse is an empty Facade or Shell, for it is based upon a pathological Dominance of Colde. The Vampyre is not a happy Creature, and because he may not Die except by Violence, does not carry the Hope of Heaven and is Abandoned to Salvation.

Moreover, Melancholly is a daungerous Humour, as all Physitians know, and leades to Destruction and Self-Destruction. As the Vampyre goes without fresh Bloud for longer than a few Days, he becomes Dryer, and the Surfeit of Melancholly makes him Mad.

> —Both Sport and Ease and Companie refusing,
> Extreme in Lust sometime yet seldom Lovefull,
> Suspitious in his Nature and Distrustfull.

So too the Yeeres of Melancholly may build an unwholesome and Evil Character.

I must treate on the Method of Spread of this Distemperature. Vampyrism is not disseminated by Miasmas, but seems to require a direct Contagion as does the Smallpocks and the Measles, as by the Seminaria of which Fracastorius of Verona speaks. That it is a poysonous Venom is shewn by this, that Garlicke protects from Poyson and from a Vampyre also, though this may result from the Odour of the Bulbe and from the acute Senses of the Vampyre, of which I shall another Time write. That it is Spread by Specifick Contact is shewn by this Fact, that he who is bitten by the Vampyre shall become a Vampyre in his Turn, but he whose Bloud is drank from a Bowle lives unscathed. By this we may suggest that Vampyres ought become Physitians and Chirurgeons and so earne their Day's Bloud in an honest and virtuous Manner.

* * *

The heat was oppressive and the air wet, heavy, and smelling of smoke. The sky glowed a soft red.

Guido closed the shutters. "These fires make the air intolerable."

Praisegood raised his head slightly. "The College of Physicians suggested it. Hippocrates ended the plague in . . . "

"He died millenia ago, Will, and thy College has fled like frightened puppies. See, here is written their other counsel. 'Pull off the Feathers from the Tails of living Cocks, Hens, Pigeons or Chickens, and holding their Bills, hold them hard to the Botch

or Swelling and keep them at that Part until they die; and by this means draw out the Poison.' "

Praisegood leaned his head down upon his hands. His saturnine friend gazed on him with concern, then began again. "Oh, you scholars of physic—here are more cures you publish. Powdered toads and mastiff pups . . . " Seeing no response, he dug the knife in further. "Figs boiled in vinegar—Wait, here's a fine one." He waved one of Praisegood's favorite books. " '*Methodus methendi:* Take of Moss that hath growne on a dead man's Skull'—and thou wilt accuse me of dabbling in magic . . ."

"Enough," Praisegood groaned. "I will not rail with thee, Guido."

The vampire reached one hand out, and grasped his friend. "Thou wert always ever ready to dispute—Will! Th'art hot as a brand!"

"And thy hand is cold as death," replied the doctor. "George Thomson told me to live temperate, eat well, sleep aplenty, yet he would work to exhaustion. Now I hear he has taken plague and is closed in his house, as are others who were at the anatomization . . ."

Thunder split the stillness, and rain began to tap against the walls.

10 September

It was the first Raine since April, and in that next Day did die four Thousands of Soules. There are too Few to close the Houses or Bury the Dead or dig new Pits, so that Corpses lie in Publick, Fodder for Vermin and Birds, and floate in the River. Grass growes in Whitehall. Madmen run on the Streetes. I fear that soon no one shall Live to bury the Fallen, and all London shall be a Mausoleum. As to myself: I felt a Melancholly I thought my Usual, but then an Icy Chill taking holde, I knew it was the Ferment insinuating itself into my Bodie's Juices. Next I knew a grypeing of the Gutts and a Headayche as the poysonous Spicula did prick and vellicate the Membrums of my Braine. Soon came a Feaver with Palpitations and Unease. So did I eagerly search my Frame for Blisters or Whelks or an Apostem in the Groine, for oft these Tokens signal some feeble Hope of Survival. Instead I found the Stigmata Nigra, most ill of the Pest's Forms, saving only that which manifests with bloudy Sputum. And so I find myself a Dead Man soon. Ah veryly, Thomas, I would save myself an' I could, though all the World be so bleak. Few are the Physitians to treate the suffering People, fewer still now George and I are doomed. Would I might Rise from this Bed, and go my Rounds

at Barts, see my Patients and deale out their Regimens. But now I am unable to do More than Lament and Regret. So swiftly now, before the Phrensy that strikes one plague-rid Man in two, I shall own myself in my Last Moments to be your Friend and to commend my Soule to your Prayers . . .

Guido lifted the man's head, placing the wine glass to his lips. "Drink, Will," he said, finally cozening the doctor into taking a sip. Praisegood half-opened his eyes.

"Guido?" he rasped.

The vampire laid one cool hand on the fevered forehead. " 'Tis I, Will."

"My blessings . . . "

"Will!" Guido shook him back awake. "List' to me, Will! Wouldst thou live?"

"My time is come . . . "

"Wouldst live?"

The dying man laughed. "Aye, I'd live. I'm a doctor, and the entire city my patient, now abandoned."

"Wouldst thou live, Will? To continue thy work? Even at the cost of thy soul?"

The man closed his eyes, and whispered. "I would live."

Guido undid his friend's collar. "Then sleep, Will," he said softly. "And wake to a better life than this thou leavest."

He leaned forward and placed his teeth to Praisegood's neck.

20 September, 1665

Tho: Sydnam from his Friend, W^m^ Praysegode of London

Sir: I have by the Grace of God survived the Siege of this Epidemical Disease, and am in no way Impayred by having catched the Distemper. Furthermore am I returned to my Duties, though it seemes a Wonder there are any Patients to treate, as 8,297 died this last Weeke and 7,690 the Weeke before. But I am a Physitian againe, and shall live or die with the Citie, and my Hope is Renewed. The Plague may be defeated. If by the wondrous Mercy of the Almighty this Plague shall end, then I have a Minde to see the World, and perhaps to travel to other Cities so afflicted and work amongst their Ill, for I feel myself now quite Immune to the Pest. Gwido Lupicinus has offered to be my Guide in any Travels I shall chose to Undertake. And so, my Friend Thomas, if we do not meete again in this World, be assured that I am

Yr humble and obdt Colleague and Servant

William Praysegode ●

(From page 22)

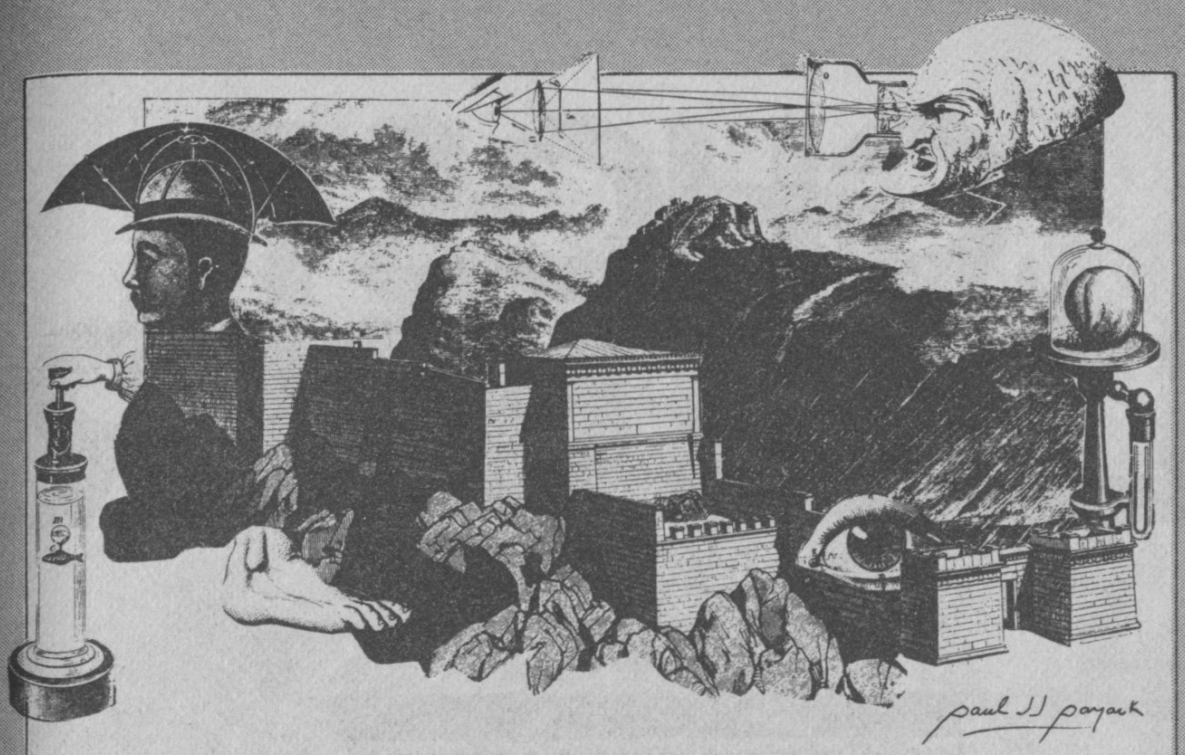
SOLUTION TO ON TO CHARMIAN

If the digits are arranged 321654987 (or the reverse of this), the arrangement contains no subsequence of four digits in ascending or descending order. Remember, the four numbers need not be neighboring. They can be scattered through the sequence. If you are interested in a way to prove the general theorem, and in references to some literature on it, see my *Mathematical Magic Show,* Chapter 15.

The theorem suggests a pleasant card game. Two players alternately select a card from a set of ten cards with values 1 through 10. The chosen cards are placed in a row. The first to play a card that completes a set of four in monotonic sequence wins. For example, if the first player, call him *A,* takes the ace, the second player *(B)* is sure to win if he takes a two. *A* is forced to take the ten. *B* takes the nine. Now no matter what card *A* takes next, *B* can complete a four-card monotonic subsequence on his next play.

The game can also be played in reverse form: the first to complete a four-card monotonic subsequence loses. No game in the standard or reverse version can end in a draw, but I don't know who is certain to win either version when both sides play their best. I'll be pleased to hear from any reader who can tell me.

Back to the planets. On the day you first read this sentence, what planet is closest to you? See page 175 for the answer.



THE GREAT WALL OF WONDER

At the edge of the universe
there runs a colossal curving wall
beyond which lies an unknowable *nothing.*

Envisioned as a defensive barrier
against this alien void
the wall was begun in the time primeval,
the first foundations being laid
shortly after the Big Bang.

It's a continuously expanded border
which resembles the Great Wall of China
except that its length is measured in light years,
and it is made out of more ethereal materials
including moons, small planets, & asteroids,
with solidified clouds of cosmic dust
used as celestial cement.

Lofty watchtowers
with blazing quasars positioned on top
were erected at strategic intervals
along this monumental fortification,
to stand on perpetual guard against
the ever-lurking legions of *nothingness.*

—Peter Payack

GHOST LECTURER

by Ian Watson

art: Odbert

Ian Watson's most recent novel is *The Book of the River.* The first volume of a trilogy, it's been serialized in *F & SF* and published in book form by Gollancz, England. His last appearance in our pages was with "Cruising" in the Mid-December 1983 issue.

As soon as Lucretius materialized, stark naked, at the focus of the Roseberry Field, one of the Institute technicians rushed to drape a bathrobe round him. Another technician furnished our ancient Roman with a pair of sandals.

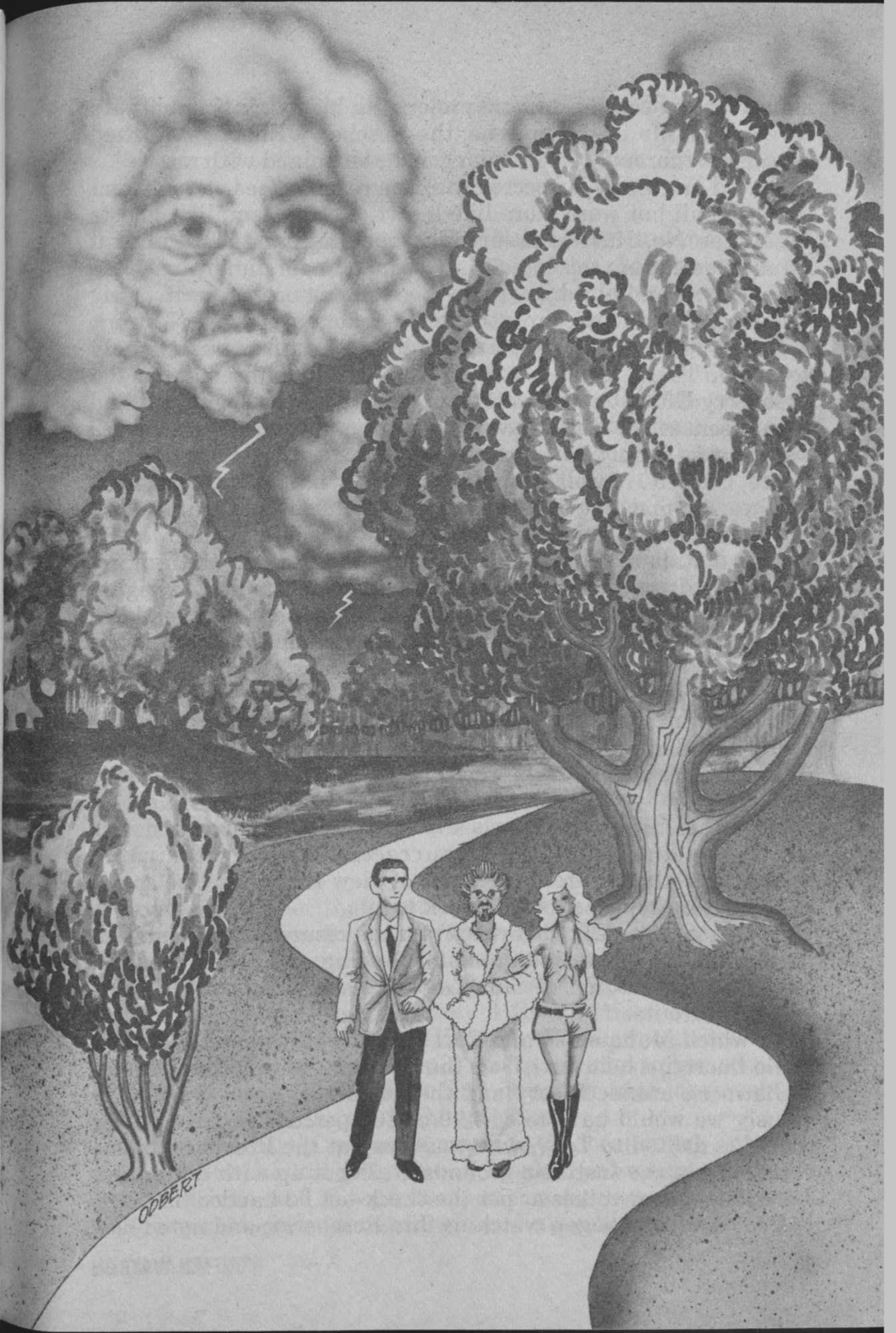
It seems a genuine toga took at least half an hour to don; so a bathrobe was the next best thing.

Then Jim Roseberry advanced to greet our honored guest and explain the set-up, in Latin. Jim really radiated benevolence—you felt you could trust him. With those twinkling blue eyes, that shambling gait, that wild halo of grizzling hair, he looked like a friendly bear whose only wish was to hug you.

"Magister," he declared, "welcome! We of the future salute you, who are about to die. With our science we have plucked you from your deathbed, to honor your wisdom . . . " And so on.

Titus Lucretius Carus stood listening, his head cocked. He was a short skinny fellow with a crimped, tiered hair-style surmounting a large, lined forehead. His nose was long and thin; lively brown eyes were encased in lugubrious lids.

He didn't *look* on the point of death, but of course Jim had already explained to me the night before that in snatching a dying


ODBERT

man from the continuum and prolonging his dying moment into seven days' life in the present, the Roseberry Effect revitalized its subject thoroughly, for as long as he remained with us.

Me, I'd originally suspected that the resurrectees weren't real people at all but were more like a sort of ectoplasm, like ghosts at séances. No, Jim had assured me: real flesh and blood. And if I was a continuum topologist like him, I'd understand why.

Real flesh and blood: that gave me an idea or two for livening things up. Because of course the problem facing us at the Network was that Roseberry's Memorial Laureate Lectures were simply *not* prime TV material. Naturally the first announcement of the Roseberry Effect and the fantastic piece of science behind it had been a sensation. But following it up was the problem. Charles Darwin was simply *not entertaining,* and as for the second resurrectee, Galileo . . . well, computer translation in that monotonous synthesized machine-speech is a real bromide, and we couldn't expect millions of viewers to rent hypno-teach equipment to learn medieval Italian. It was only the rumor that Jim was thinking of resurrecting Jesus Christ which persuaded us to buy TV rights to Lucretius, in order to get an option on subsequent resurrections. I mean, who cared about Lucretius or what he had to tell the world?

So here was I burdened with directing the show. We just *had* to concentrate on the personal angle: the week this old Roman would spend after his lecture, *en famille* with the Roseberry family. And already I knew it would be up to me to personalize his visit.

Once the initial shock was over, Lucretius approached this whole business of his resurrection with admirable composure—though from my point of view it wouldn't be so admirable if he kept his cool all week long.

So presently we all adjourned from the resurrection room with its power cables, continuum-matrix-engine and other doodahs, next door for a buffet of canapés, cookies, and cola prior to the guest lecture itself . . . .

. . . which Muhammed and Carl dutifully filmed and recorded, while Lucretius held forth from the podium to an invited audience in Latin on atomic theory and the nature of the universe. Obviously we would have to edit 99 or 100 percent of this out. My thoughts drifted to Tony, who was away at the Roseberry home elsewhere in the Institute grounds, fitting it up with auto-minicams and snoopy-mikes as per the check-list I'd handed him.

After a while I began watching Jim Roseberry; and noted how

slyly he smiled from time to time during the lecture, how knowingly he nodded.

It occurred to me that something wasn't quite kosher about Jim . . .

Afterwards, when the audience of Nobel laureates and whatnot had departed, we walked back through the rhododendrons towards the Roseberry residence, leaving the mirror-glass and concrete of the Institute behind: Jim and Lucretius and me. With Carl and Muhammed pacing us assiduously, taping every golden moment.

Lucretius mustn't have been used to our modern toe-grip style of sandal—or else delayed shock caught up with him—since we hadn't gone far before he stumbled and collided with me. I took the opportunity to slip my arm through his.

"Is it true you were driven mad by a love-potion?" I whispered. (This was something my researcher Karen had turned up, cheering me considerably. Our Roman reportedly had died raving mad, crazed by aphrodisiacs. Too, he had always been a manic depressive, forever flipping from ecstasy at the beauties of the world to gloomy horror at all the carnage in it. Though he had tried very hard to maintain a philosophical detachment.)

Jim overheard. "For God's sake!"

Lucretius eyed Jim with a pained expression. "Do you *still* believe in gods?"

Me, he continued to clutch. I guess my knee-boots, micro-shorts and halter must have turned him on. Goodness knows what he thought Muhammed was up to, bobbing about with his mini-cam. A black slave, fanning us?

Invited to dinner that first evening were two people from the afternoon audience: tubby Max Stein the astrophysicist, and particle physicist Ingrid Langholm wearing a full-length orange gown with organdy insets showing flesh discreetly. Our hostess Martha Roseberry was definitely a Rubens woman: portly and pink and powdered. Daughter Harmony Roseberry, an adolescent know-it-all, was plump too, and spotty, thanks to her addiction to greasy doughnuts. Mother and daughter both obviously regarded Jim as the next best thing to God.

Muhammed and Carl had gone off to the local motel; Tony was relegated to the kitchen, whence Machiko, the Japanese maid, served drinks and the products of the family's Filipino cook. Whenever Machiko came into the dining room, Lucretius in-

spected her oriental features in puzzlement. Finally, in the midst of the smoked salmon and asparagus, he enquired whether she was Egyptian—which sent Jim rushing off to his study, to return with a globe of the world: one more modern marvel to amaze our Roman with, to add to electric light, TV, and flush toilets.

And as I listened to Jim explain how we had explored and mapped every last inch of the Earth, and even gone to the Moon, I began to understand what wasn't quite kosher about him.

It was like this: Jim's great scientific breakthrough was to yank past geniuses out of time, supposedly to honor them so they would know their lives had been worthwhile in the eyes of the future. But then he would go on to tell them—oh so kindly—where they had gone wrong or fallen short of the mark. And how much more we knew nowadays. "You almost got it right, boy! You were on the right track, and no mistake. Bravo! *But* . . . "

That was why he chose scientists to resurrect and host. An artist like Mozart or Shakespeare could never be upstaged; but a scientist could be—by superior knowledge. Thus Jim Roseberry became superior to Darwin, Galileo, and whoever else.

True, Lucretius was a poet, but he only wrote poetry in order to explain science. He was sort of the Carl Sagan of ancient Rome.

Beef Stroganoff with pilau rice was next. Max Stein devoured second and third helpings; but Lucretius only toyed with his food.

"How do you find your meal, Magister Lucretius?" Martha asked in Latin. (We had all spent a night with the hypno equipment, of course.)

"Bitter," he replied. "Sour."

She passed the salt cellar. Harmony demonstrated its use. Lucretius tasted and grimaced.

"Do the rough atoms tear your tongue?" asked Jim with a twinkle in his eye.

The Burgundy was a success, though.

During the dessert (lemon mousse—and a doughnut for Harmony) conversation turned to electrons and quarks, and the Big Bang. Ingrid Langholm proved rather ingenious at coining Latin words to explain what happens when you split the unsplittable. Coffee and Cognac followed; and Lucretius began to frown and ask for more Cognac. He was still keeping his cool; but for how long? I was next to him; I rubbed my bare leg against his bathrobe, innocently. (Tonight was too soon. Perhaps the next night . . .)

That was when I heard thunder. Jim jumped up and went to part the drapes. Outside the night was black and moonless, and

no stars showed. A wind seemed to be rising. "Dirty weather brewing," he told Max and Ingrid.

Max consulted his watch and sprang up. "I'd better be going!" He stuck his hand out at Lucretius. "A real pleasure to talk with you, Magister!"

"Me too," said Ingrid, also rising.

Lucretius stared at Max's offered hand. "That's all right. I don't wish to go outside to vomit."

"Goodness!" exclaimed Martha.

"Roman feasts were so gutsy, Mom," said Harmony, "the diners usually had to vomit between courses."

"Was this a feast?" asked Lucretius. "I admired its moderation, if not its flavor."

"Well, I never!" Martha said.

And so the party broke up.

I spent a scary night in one of the guest rooms. That storm kept circling round and waking me. Every hour or so, fresh bouts of thunder erupted and lightning flashes squeezed through the drapes. Most of the time, a real banshee of a wind howled. Occasionally I thought I heard a cry or owl-screech. I felt *edgy,* and burrowed deep under the duvet, even if it overheated me.

When I got up the next morning, the wind was still wild. Enormous cloud galleons scudded through the sky, sail piled on sail high up to the stratosphere.

My bedroom window looked on to woodland which hid us from the highway. Amidst the general gray-green I noticed something brightly orange.

Suddenly it seemed as if the area of trees I was staring at, well, *threw* itself at me—shucking off veil after veil which flew towards me. I felt the impact of each thin copy of the scene like a physical blow upon my eyes. What I was looking at was *radiating* its surface at me. For a moment I thought I was having a flashback to an acid trip, years ago. But then I focussed on that orange patch.

It was Ingrid Langholm, and she was half way up a tree!

Was this a hallucination? It didn't seem to be.

I dressed quickly, and went to rouse Tony and Jim Roseberry too. If Ingrid had spent the whole night up a tree in a storm, she must have had a damn good reason.

When we got back to the house, supporting a bedraggled, worn-out particle physicist, Martha Roseberry was outdoors too, in her

housecoat, ignoring the wild weather. Lucretius had also emerged, in his bathrobe.

"Whatever happened?" squawked Martha.

"Front wheel gave out," gasped Ingrid. "I had a flat."

"Her chariot wheel gave out," Jim said in Latin, mindful of his duties as host.

"No flashlight with me . . . So I started walking back . . . and a goddam *lion*—"

"A lion chased her up a tree. It kept prowling about."

"Lions fear the cry of a cockerel," remarked Lucretius, sagely.

"Eh?" from Martha.

"So it would flee at dawn. Pigs shun perfume and marjoram, lions fear a rooster." Lucretius regarded poor Ingrid with dour satisfaction. Her gown was torn and sodden. Her make-up had all run. Her hair was in rats' tails. She looked a bleary ragbag.

Just then, Ingrid's face detached itself and flew at mine—time and again. It was as if she wore an infinity of masks, which each peeled off in turn and flew through the air, without in any way diminishing her. Martha, too, rubbed her eyes in disbelief.

But Jim was too busy staring up at the wild and roiling sky. He pointed shakily. A giant face was grinning down at us from the side of a cloud. It became a snarling lion's head, then dissolved, dripping like wax.

"Did you see *that?*"

"Flimsy films of vision sometimes generate themselves spontaneously in the sky," Lucretius said helpfully.

As though this wasn't bad enough, at that moment two neighboring Douglas firs suddenly burst into flames. Jim rounded on Lucretius.

"Oh, and what's the reason for *that,* then?"

"Why, wind rubs the trees together. Friction enflames them."

By now the steady rain of blows from the wind was dislodging the atoms of my mind and body from their station so fast that I felt I hadn't slept at all the night before. I'd lost a lot of density and I needed food to fill the cracks. (And part of me asked another part, "What the hell am I thinking? Blows? Dislodged atoms? Loss of density?") My limbs tottered. I didn't notice the snake sneaking through the grass till Tony shouted, "Look out!"

Hastily I jogged my vital spirit, to get it to jog my body aside. (I did . . . *what?*) Lucretius spat casually at the snake. Instantly the serpent writhed around and bit its own tail, stinging itself to death.

Lucretius clucked in satisfaction. "Luckily it's one of those which human spittle poisons."

I was reeling. And in the furnace of colliding clouds, seeds of fire were being crammed together. A thunderbolt burst forth and smashed into the ground quite near us.

"What the hell's going on?" cried Tony.

"I need some breakfast urgently," I told Martha. "Please! I've lost too many atoms. My vital spirit will quit."

"Are you into some new kind of therapy?" Martha asked, baffled.

"We'd better get inside fast," advised Jim.

We breakfasted on waffles with maple syrup; the smoothly trickling particles of syrup seemed to please Lucretius's palate. Soon the storm was on the wane.

Jim gazed across the table at me balefully. "What's happening? I'll tell you what's happening. Those "films" you see flying off surfaces and hitting your eyes—that's how our friend here thought vision worked. And now we're seeing it happen, as though it's true. All the crazy rest of it, too! His world-view is affecting us. Somehow it's . . . projecting itself. And I'll tell you why. It's because you sexed him up! On account of how you're dressed. Or undressed!"

"So what's wrong with shorts and a halter? I'm not exactly nude with body paint!"

"I watched you at dinner. You caused the onset of a love-frenzy."

"A what?" asked Harmony.

Martha said mildly, "Do you think we should be discussing this in front of our guest?"

"Aw, the hell with that."

I spoke from the depths of me. I cut sounds into words with my tongue and molded them with my lips. (At least that's what it felt like.) "The hell with my costume and morals, too! *How* is this happening to us?"

"It's his world-view taken literally—and taken to extremes . . . . This must be an aspect of the Roseberry Effect I hadn't taken into account. With Darwin and even Galileo we were on the same general wavelength. The modern scientific world-view," Jim mumbled.

I just had to laugh. "So instead of *you* wising Lucretius up, he's changing things to suit his own half-baked ancient notions? Oh, that's too rich!"

Jim went white. "I'm going to make some phone calls. Excuse me."

Harmony looked daggers at me, then rushed out of the room after him. I hoped the mini-cams and snoopy-mikes were working okay, getting all this taped.

While Jim was away, Ingrid, wrapped in a spare bathrobe, drank a lot of hot coffee. After a while Lucretius coughed, to clear his throat of sticky atoms, I suppose.

"Indeed I must confess that I felt love-frenzy coming over me. Will we never reach a state of equanimity? Will we never heed the Master's word?"

"The Master?" asked Ingrid.

"Epicurus."

"Oh."

"And yet . . . if one concentrates on the defects of a woman, however fair at first she seems . . . " He looked steadfastly at Ingrid, who resembled a drowned rat after her night out; and I realized to my chagrin that Lucretius had been more excited by *her* than by me.

Maybe that was just as well! Otherwise I might have been the one who was trashed. Still, the snake had been heading for me. . . . I could almost imagine myself swelling up and raving, and black flux pouring from my bowels . . . . Where were such notions coming from? I *must not* think along those lines!

Presently Jim returned, followed by Harmony. "The phone's okay. Those little atoms still rush along the wires. The effect's quite local." He sat down, though he wouldn't meet my eyes at first—because I had seen through him. "I've been thinking."

"So have I," said Ingrid. "If Jesus Christ were here instead of Lucretius—if this were *His* Second Coming—then we could experience joy and peace and true love. For a while. In one little corner of the world."

Oh beautiful! thought I. Bless you, Ingrid. Press that button again. I'd been trying to get on to the business of resurrecting Jesus, but whenever I broached the subject Jim had neatly evaded it—till I suspected that maybe he had begun the rumor himself, just to get hold of a fancy chunk of TV money for the Institute.

Ingrid blushed. "I guess I was praying a bit last night. Old habit, long forgotten. It kept me company."

And maybe it wouldn't be so beautiful, after all! Lucretius was an unreligious man. Would we want real archangels flying about . . . and Satan knocking on the door in person?

"As I say," resumed Jim, "this is a local problem. Reality has

become a little unhinged in our friend's vicinity. And definitely more plastic. His imagination is molding it—and he always had a strong imagination! As to *why* exactly, it's too soon to say. We'll have to put our heads together at the Institute. But for my money I'd say it's a function of how far we've gone into the past this time. Apparently the further back we pluck a fellow from, the more we loosen the continuum. Don't worry, it'll bounce back afterwards."

"After he goes home," said Harmony, rather grimly.

"Meanwhile we'll have to watch our step. Avoid exciting him too much."

"Who," asked Lucretius, "is Jesus Christ?"

"Ah. Um. Long story, that," said Jim. "I guess you could call him a teacher. Like Epicurus."

"He was the Son of God," said Ingrid, with eyes downcast.

"A god?" cried Lucretius irritably. "Then maybe *I'm* a god, if I can produce storms and thunderbolts? But I have already pointed out in persuasive verse that this is nonsense. Lightning strikes where it wills! Do you mock me?"

"No, no," Jim hastily assured him. "It's just that reality is a bit more complicated than you thought . . . Look," he said, with an effort at bonhomie, "it's brightening. Let's all go for a walk on the grounds. That'll clear our heads." He switched to English briefly. "I'll fetch my hunting ridle. Just in case. I'll pretend it's a walking stick." And in Latin: "We won't meet any more lions, will we, Magister?"

Lucretius was offended. "*I'm* not responsible for hallucinations. Wild beasts are sometimes seen when none are there, because the mind is constantly beset by images; and if a person happens to be afraid, and thinking of wild beasts—perhaps because her chariot has broken down at night—then from these images the mind selects . . . "

"Sure, sure," said Jim. "We won't think of lions, will we? Not any of us! We'll think of nice things: like flowers, and poetry. We'll walk down by the lake. Feed the geese. That's always soothing. Fetch some doughnuts for the birds," he told Harmony.

Jim hustled us outdoors rapidly, so that I hadn't any time to summon Carl and Muhammed from the motel; though Tony came along, with a mini-cam hastily mounted on one shoulder and a snoopy-mike fixed to the other. Ingrid had flaked out by now and was being put to bed by Martha. So five of us set out: me, Tony, Lucretius, Jim, and his daughter.

The wind had dropped. Clouds were evaporating quickly. As we stepped out of the house, suddenly the sun shone forth. Unfortunately I glanced up at it—and a film of solar disc hit my face with force. Particles of fire scorched my eyeballs. "The sun!" I yelped. "Don't anyone look at it!" It was a whole minute before I regained my vision, and even then my eyes remained untrustworthy; they kept watering and unfocusing. Tony helped me along for a while, but I shook him off. I wanted him filming, not guiding me as once Antigone led blind Oedipus.

On our way to the lake we passed through woods, which were moist and warm. The sunlight dappling down was genial, here.

What I took at first to be a giant puffball sprouting from the loam suddenly split open as we drew abreast of it—to disgorge a bleating baby goat. The young kid tottered to a nearby bump on the ground, from which white liquid began leaking. Splay-legged, the kid grabbed hold of this bump with its mouth and sucked greedily. Yes indeed, suckling milk from a breast of the earth!

The bump just had to be a nipple. Which meant that the puffball, now collapsed, must have been . . . not a fungus but a rooted womb!

We stared in amazement as a kid grew apace. Soon it was grazing contentedly on poisonous hellebore which had sprung up nearby.

Lucretius frowned, and tutted.

"How odd. In the late, decaying state of the world nowadays, only worms and animalcules should be generated spontaneously from the soil. This is exceptional."

"Isn't it just?" snapped Jim.

"And if goats can get born from the soil," broke in Harmony, "why not lions as well? Gee, Daddy, *anything* could pop up. This is scary." Oddly, though, the prospect didn't seem to scare her, so much—how can I put it?—as encourage her.

Lucretius shook his head. "I still maintain the lion must have been a hallucination. One must always select the most *reasonable* explanation of phenomena. Though in this case—"

"Oh, shut up," Jim growled softly. Yet just then (when I thought back on it) he too looked oddly content.

And we carried on.

The lake was circled by lawns. Our group was still in tree-shade, but all before us the sunlight was blazing down. (I took care not to look anywhere near the sun again, but one thing I remembered about it was that it had seemed to be only a few

miles away—and no larger than it looked.) The rainfall of the night before was steaming off the grass. At that moment I could see quite clearly.

A flock of Canada geese came winging in towards the water. One moment they were flying blithely along; the next they were tumbling out of the sky. Falling like rocks on to the lawn. Thump, thump. Dead as ducks.

For one mad instant I thought Jim must have shouldered his gun and zapped the geese in an incredible—and silent—display of marksmanship. But no; he was still tapping the ground with the rifle butt, like the old man in the riddle of the Sphinx.

"And *what*, Magister," Jim asked icily. "is the cause of that? I *liked* those birds."

"Ah . . . " Lucretius scratched his chin. "A vacuum must have formed, you see. The ground has been rotted by unseasonable rain, and now it is pelted with sunbeams. Consequently a foul effluence rises, expelling all the air above."

"Of course! How stupid of me! What other explanation could there be?"

Lucretius regarded the phenomenon equably. "We must believe the evidence of our senses, as interpreted by Reason. I have a question, though."

"Ask away."

Thump, thump. A trio of mallards slapped on to the lawn.

"By use of Reason, I discovered the causes of pestilence: pestiferous clouds of atoms uncongenial to us, which fly about. Yet different air in different lands breeds characteristic diseases. Thus elephantiasis is only found in Egypt, while gout is native to Attica. Tell me, what is the characteristic disease of this land, America?"

"Cancer and heart disease mostly," remarked Tony, who was otherwise occupied with the occasional tumbling bird.

"Jesus, what did you tell him that for? Magister, disease is *not* caused by atoms in the air. Well, usually it isn't . . . "

"Maybe it is, around this neck of the woods." Tony pointed. "Here come more kamikaze birdies."

At this point my eyes blurred, as if they had just been attacked by cataract-causing atoms. I heard Harmony scream, "A monster!" I heard the bang of the rifle. Then a thump.

"Holy Moses," I heard Tony cry. "You've shot him."

My vision swam back to normal. Jim was standing with his rifle at the slope. Harmony had her hands over her mouth in a theatrical show of shock; she had dropped all the doughnuts. Lucretius lay sprawled on his back, looking very dead.

"Did you *see* that monster?" babbled Harmony. "It was breathing *fire!* My Daddy saved us!"

"What do you mean, *saved?*" said Tony. "The bullet hit Mr. Lucretius."

"What a terrible accident," said Jim. "Oh, this is awful. I hope you got it all on film."

"Of course I didn't! I was looking over there. I didn't see any monster."

"It was like a lion," said Harmony. "But worse. It breathed fire. Now it's gone."

"Did *you* see anything?" Tony asked me. I shook my head.

But I had the gravest suspicions that Jim Rosenberry had just killed Titus Lucretius Carus deliberately. Out of almighty pique at how he, Jim, had been upstaged.

He must have thought this was the perfect murder, too. For how can you be guilty of murder when your victim already died two thousand years ago?

Well, there was quite some fuss then. We rushed back to the house, where Jim monopolized the phone for a while. Soon as I could, I called Carl and Muhammed at the motel; and a bit later a police captain and a lieutenant arrived in a Buick, all lit up and screaming—just beating the Network minibus by a short head.

However, Jim must already have been calling in a favor or two before he even called the police to report the fatality, since the two officers were so respectful and apologetic; and what's more, even as we were all heading back down to the lakeside, they were already deciding that the matter was right outside their jurisdiction.

And Jim was nodding so concernedly and saying that on scientific grounds the body *would* really have to be rushed back to the Institute for dematerialization; though he had felt it his duty as a citizen, et cetera.

When we got to the lake, Institute staff were already standing by with a stretcher. After asking the bare minimum of questions, the captain and lieutenant waved the body on its way; and departed.

Dead Lucretius departed too. To return to his own time. Back where he was already on the point of death. So nobody back in ancient times would notice any real difference; except maybe that Lucretius now had a hole in his chest. If he had indeed stabbed himself to death, crazed by a love-potion, this mightn't look too

odd. Or maybe the murder, up in our present day, was what *caused* the tale of suicide? Even if nobody back in the past could locate a knife—since there wasn't one . . .

Very neat, Jim!

Except, it wasn't neat at all.

As I was the first to notice, while we headed for the Institute in the wake of the corpse, when Jim's face suddenly unpeeled and flew at my eyes several times.

"Hey!" cried Carl, staring at *my* face in alarm.

I tapped Jim on the arm. "Notice something?"

"You mean, the effect still continuing. Hmm, I thought it would fade as soon as he died—"

"Did you just?"

He flushed, "So instead, it'll go away when we get rid of the body. Be *very* careful what you imply."

"Oh, I will be careful, don't you worry."

And so we all saw Lucretius off, six days early, from the resurrection room accompanied by crackling air and sparks and a little sonic boom. And our show had gone down the drain, thought I.

But on our way back through the rhododendrons afterwards, to the Roseberry house, I thought I heard the distant roar of a lion.

"Just thunder," Jim said dismissively, and scanned the sky.

He froze, ashen. For up on the side of the nearest cloud hung a familiar face. The cloud-mouth of Lucretius opened and dripped red blood like a sunset, before dissolving.

So the effect hadn't gone away, after all. It stayed, And I could guess why. It was because Lucretius died here in the present. His vital spirit had already flavored the environment in a most exaggerated manner, courtesy of the Roseberry Effect and its derangement of space-time. Him being killed here, this feature was locked in. All that Jim sent back to ancient times was a lump of meat.

The grounds of the Institute were haunted now. Meteorologically, optically, psychologically *haunted.*

Storms broke out. Trees burst into flames. Birds plunged from the sky from time to time. Phantom images flew about. Faces appeared on clouds. Love-frenzies possessed people.

One thing was for sure: the reputation of Lucretius endured in

the modern world. Jim had seen to that. A couple of square miles were definitely Lucretian.

Ironically enough, Lucretius himself always poured scorn on the idea of life after death. As I discovered when I read *The Nature of the Universe* not long after.

I also discovered that our Roman never believed in fire-breathing monsters. "If fire burns all known animals, even lions," he argued, very rationally, "then no animal can ever breathe fire." Harmony went right over the top there. Which only proves how she conspired, hastily, with her Daddy. They must have loved it when they saw that kid goat born from the puffball womb.

And at one point the Lucretius Zone overlapped the grounds a bit, and slopped over a stretch of state highway. Since nobody can drive safely when images might zap their eyes, this effectively rendered the highway unusable. And some real estate was hexed, too. So Jim was in trouble.

Not trouble as a murderer, of course. As I said, you can't murder a dead man. But soon he would be hit by suits for damages from neighboring residents whose property values had crashed; not to mention the highway authority, who were going to have to build a very costly detour.

Those members of the Institute who hadn't fled were busy studying the new Roseberry Effect—of disordered reality. One thing they quickly found was that the old Roseberry Effect was blocked by the haunting. So there would be no more resurrections at the Institute.

One morning Jim phoned me at the Network. He sounded stressed.

"It occurs to me," he said, "that you could shoot a damn fine horror movie here in the Roseberry Zone." (He didn't, of course, refer to it as the Lucretius Zone.) "I mean, we have a genuine *phenomenon* here."

"Do you really think anyone would want to act in *there,* when they could catch instant plague or be smeared by thunderbolts?"

"So do your location shooting here—build your script around the phenomena. Then find somewhere else that's similar-looking, but safe, for the actors." He was almost pleading.

"Do I hear the rattle of an almost empty money box?"

"Look, it'll stir up a lot more interest than laureate lectures. Or even a real live sermon by Jesus, and seeing how he uses the bathroom."

"Ah, but we can't host Jesus now. Not any longer. And frankly

I wouldn't want to. In fact, I'd personally whip up a real campaign to block any such proposal. *No,* Jim. But let me give you a bit of advice, out of the pure kindness of my heart. Get out of there fast."

"What?"

"Take to your heels. I know that you murdered Lucretius—and his zone knows it, too. It's just biding its time."

Oh yes. Pretty soon it would trap Jim Roseberry in a nasty doom. Worse than any law suits. Perhaps that doom would be such as overwhelmed the Athenians with loathsome ulcers and malignant fluxes of foul blood, descending to the groin, so that some men only saved their lives by self-castration, while other victims completely forgot who they were. As Lucretius reveals in the gory and psychotic climax to *The Nature of the Universe.*

"You're out of your mind," said Jim.

"No, you're *into his* mind. Slap in the midst of all his cockeyed ideas, exaggerated and made real."

Of course, Jim wouldn't listen. Was he not the custodian of a profound natural mystery?

Really, all that poor old Lucretius ever wanted out of life was peace and quiet. So resurrecting him had been a fairly unkind cut. But resurrecting him, then murdering him had been the unkindest cut of all. No wonder Lucretius died raving mad—mad at Jim.

A week after that, a snake bit Harmony—though she did recover, away from the Zone in intensive care.

A fortnight subsequent, the Roseberry house was struck by a thunderbolt and burned down. So Jim moved into the Institute, to camp out.

Just yesterday I heard how Jim has caught, yes, plague. And a Lucretian plague isn't very pleasant. But you can't say I didn't warn him. ●

GALATEA

by Kristi Olesen

art: Arthur George

The author reports that she grew up in Milwaukee, left halfway through high school, and spent the next couple of years living and traveling in Europe. She finally settled in San Francisco about ten years ago, where she now lives in an immense Victorian flat in the Haight-Ashbury district. She also says she "survived" the 1982 Clarion workshop and is at work on a novel. In addition to "Galatea," she has two short stories scheduled to appear in original anthologies, one in *Wet Visions* and the other in *The Clarion Awards* from Doubleday.

Spring had come, but the roses were still ugly, the new buds pinched off. When he ordered roses to be planted in the women's courtyard, Pygmalion had assured Galatea that their blossoms would be as exquisite as their thorny stems were misshapen. He pointed to one and then another, telling her which would be crimson, which dark-wine, which white, but she couldn't imagine the shiny red shoots and stubby round leaves producing anything but more thorns. Still, she checked them daily, waiting for the transformation. Pygmalion had told her to.

She examined the stems again, looking behind the leaves and studying the ground as best she could without bending or stooping. Nothing. Yesterday she had discovered the first tiny buds, three red and one white, tight-wrapped and fragile. She tried not to wonder who had plucked them. Or why. Pygmalion rarely visited this garden anymore.

Resting her hands on her huge belly, she sat carefully on one of the richly carved cedar benches that flanked the doors to the bedchamber. She gazed at her stomach, fingers tracing haphazard circles over the child that lay growing beneath. One more month. When Artremis again showed herself fully in the night sky, Gal-

atea would be a mother. The roses would have many leaves then and the bushes of myrtle that crouched along the courtyard walls would be covered with flowers of pink and white. Or so Pygmalion said. Galatea had never seen spring.

Myrtle and roses, a dovecote and a pool for swans—all Pygmalion's way of honoring and thanking Aphrodite for her gift: for Galatea, the perfect woman, whose delicate skin was as unmarred as the ivory from which she had been carved.

"Will it be a boy or a girl, do you think Mistress?"

Galatea started and looked up. Drusilla stood before her smiling shyly, one sandaled foot rubbing at the other, her pale, straight hair straying from under her headband. Galatea returned the smile.

"A boy. Pygmalion says it must be a boy." She looked back at her lap. "Drusilla, do you know what happened to the buds? On the roses? I found the first yesterday and now they're gone. Who picked them?"

Drusilla flushed at the unexpected harshness in Galatea's voice. "I . . . he . . . I couldn't say, Mistress," she muttered, "maybe one of the gardeners took them. Shall I ask? I can ask if you want."

Galatea sighed and gentled her tone. "No. No, dear, don't bother. Silly to worry. They were so small. So small." She examined her hands, turning them over slowly as if she might find the missing buds hidden in them if only she didn't move too quickly.

Drusilla cleared her throat. "Mistress? Are you ill? Would you like me to rub your forehead? Can I get you anything?"

"No, thank you, Drusilla. I'm fine." She forced herself to smile again. "I was thinking about the banquet tonight. How exciting to have a guest after so long! I'm anxious to meet this bard and hear his singing." She had said the words to reassure Drusilla, but as she spoke she realized she *was* excited; a new face would help to break the long quiet of dinners in the great hall. And the tales! To others the poems were old, heard over and over since childhood, but to Galatea each was fresh, full of plots, heartaches and battles all the more intriguing for their strangeness.

"Go on, Drusilla," she said, her smile now a true one, "Go help the others with the preparations. I'll call you when I'm ready to bathe."

"Yes, Mistress. And about the roses? Ask one of the men. Maybe they can tell you." She bowed quickly and set off across the courtyard to the passageway that led through the men's courtyard to the kitchens at the rear of the house. Galatea watched the slave

girl's frail back as she skirted awkwardly around the pond, the spindly rose plants and the chittering sparrows in their standing cages.

How simple the girl made it sound. Ask one of the men. But Galatea knew that, though Pygmalion had never specifically forbidden her to seek advice or guidance from the slaves, he would be displeased should he discover his wife on friendly terms with anyone other than himself, male or female. He tolerated Drusilla only because Galatea had to have at least one attendant, and the skinny blond slave, hardly more than a child, was too shy to have developed a talent for the wile and manipulations that made Pygmalion mistrust all females, save his own creation. He did not want his wife sullied by contact with the common run of woman.

She plucked an orange-blossom from the tree beside the bench and inhaled its fragrance, broad and sugary, without the subtle shifts and layers of scent in the white roses that Pygmalion so adored. He had given her white roses every day, back at the beginning. He had let her meet other people then, too—travelers, and occasionally family friends or other artists. They had all been kind though reserved, treating both Galatea and Pygmalion with the same mixture of reverence and familiarity that they used when speaking of immortals. The magic had happened right here, on their own island; even the slaves behaved as if this special couple belonged to them, handling Galatea both as a priceless pet and as a distant character from a bard's song. After all, she *was* a living miracle, and Pygmalion, the third son of a leading Cyprian family, had already been a celebrated sculptor when first he had begun to shape the now-famous tusks. Then, to be blessed by the personal intervention of Aphrodite, the Cyprian, the islander's most cherished deity: this was the fabric from which the poems were shaped.

Galatea sighed again and picked up her wool and carding-comb. She didn't *feel* like a poem. She felt much too human. With each passing day, as the ache in her back worsened, her apprehensions about the birth grew deeper. Oh, Hera, she prayed silently, please let it be a boy. Let the birth be easy. Let Pygmalion continue to love . . . But of course he loved her. He wasn't leaving her alone so often because his joy in her diminished; he was an artist, one of the blessed few whom the Muses chose to visit when they left their mountain. It would be sacrilege for him to ignore the nine sisters' holy gift. If only—

She pushed the wool aside and looked beyond the clay tiles of

the low roof to the peaks of the northern range. Light from the late afternoon sun brought out muted ribbons of brown, ocher, and wine on the steep slopes and gilded the far-off thickets of cypress, oak, and cedar.

If only Pygmalion would take her walking in the mountains as he had when she was new, or let her go with him when he rode out to oversee the care of his groves, or take her on his calls to neighbors and family. There was so much she wanted to learn about Pygmalion and his world, but he kept her here, cloistered in this lovely, cool house in its pretty, fertile valley. He retreated to his studio, appearing only for meals. Then he ate rapidly and spoke little, mind focused inward, hands recalling the stone.

The sun angled past the roof and touched Galatea's cheek. Leaving the wool and comb tangled together on the bench, she rose and walked slowly to her rooms. Unveiled, she never stayed outdoors for very long. She had to protect her skin. Pygmalion noticed each tiny line, each mark, each discoloration, as he noticed every tremulous smile or blush, and every graceful movement of Galatea's full, matchless body.

Half-listening to the jabber of the sparrows from the courtyard, she sat on the edge of her bed to remove her sandals, recalling the way he had watched her at dinner last afternoon—the way he always watched her, of late. Rubbing his long, auburn beard, he judged and measured, the sinews in his arms jumping as his black eyes swept her form, searching for the inhuman perfection he had dowelled and whittled into a pale statue; searching for the unalterable innocence he hoped the goddess had carved into this mortal woman's soul.

And finding what? Galatea stroked her stomach. He had not come to her apartments of an evening for many months. When she was new, she had known the Cyprian was with them, for the doves had cooed day and night, never leaving the cote, and the house had smelled of incense, roses, and myrtle. When Pygmalion made love to her, their light, shared laughter had frothed like the foam from which Aphrodite had sprung, whole and brilliant. He stayed at her side for weeks on end, shielding her from all other company, whispering into her ear, arranging and rearranging her hair and clothing, choosing the foods she ate and the wines she sipped.

He had told her everything—given her everything. She glanced about her bedchamber at the enameled friezes of hunt and harvest, at the plates of worked bronze on lintel and jamb. In every corner were whimsical statues of animals, carved from wood and

covered in beaten gold, art to entertain a girl-child. And on every table lay shells and pearls, beads of amber and copper, belts of soft bright leathers, gleaming necklaces set with rubies and diamonds, golden chains, coronets, fillets, bracelets and anklets. Her bed and windows were draped in cloth of purple, dipped in the finest Tyrian dyes, her chitons all the most excellent weave, simply white or saffron.

Which would she wear tonight? She pulled the twisting cord near her pillow; copper chimes tinkled. Drusilla appeared in the doorway, brushing at the coal smudged on the front of her tunic.

She bowed, sniffling. "Yes, Mistress? Will you bathe?" By tugging at her headband she had managed to slide it down over one ear, making her hair bulge in sweaty clumps.

Galatea didn't let herself laugh. "Yes," she said, rising and unfastening her belt, "is the tub filled? I'll want myrrh for my hair and orange-blossoms in the water."

"I've already put flowers in, Mistress, and I'll get the myrrh right away. Do you need help with your chiton?"

"No, dear. Go ahead to the tubs. I'll come in a minute." Drusilla ran from the room, sandals slapping on marble. The poor girl wanted so desperately to please, a need Galatea understood too well. She picked up a long-sleeved pharos, wondering whether Pygmalion would rather see her arms covered or bare. Gold chains, or copper? As she undressed she inspected her reflection in the polished bronze panel near the window. No bruises, pimples, or cuts. But her breasts were so swollen, and her belly . . .

A dove flew past, flashing low over the orange tree, landed on the roof at the far side of the courtyard and began to preen its milky feathers. Galatea imagined Pygmalion's eyes and closed her own, arms crossed tenderly over her stomach.

The heifer stood docile under her gilded horns as the blade crossed her throat and blood splashed crimson on her white withers. Tendrils of purple-blue incense rode the breeze, twining with the sighs and prayers of unhappy lovers. The heifer shuddered and toppled. Priests swarmed, flaying the snowy hide, chopping portions from the thighs, setting them on the altars. Flames sizzled as the fat dripped and the red wine poured, roiling the hungry brown smoke. The priests chanted as they probed the entrails. Prayers grew fervent. Pygmalion stretched his arms skyward, tears on his tanned face.

The Cyprian's laughter filled the temple. Three times the fire

burned white. Three times, higher and higher, up it leapt, floating above the altar. Six times in all the goddess showed her favor.

And the flames melted ivory to wax and wax to flesh, and each stroke of fire thumped at the pulse of a statue. Crimson blood beat in her forehead and forced her lungs into rhythm. She gasped, sucking in sweet incense and the heavy smoke, her skin overrun with Aphrodite's pale, cold blaze. She waited for him, limbs still hard and leaden, until he took her and the last vestiges of stiffness dissolved. His warm lips were on hers, eagerly giving her his breath and water, so good, so strong—

"Galatea!" Pygmalion's voice rapped out from across the central hearth. "Our honored guest asked you a question. Shyness is becoming, but only in its place. Give an answer."

Galatea felt the copper-work of the divan digging into her back, felt the heat from the hearth, saw the table resting on its bronze tripod before her, tasted the bite of herbs on her tongue. She was not in the temple of Aphrodite. She was not fresh-made, wreathed in silver flame, receiving her husband's love for the first time. She was reclining in the great hall of her home, just having finished the oysters, listening to the bard, Doran tell of his travels while they waited for the platters of meat and salt-fish to be carried in. How long had she been unaware? She had not relived her creation so vividly in many months. Did this mean that the Cyprian had returned? Was this a sign? She found she was panting, glazed in icy sweat. She swallowed, trying to calm herself and toying with her bread as she searched for words. The cloying incense of her vision clogged her throat.

The bard caught her eyes and gave her a kind smile. "Maybe your lovely lady did not hear the question, sir," he said, not looking at Pygmalion for a response. Galatea could not break from the bard's blue gaze. "I'll repeat it. What do you think of your husband's last sculpture? Are you surprised at the change?"

Now she knew she must speak, for Pygmalion's annoyance was palpable. "I—I have not seen his work recently, " she whispered, "I have not been allowed—"

"What? Not allowed to see such magnificent art? Not allowed to admire your husband's handiwork?" Doran's banter was a little too sharp. He bit off a hunk of crust and spoke around his chewing. "For shame, Pygmalion. Your charming wife should know that you no longer carve women—or men, for that matter, or any breathing thing."

Galatea looked from the bard to her husband, puzzled. Was this

a jest? No, Pygmalion's mouth was sternly set.He was no longer annoyed. He was angry.

She inclined her head modestly. She knew she should remain silent, but curiosity goaded her. "What . . . what does my husband sculpt, then? I know he carves no women. I—I was the last. He stopped after me." Yes, that was the right thing to say. She sensed a slight shift in Pygmalion's humor. How she wanted to make him smile at her!

Doran sought for her gaze once more, but she refused to meet him. "Indeed," said the bard, nodding. "had I created beauty such as yours, lady, I would never sculpt another female. This I understand. And I understand why the honored Pygmalion never carves in ivory—no mere tooth, no matter how magnificent an animal it came from, could compete with the pallor of your skin." Pygmalion stayed motionless behind his table, ignoring the compliment. "But your husband gives us only vegetation now—myrtle, and the thorny stems of roses without the blossoms. And only in the black stone of Hephaestus. Powerful, but uncanny. His muses show us no emotion—"

"My intercourse with the nine sisters is *my* business, bard!" Pygmalion leaned forward on his divan, gripping the armrests. "I create what they set in my heart. I do not question the immortals. Their gifts are too easily revoked."

Doran's hands fluttered. "Forgive me, lord. I meant no offense." His tone was warm, his smile conciliatory. "I spoke only as one craftsman to another. I overstep myself. My excitement at being in conversation with so famous an artist makes me forget my manners. Please, accept my apologies, you and the lady both." Though he seemed to be speaking to Pygmalion, Galatea knew his words were for her.

For a moment the only sound in the hall was the faint hiss of the embers. Galatea tried to make herself small, trying to blend into the massive column at her back. The chink and clash of kettles and pots filtered down the hall from the kitchen, accompanied by the smell of roast mutton. The main course was on its way.

"No offense taken, bard," said Pygmalion finally. Galatea let all her breath escape. "Galatea understands nothing of art; the discussion of it only upsets her. It is easy to forget what a child she is when looking at her womanly form. Remember, she is but nine months old. Why, her little slave-girl, Drusilla, understands more about the world than does my wife. Do not be misled by the ripening of her body. Her awareness is hardly more than that of

the infant within her." He inspected her with an air of fond propriety. "Did you know that her entire face was carved from a single tusk?" Doran shook his head and arranged himself more comfortably on his divan.

Galatea relaxed. This she understood. Her childishness and the art involved in her construction were favorite themes of Pygmalion's. On the rare occasions when guests were allowed to share dinner in the great hall, the conversation generally pivoted on the various qualities of Pygmalion and Aphrodite's perfect creation—her modesty, beauty, and complete simplicity. It was a role Galatea played with assurance, letting Pygmalion see only a part of what she had managed to learn when he was absent. She knew he enjoyed her most when she held her tongue and kept her eyes downcast.

"It was the largest single piece of ivory I have ever found," Pygmalion continued, warming. "They say there is only one other like it in the world. The beast it came from was ancient, perhaps the last of its kind. A huge creature, certainly. Akin to an elephant, but of a size to suit the gods."

Doran nodded and sat up, encouraged by Pygmalion's enthusiasm to launch into a description of the various fantastic animals he had come across on his journeys. Galatea reclined quietly, hands folded in her lap, glad to be ignored.

While the slaves brought in the steaming meat and cold fish, Pygmalion and Doran chatted amicably, comparing details of traveling, dissecting common aquaintances or the performances of other artists, and gossiping about Cyprian politics. Galatea listened and absorbed, trying to piece this new information into what she already knew. She hoped that one day Pygmalion would come to her for thoughtful discourse; she would please and surprise him with the amount of knowledge she had collected. He would begin to love her for more than her innocent femininity. And she needed to know as much about the outside world as possible to be a good teacher for her child when it came. She held her belly. She *would* be a good mother.

Pygmalion's habit was to call for wine only when the meal was finished, but tonight, in honor of Doran, the libations were poured early, and they all drank of a dry, gold vintage as they ate the main course. The bard kept the slaves busy filling the krater, frowning jovially when they mixed in too much water.

By the time the sweetmeats and fruit arrived along with Pygmalion's special wine, a strong, honied brew, almost black in color,

Doran's voice was too loud, his gestures over-broad, and he giggled often—an odd sound coming from so large a man.

He began to watch Galatea, staring at her tapered fingers as she lifted her kylix and sipped daintily. Pygmalion did not like her to drink more than one well-watered cup of wine at any meal.

To her surprise, she discovered her distress at the bard's scrutiny changing to pleasure. His teeth were white and clean against his curly black beard. Tan, broad-muscled and unusually tall, his figure was even more imposing than Pygmalion's. Her husband, engrossed in a lengthy description of his last visit to the oracle of Apollo, did not seem to notice that Doran's attention had drifted elsewhere.

The bard caught her eyes over the rim of his kylix and again she was trapped by the steady blue gaze. He set his cup down and smiled slowly, shiny teeth biting his lower lip. His well-oiled beard reddened in the hearth's glow. A breeze slid through the smoke-hole in the low ceiling, carrying the smell of—roses? Galatea strained forward. Had she heard laughter? Yes. Yes, she felt the Cyprian's welcome mirth, but this time it held a dissonant lilt, a mocking edge. Teasing sweetness. Chilled, arms prickling, she looked away from the bard, knowing his hot stare had not wavered. The hall was quiet. Pygmalion had finished his story.

"It is time for you to retire, Galatea. You must remember the child. You need to rest. The bard and I have much to discuss. You will be bored. Drusilla?" His words were stone. Fidgeting with the hem of her tunic, the slave came out from her station behind a column. "Take your mistress to her apartments. She is tired."

Galatea commanded herself to rise, chided her limbs for their heaviness, but she did not move. Uncertain, Drusilla stood at the head of her mistress's divan, glancing unhappily at Pygmalion, whose mouth was a hard, straight line.

Anger. Galatea was feeling anger. Was it hers or Pygmalion's? She was shaking. "My lord." How loud her voice was! "I would be pleased to stay a while longer. I've not yet heard the bard sing. We haven't had a guest for so long. I would like to stay and listen—" She shut her mouth abruptly, awed by Pygmalion's reaction to her gentle dissension. He made as if to rise or speak, broad shoulders tensing, then all at once lost his strength and withered back like an old man or an uncertain child. He was diminished. She had hurt him. When she had thought he was self-involved, attending only to his story-telling, he must have been observing her exchange with Doran. He had been testing her.

The hall filled with the smell of roses, backed by a musk of decay and incense. The laughter came again, louder. Could Doran hear it? Or Pygmalion? Her husband stayed silent, unreachable, staring at nothing. The odor increased, a stifling perfume. Was she going mad? Doran's fingers drummed noiselessly against his thigh as he gazed into his cup. The laughter faded and disappeared.

Forcing her knees to unlock, she rose, awkward for the first time in her life, shivering so much that her pharos slipped off her shoulder, revealing the outer curve of her breast. Drusilla adjusted the garment hastily, but Galatea knew both Doran and Pygmalion had seen. The hall was too warm. She was dizzy and the child weighed too much, skewing her balance. She leaned on Drusilla.

"Forgive me, lord. You are right. I—I am unwell. I will retire. Good night." Pygmalion did not reply and she could not look at him. Without turning back, she and Drusilla walked unsteadily the length of the hall and out into the courtyard.

Behind, she heard the bard begin to tune his cithera; or was that the Cyprian's discordant laughter? No, it was Doran. He started to recite, the cithera's high tang accenting each verse. She couldn't discern the words of the poem, but the ponderous rhythm was clear. As Galatea went to her room, Doran, the bard, chanted an elegy and doves clustered on the roof.

Galatea slept badly, remembering none of her dreams, but knowing they had been foul. She woke early, her mouth tasting of soured wine, her temples throbbing. Outside her window she heard slaves calling to one another, grunting and cursing. Curious as to the reason for such commotion so soon after dawn, she wrapped herself in a purple cloak and went to the casement.

The sky was cloudless, the mountain peaks washed with gentle pinks and blues. Wild birds darted and hopped as they bathed in the pond, avoiding the pecks of the swans.

Two slaves, red-faced and sweaty, strained at a cart jammed in the courtyard's rear door. The load was shrouded and bulged oddly, making peaks and chasms in the dun cloth. Whatever was underneath rattled as the slaves tugged. Stone for Pygmalion's studio, probably: the black stone of Hephaestus, to be carved into a huge bush of myrtle or a dark, blossomless rose, thorns sharp and daunting. The workers pushed and pulled, rocking the cart back and forth until it rolled forward, tipped, and crashed on its

side, spilling the load. The shroud fell away, revealing the material from which Pygmalion would work his next sculpture.

It was not black stone from the ugly god of fire. Across the shards and smaller teeth, wrapped and padded carefully, lay a huge tusk, the largest piece of ivory Galatea had ever seen. Poking through its covering, the tip shone dully, palest white, the color of innocence. A dove settled on the tusk, plumage a shade darker than the smooth surface; while the slaves righted the cart and began to reload, the bird fluttered off and rose, wings beating as it caught the sea-wind.

Galatea watched until it became an icy dot melding into the light sky. She did not look down until the workers had rolled the cart across the courtyard and into the hall. When they were gone, she studied the rose plants, unable to recall which had begun to flower white. She lifted her head and sniffed; orange blossoms and breakfast cooking, dew from the fields and fresh-turned earth in the furrows. By the time the crops were ready for harvest, Galatea would be one year old and the mother of Pygmalion's first child. She reached across the casement and touched a red-tipped shoot on the nearest stem, then pulled back to sit on the edge of the bed, bare feet dangling above the marble floor.

An hour later Drusilla came to awaken her mistress and found her sitting in the same place. Galatea's eyes were shut and her fingers traced endless circles over the perfect ivory of her belly. Sparrows chattered from their cages in the courtyard. ●

STREET MAGIC

by Ron Goulart

Ron Goulart has been too long absent from these pages (September 1981), but he has rectified this situation with a story that may surprise the more dedicated Goulart-ians among you.

art: Robert Walters

With a large uniformed guard clutching each arm, Ben Hubberd came galloping across the vast art deco lobby.

"Don't I have to sign out?" he inquired, trying to incline his head back at the register next to the Floors 13-20 bank of elevators.

The guards hustled him to the glass doors, and marched him out into the overcast afternoon. Without exchanging a word they began swinging him back and forth and, on an unspoken count of three, heaved him down the imitation marble steps toward the crowded courtyard.

While he was still in midair one of the guards called out, "And don't try to submit any more manuscripts to Tiny Tots Press!"

Ben landed next to the plashing metalwork fountain, and he heard his leg break before he felt it.

"Just my damn luck," he muttered.

His shabby attaché case, a present from his former wife six years ago, came sailing at him as an afterthought from the guards at the Broadway Office Building.

It landed on his broken leg, causing him considerable pain, and

popped open. Folders, magazines, book proposals, article notes, and tearsheets came spilling out onto the pebbled flagstones.

"I told you the freelance life was rough," said a passing young executive to his similar companion.

They didn't stop.

Things like this kept happening to Ben. Lately especially. The past five six months or so.

Today was the first serious injury, though.

Gritting his teeth, he made an attempt to gather up his scattered wares.

"Let me help."

It figured. The only person who'd lend a hand in Manhattan would be a lunatic.

A young woman lunatic apparently. She was wearing faded jeans, tacky running shoes, an oversized tailcoat, and a top hat. Her thin face was painted a dead white and her eyes were made up Betty Boop style. Three silver hoops dangled around her right elbow.

"I'm a street magician," she explained, kneeling.

"Thanks. I seem to have . . . " He lowered his voice, realizing he didn't want any of the people who were lingering nearby to know he was hurt. "My leg—think it's broken."

"It is, yes. I knew that right off. Not because I have any medical training, which I don't because I'd faint if I saw anything like surgery or even probably the putting on of a cast, but I can just sense things like this. Because I . . . well, here are all your things back in your case." She'd done that very rapidly.

"If you could maybe," he said, "help me get to a cab. I'll find a doctor."

She was frowning at the open attaché case. "Why do you read magazines like *Hooker, Gamy,* and *Foul?*"

"I don't read them," Ben explained, dropping his voice lower. "I write for them. Used to, that is. Lately I can't seem to sell a damn thing. Like today, I went up to Tiny Tots. Been doing the Danny the Dump Truck Detective series for them. They only pay $750 a book and it's a buyout. But, the way things have been going the past few . . . My editor is a little old lady. Seventy three and been dealing with dump trucks and bunny rabbits all her life. So today she accuses me of trying to molest her. I wouldn't molest anyone, especially a—"

"I never read detective stories, which is why I haven't heard of you I guess."

"My name doesn't appear on the books. They're signed with a penname. And you have to be 6-11 years of age to read them."

"What's your actual name?"

"Ben Hubberd."

"That's not a bad name. Names are more important than most people realize. Sometimes they can be as significant as a magic word or . . . Listen, Ben, I'm going to do something I maybe shouldn't," the whitefaced young woman said. "Well, not actually shouldn't. It's not forbidden or anything. The situation is this . . . I'm really magic."

"Hum?"

She was studying his face. The expression on hers showed through the clown white. "Oh, boy," she said finally, hugging herself and swaying slightly.

"Something wrong with you, too?"

She bit at her ruby red lips. "I'm fine, more or less," she answered. "Look, I don't want to get involved in this mess. I could I suppose, but I'm pretty sure I don't want to. You seem like a nice enough fellow and . . . how old are you? Thirty five maybe?"

"Thirty seven. Even though my career hasn't been going as well as I'd like it to, I've managed to keep looking younger than . . . " The leg was throbbing now, sending pain up his leg and into his crotch. "If you could just drag me to a taxi, miss, that's really all the help I require."

"No, no, I wasn't talking about simply helping an injured fellow human being." She removed her top hat, scrached at her short-cropped red hair. "It's the sorcery angle I'm wary of. See, it could well be I'm not up to that yet. If I'm not we could both end up in a worse fix than you—"

"What sorcery?"

She made her eyes go wide. "Don't you know?"

He glanced away from her, hoping he could flag someone who'd help him into a taxi. There must be at least one other good Samaritan besides this lunatic girl. "The pain is starting to get to me. I know it's not masculine to complain about a broken leg, but—"

"Don't fret about your leg, Ben. That I'll fix." Nodding her head, she reached down and touched his leg. "You'll probably feel as though somebody hit a funny bone, but only for a minute or so. At least I'm assuming so, since I haven't done this sort of thing all that often. Because if you get a reputation for being able to heal the—"

"Wow!" Needles, hundreds of them, seemed to be attacking his injured leg.

She nodded, poking at the leg. "Yep, you're okay now." She stood up, tipped her top hat and gave him a rueful smile. "I wish I could help you with your bigger problem, but . . . " She shook her head, turned her back, and went hurrying away.

"Hey, wait now." He grabbed his attaché case, snapped it shut and stood up. The young woman knew something, probably something about what had been happening to him and why he couldn't get work.

He started making his way around the sparkling fountain, intent on following her.

He walked ten fast steps and then stopped still. "I don't have a broken leg," he said aloud.

"Beg pardon?" asked a plump woman who was spreading out taco crumbs for the pigeons.

"I don't have a broken leg," he repeated, scanning the wide busy courtyard.

"These days, with the economy the way it is, be thankful," she said. "You look like you need all the help you can get, son. Be thankful you have two good legs."

"But it was broken just a . . . " He walked on, eyes narrowed, searching for the redhaired magician.

At the far side of the courtyard a six piece dixieland band was playing *The Sidewalk Blues*.

Ben caught a glimpse of a top hat in the surrounding audience.

When he ran over there he saw the hat was atop the head of a pudgy youth who was juggling six oranges and what looked to be a wadded up pair of gym sox.

"The girl magician," he said to the juggler. "Do you know where she—"

"You're standing in my contribution box."

Looking down, Ben noticed he'd planted his foot in a cigar box that had about fifteen dollars in bills and change in it. "Sorry, I've been doing a lot of clumsy things lately." He found a quarter in his coat pocket and, after extracting his foot, dropped the coin into the box. "I'm sort of anxious to talk to the girl who works here as a magician. Do you know her?"

"Don't know her, never even saw her."

"She must've been doing some kind of act."

"Could be, but juggling requires all my concentration. I don't watch the competition."

"I'll ask around, thanks."

Ben devoted the next half hour to searching and asking. No one could tell him anything about the whitefaced magician, only a few people even remembered having seen her at all.

He decided to go back to his meager apartment in the West 80s. He didn't bother to call on the two remaining publishers on his list for today.

Ben took another turn around the penthouse living room. "See? Not even a limp." He halted by one of the wide windows.

"Stress," suggested Lew Faro from the low tan sofa. "You've been under a lot of pressure lately, which causes you to imagine things. Before I got hired as a regular on *Terminal Ward,* I used to see the Virgin Mary a lot. Hunger'll do it, too."

"I wasn't hungry." He spread his arms wide. "If anything, I'm overweight."

"Try the pasta diet," called a female voice from the next room.

"Oh, good evening, Mazda. I didn't know you were in there." Ben nodded at the open doorway.

"Deadlines," she replied. "Full page spread for *The Knickerbocker* due tomorrow. Be with you fellows later."

"Maybe it is your diet," said Faro thoughtfully. He was a lean, handsome man in his early thirties and just about the only close friend Ben had left. "Allegic reactions to food can produce hallucinations. People don't realize—"

"Milk, wheat, corn," said the unseen Mazda from her drawing board. "Most common offenders."

"Have you been watching my soap? Christine, who's Dr. Wingate's natural daugher, is just commencing to suspect her nymphomania is caused by an allergic reaction to the additives in the cupcakes she—"

"I don't eat cupcakes. I don't," Ben cut in, "watch soap operas. I'm too busy trying to salvage my sinking writing career."

Faro shrugged. "I read all your stuff, and you could at least reciprocate by watching my show," he said. "At least a couple days a week. When you were churning out that mystery series for Buck Books. What was the name of that?"

"Nick Blood, Secret Killer," provided Mazda.

"Nick Blood, Secret Killer," said Faro. "I read a good two dozen of those damn things."

"I only wrote eight before they dumped me," said Ben. "That was the first step of my plummet toward failure. Right after that I lost the Baroness Whipp paperback series over at Crouch Books.

They said my work was no longer up to their standards. That was the first time anybody knew they had standards."

"How about California?" said Faro. "You could go out there, write for television."

"Get a nice tan, too," added Mazda. "Get rid of your pasty look."

"I'm going to maybe hitchhike to California?" He turned his back on the dark window and faced his friend. "Listen now, Lew. I am not going goofy. This really happened, earlier today. These goons heaved me out of the Broadway Office Building. I landed right on my left leg, this one here, and it broke. I heard the snap and I felt the pain. Really."

Faro locked his hands behind his head. "Damn, if that had really happened, Ben, you could sue the bastards for a million at least."

"Marzloff got two million," reminded Mazda.

"Yeah, but he's crippled for life," said Faro. "They heaved him out of Alfie's Pub one night and, as it turned out, right smack into the path of a beer truck. Took him four years, but he collected. He lives in Miami now."

"Ft. Lauderdale," said Mazda.

"Listen. I broke my leg this afternoon. Then this girl in—"

"Young woman," corrected Mazda. "Unless she was ten or eleven or thereabouts."

"No, she was . . . Hell, I don't know. Twenty five. Difficult to tell under all that makeup."

Faro asked, "What was she, a hooker?"

"Not that kind of makeup."

"I always love these hooker with a heart of gold yarns."

"She isn't a prostitute, she's a magician. A street magician," explained Ben. "She was, you know, wearing a sort of costume. Tailcoat, jeans, top hat. White makeup on her face. You see people like that all around at midday. Jugglers, mimes, musicians."

"But this young woman was different?"

"She fixed my leg, Lew. Simply by touching it."

"Maybe she's a chiropractor on the—"

"Just touched it with her fingertips," Ben said. "That's very unusual."

"It is, yeah," agreed the actor.

"Another thing. She . . . well, she seemed to know about me."

"You're a fairly wellknown writer. Lots of people are—"

"No, I'm not. I'm a nearly anonymous hack. Especially the last six months," corrected Ben. "I used to do some fairly intelligent articles and reviews for *The Village News, The Apple Review of*

Books and such. I was building a good reputation for being a clever and witty critic. Some of my reviews, like the one where I savaged Larry LeBlanc's latest suspense bestseller, *The Henhauser Memorandum,* drew over a dozen favorable letters to *The Village News.* I was aiming to move out of doing cheap paperbacks exclusively and—"

"That friend of Rosco's," called Mazda.

"What, love?"

"Rosco's protégé, the skinny redhead."

Faro frowned. "Who?"

"We met her at that last party of his, down in the Village. Thin redhaired little thing, big innocent eyes."

Faro sat up. "That's right, she did tell us she was working as a street magician," he recalled. "Sort of pretty."

"Underweight."

"I don't care what she weighs in at," Ben told them. "Who is she? I'm anxious to find her, talk to her."

"Are you ready for a romance just yet?" asked Faro. "With your finances—"

"I'm not in love, I'm not seeking romance," said Ben. "But this . . . young woman seems to know something about why I'm so fouled up of late. Do you know her name?"

"Do we, Mazda?"

"Singleton, wasn't it?"

"Oh, right. A name like Penny Singleton."

"Is that it?" asked Ben. "Penny Singleton?"

"No, Penny Singleton's the one who used to play Blondie in the movies. This is a name like that, though."

"Jennie?" suggested Mazda.

Faro thought about that. "I think that's it."

"Where's your phone book?" asked Ben.

The narrow street was one block long, and he'd never heard of it before. It was a twisting lane of two and three story brownstones, filled tonight with thick prickly fog. There was only one lamp post and its ball of light glowed only faintly, as though it were about to expire.

The number Ben was seeking turned out to be a converted carriage house, a thin grey building huddled between two larger ones.

There were three mailboxes to the left of the locked, leaded glass doorway. Ben had quit smoking over two years ago and

didn't carry a lighter or matches. He leaned close to the row of name plates, squinting, running his fingers over them.

Apartment #2 had two names crossed out and scrawled at the very bottom of the card in red ink was *Singleton.*

Drawing in a breath of misty air, he pushed the button beneath her name tag.

The house was so silent he could hear the buzzer rasping away somewhere inside.

He waited. The silence came back.

Ben rang again.

After about three or four minutes he gave up and walked down the five stone steps to the street. Looking up at Jennie Singleton's building, he couldn't even see one light showing.

The whole block, for that matter, seemed dead.

Hands in pockets, he started walking back toward the livelier streets of Greenwich Village.

"I suppose we could talk."

Ben stopped dead.

Jennie had materialized out of the fog just in front of him. She had a pretty, thin face. She was wearing the same jeans and shoes, but had traded the tailcoat for a maroon windbreaker that had "Weston Golf Club" stenciled on the left breast.

"You play golf?" he asked her.

"Nope, but I suppose the person who donated this to the thrift shop might have." She moved up beside him and took his arm. "I've wondered why he gave it away while it was still fairly new. Did they drum him out of the club, did he go suddenly bankrupt and figure he could no longer handle the extravagant dues, did he abandon his faithful wife for a younger woman?"

"Jennie, I'd like to talk to you."

"Around the corner." She tugged at him, and started him walking along the misty night sidewalk. "Angelo's Cafe. Don't, whatever you do, order anything to eat because the food is awful. But the coffee is passable. Angelo doesn't mind if you just have coffee since he's honest enough to admit his food is mostly terrible. Oh, and don't let him talk you into having any cheesecake."

Only one of the ten checkered-clothed tables was occupied. That, by a fat, bearded man who was toying with a wedge of grayish oozy cheesecake.

"By the window," suggested the redhaired street magician. "If it wasn't so muffled outside you could see the little park across the way."

Ben rested both elbows on the table. "You fixed my leg."

Jennie nodded. "I try not to do too many things like that out in the open," she said. "The thing was, you . . . You're basically a decent man, in spite of what you write." She sighed. *"Foul, Vile, Hooker."*

"I was only in *Vile* once. Just a nostalgia piece, on 1940s lingerie," he said. "Listen, how could you do that, Jennie, repair my broken leg?"

"I'm a magician," she replied. "Quiet for a minute, here's Angelo."

"Hey, skinny, I don't see you for a week," accused the short, moustached proprietor. "You been shacking up with this guy?"

"Two coffees, Angelo," she said, smiling up at him.

"How about an espresso, mister?"

"That might be—"

"No, nope," said Jennie quickly, shaking her head at Ben. "Just regular coffee."

"Hey, I got a new espresso machine, skinny. It doesn't come out that greenish color any more."

"Nevertheless. Two regular coffees."

Angelo shrugged. "Cream and sugar?"

"Yes," said Ben.

"No, no," put in Jennie. "Plain, Angelo. For both of us."

"You got it. Glad to see you once again."

"The cream's always sour," explained Jennie when Angelo had departed.

Ben asked, "What do you mean you're a magician?"

"Everybody knows what a magician is," she replied. "And I'm one."

"Magicians do tricks, create illusions. You don't mend broken bones with something you ordered out of a magic catalog."

"Some people, Ben, really have powers. I happen to be one of them."

"Yeah, but a power like that, to heal the sick. You could—"

"I can only do simple healing so far," Jennie said. "Broken bones, minor scrapes, and such. If you'd had a massive heart attack . . . well, I might've been able to keep you from dying, but you'd probably have had to go to the hospital."

"I'd settle for that. Alive in a hospital is better than dead in front of the Broadway Office Building," he said. "You've other powers as well."

"Yes, I do. But, not in terms of years because I'm nearly twenty-six, but in terms of developing as a sorceress, I'm young. I'm still learning to develop my abilities and figuring out how to use them

properly. No one else in my immdiate family had special powers at all, so I've had to teach myself how to handle this all."

"When did you—"

"Oh, I knew that I was gifted from the time I was six." She laughed. "I wasn't too subtle back then. I levitated my first grade teacher for criticizing my spelling. Teleported candy bars, got test answers in advance. Gradually, though, I learned. Now I . . . well, you may consider me odd and strange, but—"

"No, I don't. You seem fairly sensible now that I see you without your disguise," he said. "You're attractive and—"

"Skinny."

"Lots of woman are slim. In fact, slim people live longer. Myself, I'm about fourteen pounds too heavy, which is . . . " He stopped talking when Angelo arrived with the coffees and a small plate of cookies.

"Italian cookies on the house."

Jennie asked, "Who made them?"

"From a package," Angelo assured her. "Bought at the deli."

"Okay, thanks."

He bowed and returned to his forlorn kitchen.

"Yes, these are too normal looking to be his handiwork," said Jennie as she scrutinized the six cookies. "Safe to eat."

"I'm dieting," he said, taking a cookie with a chunk of candied cherry atop it. "Seems to me, Jennie, that with the powers you have you could do almost anything. Make great amounts of money, not wear thrift shop clothes."

She grinned at him across the cup before sipping her coffee. "I have $423,000 in the bank," she said. "One of the things I can do is predict the stock market's behavior. I'm not bad on horse races either."

"Nearly half a million," he said slowly. "Then why work as a street magician?"

"Partly it's the old purloined letter dodge," she answered. "Hide the fact I'm a real magician behind the facade of a fake magician. More importantly, though, it gives me an excuse to move around the city. To see people and determine who to help. Or should that be whom?"

"Whom," he said absently. "You use your magic abilities to do good?"

"Part time anyway, yes." She drank some more coffee. "I feel better this way than if I was, say, playing Vegas with a fancy magic show."

Ben got around to tasting his coffee. "Yag. This is awful."

"Compared to the food, it's not bad. Have another cookie."

He selected one encrusted with almonds. "Okay, you've decided to use your powers to help mankind," he said, watching her face. "Here I am, obviously on the skids and you won't help me at all."

Jennie looked away. "I could try, Ben, but . . . frankly I'm uneasy. I made a note of your name, from one of the manuscripts in your attaché case, and I was thinking of looking you up maybe. The problem is, we'd be going up against some very powerful black magic. I really am not certain I'm ready yet. Another year or two maybe."

"In two years I'll be on skid row or locked away in Bellevue," he assured her.

"Yes, but—"

"Do you have some idea of what's going on wrong with me and why?"

"You've had a curse put on you. A powerful one."

He dropped the cookie he'd just selected. "A curse?"

"A curse."

"Is there some way we can find out who did it?"

"Oh, I already know that," Jennie said. "I can . . . sense that sort of thing. Which is why I'm a bit uneasy."

"Who?" He leaned toward her.

"Larry LeBlanc."

"Larry LeBlanc, the bestselling suspense novelist?"

"That Larry LeBlanc, yes." She nodded. "He apparently didn't like your review of his last book."

Ben circled the small beam-ceilinged living room. "I've suspectd at times that the publishing business worked that way; by magic and sorcery. A mediocre novel like *The Henhauser Memorandum* sells a million damn copies while something worthwhile like *Siam Slaughter* . . . that was one of my Nick Blood paperbacks . . . doesn't even earn its paltry advance."

"Not *all* publishing," amended Jennie, who was perched on the edge of a wicker chair. "There are only . . . oh, less than a half dozen men like Larry LeBlanc in the book business. He's about the nastiest, using witchcraft and the black arts to create sales, favorable contracts, immense advances. He's mesmerized editors, publishers and even accountants. He's so powerful he's never even had a falsified royalty statement sent to him."

"And he can put spells and curses on reviewers?"

"Those who don't give him the sort of reviews he thinks he deserves," she answered. "For a mildly unflattering review he might put a spell on you that only caused the three-day flu.

Eventually most critics get conditioned, without really being aware of it, and start giving him nice write ups. Magic has helped his literary reputation no end."

"But he's done a lot worse than the flu to me, Jennie." Ben paced in front of a book case that had a row of five top hats atop it. "At *The Village News* they accused me of stealing from the petty cash box. Another editor who once told me my prose had zing now claims I can't spell let alone do articles for him."

"LeBlanc dislikes you a good deal more than the others," she said. "Apparently your review of *The Henhauser Memorandum* was nastier than—"

"Wasn't nasty at all, just honest."

"Be that as it may." She gave him a sad smile.

"Okay, so how do we erase the curse, cancel his spell on me?"

She exhaled slowly. "There are certain occult procedures which might work. They involve very powerful counterspells and, maybe, even a face to face confrontation between me and LeBlanc. He fights dirty, even for a black magician, and so . . . " Jennie stood up. "But I'm willing to try it. I like you, Ben, and I'm willing to go up against the guy."

He crossed her living room, put his hands on her shoulders. "We'll beat him, too."

Ben glanced to his left and then his right as he came out of the office building at 47th and Third Avenue. It was a bright midday and dozens of people were roaming or sitting around the esplanade that fronted the towering glass building.

A string quartet played Mozart near the revolving doors. A blind man was strumming folk tunes on an electric banjo next to the small splashing fountain.

From the midst of a cluster of people a white dove suddenly fluttered up, circled and went flying off. Hunching his shoulders, pressing his attaché case close to his chest, Ben started walking away.

"I didn't want to believe it, even though I sensed it. But it's true, isn't it?"

Jennie, in white face and top hat again, had pushed through her small circle of audience and come hurrying over to him.

"Hi," he said, trying a smile. "Sorry I didn't phone you yesterday. An assignment came up that—"

"He's in there." She pointed at the glass building Ben'd just left.

He stopped walking. "Who?"

"Larry LeBlanc."

"Oh, so?"

"His office is in there. Thirteenth floor. You went to see him."

Ben gazed up to see if he could spot the dove she'd materialized and set free. "Okay, I did visit him, Jennie. After what you told me two nights ago, I figured I'd better."

"I told you I'd help you."

"You also said it was dangerous," he cut in, taking her arm. "Might even be fatal. I like you, you know, and I didn't want to risk that."

"So what'd you do, Ben?"

"Nothing much. Just apologized to LeBlanc. Explained I'd misjudged his novel and on rereading it I—"

"What have you got in there?" She broke free of his grasp, tapped on his old attaché case.

"Samples of my stuff, as usual."

"No, something else." Her eyes narrowed. "Yes, I can sense what it is. The proofs of LeBlanc's newest book. It's called . . . *The Hosenpudd Cryptogram.*"

"Well, yes. I'm going to review it for *The Village News.*"

"Ben, you—"

"Matter of fact, LeBlanc does have a lot of contacts in publishing. When I talked to him, he mentioned he'd even read a couple of my books and liked them. He's going to put me in touch with people who—"

"And what do you have to do in return?"

"Nothing, Jennie. Really," he told her. "Well, practically nothing."

"Damn." Spinning on her heel, she headed back to where her audience was still gathered and waiting for her.

"Jennie, wait." He ran after her.

From out of the middle of the circle of people came a rumbling noise and a great billowing swirl of white smoke.

When Ben pushed his way through there was no sign of Jennie. She was gone.

"That's some trick," observed a black youth.

"Not a trick," muttered Ben. "It's real magic."

"What?"

"Never mind." He walked off.

Ben thought about searching for Jennie again, going back to her apartment and waiting.

But he didn't do that.

He knew he'd never find her again. ●

THE PRINCESS OF AKKIR

by Robert F. Young

art: Val Lakey Lindahn

The title of this unusual story might lead one to expect a standard fantasy tale with princesses, swords, and sorcery. Well, there is a princess, of sorts, and a sword, and even a certain form of sorcery. But in a story by Robert F. Young, nothing is ever exactly what it seems. Enjoy.

Harry Westwood, who believed in monsters (he had slain seven), made camp for the night near the bank of a small creek that wound down from the Crimson Hills. After inflating his tent, he activated his portable campfire; then he opened a thermo-pac dinner and a thermo-pac container of coffee and sat down by the fire. He ate beneath the stars.

He kept his rifle close beside him. It was a new Folz-Hedir, so ingeniously assembled that its barrel and mechanism and streamlined stock seemed to be of one piece. He wanted it within easy reach, for Papsukil's castle was just beyond the hills, and the ogre might be abroad. Westwood hoped that he would be. If he could kill Papsukil tonight, half the job would be done. The other half—freeing the Princess—would then be a lead-pipe cinch.

It went without saying that when he killed Papsukil he would also have to kill the ogre's steed, for his contract stated that both monsters had to be extirpated. (The Office of Galactic Guidance never used the word "kill," since in a biological sense it was impossible to kill a creature that had not been born. Nevertheless, Westwood knew that Papsukil, when dying, would bleed real

blood, and that Morga, his steed, would too, and insofar as he was concerned, the correct word was "kill.")

He lit a cigarette to go with his coffee. The temperature had dropped at least a dozen degrees since the sun had set. Nights were cold in Akkir, although the tiny country was in God Bless This World's equatorial zone. But for the moment he had his campfire to keep him warm; later on, when he went to bed, he would turn the tent's wired-in heating unit on. All of the comforts of home. But they did not quite please him, and he found himself thinking of the Akkirian girls he had seen in the little native village he had set out from that morning. The Akkirians were a primitive people, but physically they were one of the most beautiful races in the galaxy, and the girls he had seen tripped like nymphs through his mind. He became so engrossed in their light fantastic that he was taken unawares when a flesh-and-blood Akkirian girl stepped out of the darkness into the firelight.

He got quickly to his feet, gripping his rifle. He peered into the darkness behind her and strained his ears for the slightest unorthodox sound. But he saw no one else and heard only the purling of the creek, the faint chirping of insects and the realistic crackling of the campfire.

"I am Khaisidra," the girl said.

The Princess! "How did you escape?"

"He lets me escape sometimes so he can recapture me. It is a game he plays."

They spoke in Akkirian, which Westwood had taken a crash-course in. The girl had deep, dark eyes. Her black hair was wet and clung to the sides of her face, and he knew she must have been bathing in the creek. She wore a single sarong-like garment, and her feet were bare. She was almost as tall as Westwood, and her narrow face, with its fine line of forehead, nose, and chin, suggested the face of a princess. He had to remind himself that she was not one, that the villagers referred to her as one only because she lived in a castle. In their minds, only princesses lived in castles, whether they did so of their own free will or were forced to. All Khaisidra had been before Papsukil abducted her was a milk girl. And appearances to the contrary, that was all she was now.

"If he let you escape," he said, "he must be out looking for you."

"Yes. By now he probably is."

"Has he ever harmed you?"

"No."

"Are you hungry?"

"No. I have eaten well. I do not eat what he does," she added quickly. "He hunts small animals for me to cook."

"We'll wait for him."

"Why are you here?"

"It's my business to kill monsters people like the Akkirians create."

"We did not create Papsukil. He rode into our village one day and stole two children. When our warriors followed him to his castle, they tried to fell him with arrows when he came out the door, but the arrows bounced off his iron clothes and he laughed at them. He came back to the village again and again and stole more children, and he went to other villages too. But our warriors have always been helpless against him. One day when he rode into our village he saw me and carried me away. So you see, we did not create him."

"But when he first appeared, everybody knew who he was."

"Of course. Our parents had told us about him, and their parents had told them. We knew that someday he would come."

Westwood laughed. "That's why he came."

"Because we knew?"

"Because you created him."

He saw that she still did not understand. He had not expected her to. Primitive people were incapable of comprehending that if enough of them believed something was true for a long enough period of time, it became true, and their ignorance was the secret of their "success."

Thunder sounded in the hills. It crescendoed, and Westwood knew it was the hoofbeats of Papsukil's steed. "He is looking for me," Khaisidra said. "I must go."

"No," Westwood said. "Stay here by the fire where he can see you. I'll hide in the trees and when he appears I'll kill him and his steed."

"No! It is he who will kill you!" She turned, and ran off into the darkness.

He ran after her, only to see her vanish into a stand of trees near the foot of the nearest hill. He knew he could never catch her, and returned to the fire. The crescendo of hoofbeats came to an end, and looking up into the hills he saw steed and rider silhouetted against the night sky. He lifted his rifle to his shoulder, but before he could aim it, steed and rider disappeared. He wondered if Papsukil had seen him. There were slower hoofbeats now, and he knew that the ogre was descending the hill. Suddenly

there was a soft cry, and a moment later Papsukil and his steed appeared on another hilltop. Westwood saw that he had the girl.

The silhouette disappeared. Thunder sounded again, but this time it diminished and gradually faded away. Westwood swore. If Khaisidra had not panicked, he could have gotten both Papsukil and his steed.

Had the ogre seen him? he wondered. He did not think so. But he must have spotted the campfire.

I'll get him tomorrow, Westwood thought. I'll hang his scalp in my den. Next to the scalps of Trisk, Udon, Mother Magrab, Chitzen, Mimb, Dijleha and Diw.

He drank the rest of his coffee. It was cold. Khaisidra stepped into his mind. Indeed, she had not really stepped out of it. The mere sight of her had lent romance to his mission. He felt like some knight of old, out of the pages of Malory.

After turning off the campfire he activated the tent's repulsi-field and expanded it till it encompassed the campsite; then he crawled into the tent with his rifle and closed the flap. He turned on the heating unit, kicked off his boots and stretched out on the inflated floor. To get his mind off Khaisidra he thought of the gods, ogres, dragons and giants man had created in the past. Of the pantheon the Greeks had installed on the heights of Mount Olympus. Of Grendel and Grendel's dam whom the thanes had created over their mead in Hrothgar's Hall. Of the cannibalistic Windigo. Of the dragon Fafnir. Of the Abominable Snowman and of Bigfoot. Of Paul Bunyan. Paul Bunyan did not really belong on the list, though, for he had never materialized. The people who had dreamed him up had been semi-civilized and had not truly believed he was real. Earth had been free from gods and ogres and dragons and giants for a long time. But interstellar travel had brought them to the fore again, and before you took over a new planet you had to lay to rest the monsters its masochistic inhabitants had subconsciously brought into being. You could not have a Chitzen or a Mother Magrab demanding sacrifices from or preying upon the colonists. You could not have a Papsukil abducting their children.

He turned on his side. He felt of his right hand to see if it was till there. It was a ritual he always performed just before he fell asleep. The hand was prosthetic, with all the properties of the original. Dijleha the ogress had bitten the real one off. He used to have nightmares about it. In his dreams he would see the terrible tiers of her rocklike teeth coming together just past his wrist. He had sacrificed the hand so he could cast pneumo-car-

tridges down her throat. Yes, for a long time he had had nightmares. But not any more. He slept soundly the whole night through.

In the morning when he stepped outside his tent, he discovered why the Planet Preparatory Team had named the hills the "Crimson Hills," for the rays of the rising sun had given their crests a blood-red cast. It was as though Papsukil had ridden out during the night and struck down a thousand foes. But the cast did not last long, and by the time he finished his morning coffee the hilltops had turned green.

He struck camp, deactivating the repulsifield and then deflating the tent and folding it into a small, oblong bundle that fitted easily into his pack. He put the portable campfire in after it. He did not hurry. By nature, he was a calm, cold man.

Before closing the pack he took out two of the thermopacs and put one in each of the side pockets of his trousers. Then he cached the pack in a nearby stand of trees. He filled his canteen in the creek and added a water-purifying tablet. He checked to see if the extra charges for his Folz-Hedir were still attached to his belt, then slung the Folz-Hedir and set out at a leisurely pace. He was a tall, spare man. Many suns had prematurely aged his narrow face and there was a touch of telangiectasis in his cheeks. He ascended the hill on which he had first seen Papsukil. There, he found the hoofprints of the ogre's steed. They were deeper than he had thought they would be, but he was not surprised. Papsukil was not a giant, but the Akkirians had given him larger-than-life proportions, therefore Morga had to be larger-than-life too.

He did not climb any more hills, but wound his way through them. He had walked all the way from the village and it had taken him a whole day to reach the hills. The forest that covered most of Akkir had ruled out a ground vehicle, and the Galactic Guidance outpost, where the port airfarer had set him down, had no aircraft of its own. He would not have tried to get Papsukil from the air in any case, for experience had taught him that it was more viable for a Beowulf to hunt his quarry on the ground.

When he emerged from a pass in the hills he saw the castle. It was about a mile away and stood on a grassy plateau that stretched away to the feet of an ancient chain of mountains. Long ago the castle had belonged to Papsukil's prototype and namesake, a feudal lord who had ruled most of Akkir. His serfs, unable any longer to endure his ruthlessness, had risen up against him, and after a bloody battle on the plateau they had murdered him and

all the other inhabitants of the castle. Then they had fled into the forest. Unquestionably he had been a cruel taskmaster, but it was highly unlikely that he had been anthropophagous. But the tales the serfs told their children and those which their children told their children had described him as such, and successive generations had probably added to rather than detracted from his putative cannibalism. As in all such cases, mass belief had at length subverted reality, and the castle which had stood empty for decades was empty no longer, and the peace and the freedom the serfs had fought for and obtained was being trodden into the dirt by the hooves of the new Papsukil's mighty steed.

Westwood, who knew fear only when he was safe and secure among his fellow beings on Earth, walked boldly out onto the plateau and directed his footsteps toward the castle. At intervals he passed the collapsed walls of the huts where the serfs used to live. Only grass grew now where once they had sown their crops. Occasionally he came upon skeletons. Some were those of serfs, some of knights. In the latter case, rusted armor partly covered the bones.

The castle faced the hills. It was a square, unimaginative structure with four towers. The towers constituted the four corners of the building but were not much higher than the building itself. Part of the roof had fallen in. As he grew closer, he saw that the portcullis was closed. The sun was quite high in the sky by this time and threw the castle's shadow sideways across the plateau. He could see the façade clearly. There were no windows on the lowest floor, and the two towers in the front had only one window each, located a short distance below their pinnacles. But perhaps there were other windows which he could not see from his present position.

In the window of the tower on his right he saw a tiny figure. Khaisidra. She was watching his advance across the plateau. He hoped that Papsukil was too. He wanted the ogre to come rushing out of the castle and to mount his steed and come charging toward him across the plateau. And then he thought, Morga, where is Morga? The steed should have been tethered outside the castle, near the portcullis. But he could see no sign of it. He heard hoofbeats then, and spinning around, saw Morga pounding toward him with the ogre astride its back.

Evidently Papsukil had seen him last night, and had either divined his purpose or had pounded it out of Khaisidra. He had been hiding in the hills waiting for Westwood to walk out into the open so that he could take him by surprise. Westwood grinned.

He had already raised his rifle to his shoulder. It had no safety; he had had it removed. One projectile should do the trick. Then one more for Morga. Morga was an Akkirian horse of indeterminate sex, ugly to begin with by terrestrial standards and made more so by its larger-than-life size. As it grew closer he saw to his surprise that its eyes were a gentle brown. There was no bridle upon its head and no saddle on its back.

Papsukil's armor covered him from head to foot and he wore mailed gloves. There was a crimson panache attached to his helmet. The visor was open, revealing his face. It was a handsome face, although the nose was a bit too long and the eyes were a crocodile red. They were fixed on Westwood and were filled with contempt. Westwood expected him to raise his sword, but he did not. Instead, just as Westwood was about to press the activator, the ogre veered his steed, lashed out with a long whip, caught the rifle in its cord, and with an abrupt snap sent it flying through the air.

Westwood dove into the ruins of a nearby hut. Morga's hooves missed his legs by inches. None of the walls were over two feet high, but he found a hollow between an inner wall and an outer one and hunched down in it. The hoofbeats ceased. He stole a glance over the topmost stones of the outer wall and saw that Papsukil had turned his steed. Glancing at the castle, Westwood saw that Khaisidra had not moved from her tower window.

Papsukil began riding around the ruins, flicking his whip. Its tip almost touched Westwood's back. He hunched down lower. He heard the creaking of Papsukil's armor. The whip lash came again, snapped just above his head. He heard the ogre's laughter. It made him think of stones rolling down a rocky hillside.

He had another weapon—an ancient .22 caliber handgun which he carried as a good-luck piece. It was loaded, but he had no extra cartridges. He knew that its bullets were incapable of penetrating the ogre's armor, but perhaps he could get a good shot at the ogre's face.

He stole another glance, almost lost an eye. He used his cap as a decoy, and when the lash of Papsukil's whip cut it in two, got off a quick shot with the handgun. It went wild.

He hunched back down again. Out of the corner of his eye he saw a snake. The Planet Preparatory Team had warned him that almost all the snakes in Akkir were poisonous. He seized this one near the neck with his prosthetic hand. A red fang shot forth from the tiny mouth and buried itself in the synthetic flesh. He laughed; then he stood up quickly and threw the snake toward

Papsukil's steed. It landed near Morga's front hooves, and the steed reared wildly, nearly throwing Papsukil from its back. Still standing, Westwood emptied the handgun, aiming for the ogre's face, but Morga's wild rearings made the target an impossible one. But some of the bullets struck the ogre's armor, for Westwood heard them when they ricocheted.

He hunched back down out of sight again. As soon as Papsukil got Morga back under control he resumed snapping the whip. Westwood knew he was trying to snake the lash so the tip would cut into his head or back, but the ogre never quite succeeded. The game went on all the rest of the morning. As the sun climbed higher into the sky, Westwood began to sweat.

Afternoon. Papsukil, tireless, continued to ride around the ruins, lashing out with his whip. But he never came close to Westwood; apparently the sound of the handgun and the high-pitched squealing of the bullets as they ricocheted from his armor had made him afraid.

Westwood kept slaking his thirst with small mouthfuls from his canteen. He was hungry, but there was no way he could reach into one of his side pockets for a thermo-pac without rising to his knees. At long last, the sun went down. He heard the hoofbeats fade away then, and standing up, saw that Papsukil was riding toward the castle. Upon reaching it, the ogre dismounted, tethered Morga, walked over to the portcullis, raised it as easily as though it were an automated overhead garage door, stepped through the entranceway and slammed the portcullis back down.

Had he gone home for supper? Westwood wondered.

The thought made him shudder.

He looked at the tower window in which he had seen Khaisidra. It was empty.

After stretching his legs, he went looking for his rifle. The stars were coming out, shedding pale, unreal radiance upon the plateau. The castle became a gray pile of stones. He pulled a pocketlight out of his back pocket and flicked it on. After a long while, he found the rifle. It had landed in one of the ruins. He examined it closely but found no sign of damage. He was surprised that it had not accidentally gone off. The activator was highly sensitive and only the slightest touch was needed in order to launch a projectile.

He wondered why Papsukil had not tried to find it. But the answer was obvious: Papsukil did not know it was a gun. He did not know what a gun was, and probably thought the Folz-Hedir

was a spear. Guns were far in Akkir's future, and he knew no more about them than his creators did.

Despite his castle, despite his armor, despite his steed, despite his aristocratic countenance, he was a peasant.

At first thought, this might seem to put him at a disadvantage, but Westwood knew better. He had learned from experience that it was impossible to anticipate what a peasant might do or how he might think unless you were a peasant yourself.

The castle windows were dark. Perhaps Papsukil had gone to bed. With Khaisidra. Westwood found the thought unendurable. Surely she would not bed down with an ogre! But what choice did the poor girl have?

If only she hadn't run away last night, fearing for his safety! He could have gotten Papsukil easily when the ogre rode into the firelight, and Morga too, and he and Khaisidra could have returned to the village, and her nightmare would have come to an end.

He sat down on one of the crumbled walls of the hut and, keeping his eyes fixed on the castle, opened one of the thermo-pacs he had brought with him. Again, he ate beneath the stars. When he finished he lighted a cigarette, wishing he had brought a container of coffee.

It had grown cold, and he had neither tent nor campfire to keep him warm. He shrugged. He could endure the cold. He continued to keep his eyes fixed on the castle. Conceivably Papsukil might let Khaisidra escape again. But it was a wan hope, and as the hours passed it gradually faded.

He dozed off, awoke with a start. The scene was unchanged. He dozed off again, only for a moment, he thought, but when he looked to the east he saw that the sky was turning gray. He got to his feet and began walking back and forth, and presently his increased circulation restored warmth to his arms and legs. At length he paused and stood staring at the castle. He knew that Papsukil had not ridden out during the night on his steed, for Morga's hoofbeats would have awakened him, and he was certain the ogre would not have come out on foot. The villagers had said he never went anywhere without his steed. Westwood, then, had two courses of action: he could continue to wait till the ogre showed himself, or he could try to get inside the castle.

The time of day decided him. Dawn was when you caught the enemy unaware. He slung his Folz-Hedir and set forth across the plateau.

* * *

The castle grew before him, acquiring greater detail as more light crept into the sky. He saw as he came closer that it was surrounded by a hedge of small thorn trees. There was a large gap in the hedge in front of the portcullis. Presently he could make out Morga. The steed was tethered to one of the trees near the gap. From a distance the hedge had seemed like part of the castle.

Morga watched him as he approached, but made no sound. The tether consisted of vines which had been braided together and was tied to one of Morga's hind legs. Boldly, Westwood walked right up to the steed's side. It whinnied softly then, and its brown eyes seemed even gentler than before. With its oversized feet and its great chest and shoulders and powerful haunches, it looked more like a draft horse than a steed. He stroked its neck. He wondered if he should kill it now. But he knew he could not bring himself to at such close range, and besides, Papsukil might be roused from sleep by the sound of the shot.

He went through the opening in the hedge and made his way along the stone wall of the castle. It was his intention to circle the building in the hope that the windows in its sides and in the back might be lower. Conceivably there might be a back door. He came presently to the base of the tower in whose window he had seen Khaisidra. The stone blocks were so unevenly laid that a good mountaineer could have climbed them to the window, but he had never climbed a mountain in his life. Then he saw the rope which hung down from the window, and looking up, saw Khaisidra gazing down at him. She beckoned to him when their eyes met, and he seized the rope and began to climb.

It, too, consisted of braided vines. If such a rope could restrain Morga, it ought easily to be able to support his weight. But suppose Papsukil had forced the girl to lower it? Suppose the ogre were in her room now, waiting to pounce upon him? He paused, and looked up at her again. She seemed to sense his thoughts. "I am alone," she called in a low voice. "Papsukil is not here." The calmness of her voice reassured him, and he resumed his ascent.

The window was a good sixty feet from the ground. He was breathing hard when at last he reached it. Khaisidra helped him crawl over the stone sill into the room. The light of the nascent day coming through the single window informed him that Papsukil was not there.

The room was round, he saw, and the only object it contained was a pallet. In the center of the floor was a square opening.

Approaching it, he saw that it gave access to a stone flight of stairs. He returned to Khaisidra's side. In the dawnlight she seemed even more like a princess than she had in the light of his artificial campfire. Her black hair fell in straight lines to her shoulders and the pinkness that heralded the rising of the sun had a transcendent effect on her face. It was said she was the most beautiful girl in the village. Westwood knew now that this was true.

She pulled the rope back up. "Papsukil made it for me so I could escape," she said. "But last night he forbade me to do so."

"I still don't understand," Westwood said. "Why should he want you to escape?"

"He thinks it is fun to recapture me. He knows he can do so with ease. But he takes no chances. When he lets me ride Morga, he holds Morga by a long rope so that I cannot get away."

"Where is he now?"

"He is asleep."

"Will you take me to his room?"

"Yes. . . . He said you have another weapon besides your spear."

"It no longer works."

"Papsukil said it threw little stones. He heard them when they hit his armor."

"It can't any more."

"You will have to use your spear then. Come."

He followed her over to the stairwell and they started down, Khaisidra in the lead. He unslung his rifle. The stairwell grew dark almost at once, and holding his rifle in his left hand he pulled out his pocketlight with his right and flicked it on. He expected Khaisidra to be startled by the sudden burst of brightness, but she showed no surprise. The stairwell was helical and wound down through rooms like the one they had left, except that they had no windows. He could smell the musty dampness of the castle now. And he became aware of another smell. It was a musky smell, and he knew it emanated from Khaisidra. He exorcised the thoughts that climbed venous ladders into his mind.

Four floors down they came to a room from which a corridor led into the castle proper. He followed Khaisidra across the room. The dust on the corridor floor showed a host of footprints, large and small. They circumvented a pile of rusted metal. It was the armor of a fallen knight. Through the open visor a pair of eyeless sockets stared up into Westwood's face. Nearby lay the unarmored skeleton of a serf. The walls were interrupted at even intervals by rusted metal doors.

Light showed up ahead. Westwood turned his pocketlight off, replaced it in his pocket and transferred the Folz-Hedir from his left to his right hand. He was certain they were approaching the hall of the castle. Khaisidra was moving more slowly now. He matched her new pace, staying just behind her. Presently he was able to make out the doorway through which the light came.

When they reached it, Khaisidra stepped through it without hesitation. He paused for a moment before following her. A sixth sense? He thought so later. He could see most of the huge hall from where he stood. Its ceiling was the castle roof, and the early morning light pouring through the hole where part of the roof had collapsed provided the only illumination. In the center of the huge room stood a long table with three legs. Bits and pieces of other items of furniture were scattered over the dusty floor. The fallen beams of the roof had never been cleared away. Circling the room was a lofty gallery. He assumed that a stairway led up to it from the main floor, but he could not see it from where he stood. Beyond the table was a pile of small, white bones. The miasma that permeated the room filled his throat and made him want to vomit.

Ignoring his sixth sense, he stepped through the doorway. As he did so, Khaisidra seized the Folz-Hedir, and with a quick jerk, pulled it from his hand. She ran several yards away, waving the rifle, and cried, "His other weapon is broken!" Westwood saw the stairs which the edge of the doorway had hidden from his eyes. Descending them with drawn sword was Papsukil.

His first thought was to try to make it back to the tower, but he knew that even if he succeeded in outdistancing Papsukil, the ogre would be close enough beind him to sever the rope before he was halfway to the ground. The only other available exit from the hall was an archway in the wall to his left, but the portcullis was discernible just beyond it. He knew he lacked the strength to raise the portcullis by hand, and he also knew that even if the mechanism with which it was supposed to be raised was still in working order, the operation would take too long.

It went without saying that Papsukil would be upon him before he could wrest the Folz-Hedir from Khaisidra.

From the beginning she had played him for a fool. She had told Papsukil that a hunter had come to kill him, and after the ogre's ambush failed, she set up a fail-safe one of her own. And Westwood had walked right into it with his eyes wide open. He had forgotten that she, too, was a peasant. Before Papsukil had abducted her

she had lived in a wretched native hut and had been nothing but a milk girl. Now, she lived in a castle, and in her own eyes and in the eyes of her people, she had become a princess. It mattered not that Papsukil II had a taste for the flesh of little children. All that mattered was her new status quo. Having become a princess, she intended to remain one.

Westwood backed away from the creature who had lifted her above the common herd. The ogre had divested himself of his armor, possibly out of contempt for his opponent, and was wearing a filthy red doublet and even filthier blue pantaloons. His black hair was streaked with gray and had never become acquainted with a comb. He was at least a foot taller than Westwood, and his muscles were long and lean.

He smiled, and Westwood saw for the first time that his teeth were pointed.

They went well with his crocodile red eyes.

The damsel fair Westwood had come to rescue stood on the sidelines, breathlessly awaiting the forthcoming encounter.

The ogre swung his sword. Westwood avoided the blade by leaping back. As he did so, he nearly tripped over one of the fallen beams. It was about ten feet long and had the thickness and width of a two-by-four. He picked it up and pointed it at Papsukil. Angrily Papsukil swung at it with his sword, but Westwood jerked it to one side, avoiding the blow, then brought it back on target and charged. The end struck the ogre in the stomach. He gasped and doubled over, and the sword fell from his hand. Westwood dropped the beam and leaped upon Papsukil's back. Encircling the ogre's neck with his left arm, he locked the fingers of both hands in a wrestler's grip and began to apply pressure. The added weight caused Papsukil to fall to the floor.

His fingers found Westwood's and tried to claw them apart. When this failed, he staggered to his feet. Westwood knew what was coming then, and tried to relax when the ogre deliberately fell backward onto the floor. It was Westwood's turn to gasp, and he did so, but he did not relinquish his hold even though he knew he had suffered at least one broken rib.

Papsukil managed to roll over onto his stomach and tried to stand up again. But he could not. His face was already turning blue. Westwood thought then that he had won, but he hadn't, quite, for an instant later he felt a stabbing pain in his back. Turning his head, he saw Khaisidra standing above him with the Folz-Hedir. Still believing it was a spear, she jabbed its muzzle into his back again. The pain almost made him cry out but he did

not break his hold. Then he saw that the fingers of Khaisidra's right hand were perilously close to the activator. Any moment now she would press it accidentally. This moment? He gambled that it would be, released his hold and rolled to one side. The jab she had meant for him struck Papsukil between the shoulder blades. Simultaneously the rifle went off. The hollowness of the hall amplified the guttural cough of the discharge, and acrid smoke rose up from a yawning hole in Papsukil's back.

Getting to his feet, Westwood bent down and rolled the body over. The chest was a hideous mélange of broken bones and blood. He looked at Khaisidra. The recoil had almost knocked her down. Her milieu had now been reduced to two objects. First she stared at Papsukil's body, then she stared at the gun. Westwood went over and took it away from her. She turned, then, and ran toward the portcullis.

He looked at Papsukil's body. He looked at the pile of little bones. He heard the creaking of the ancient mechanism as Khaisidra raised the portcullis. He looked at Papsukil's body again, then he pumped another charge into the barrel of the Folz-Hedir.

One down, one more to go.

Khaisidra had raised the portcullis just high enough to enable her to crawl through the entranceway. Westwood raised it higher and ducked in under it. Each breath he took racked him with pain.

The sun had risen and dew glistened on the plateau. Khaisidra had untied Morga and was trying to climb upon its back. He watched her. At last, after seizing the steed's mane and scrambling with both legs, she succeeded, and a moment later Morga began pounding across the plateau toward the hills. He raised the rifle to his shoulder and fixed its sight upon his target. The rifle coughed. The recoil stabbed him with pain. She did not fall at once from Morga's back. She rode for a while instead, her head hanging at a grotesque angle from her partially severed neck. Then, slowly, she slipped from the steed's back, and tumbled to the ground. Morga veered to the left then, and began circling toward the mountains. He lowered the rifle. The sunlight outlined the steed with gold. The gold made him think of the bounty he had thrown away. Westwood watched the steed till the castle hid it from view, then he slung his rifle and began the long journey home. ●

by George Zebrowski

This story marks the author's third solo appearance in these pages (a collaboration with Pamela Sargent, "The Falling," appeared in our March 1983 issue as well). As for whether or not it's "science fiction," all we can say is, we hope it is.

art: Theresa Paulina Fiorenza

THE CITY OF THOUGHT AND STEEL

They were talking about him again in the hall. He pressed his ear to the metal door and listened to the distant thunder of the words.

"But did he do it?" the new voice asked again.

"I told you, you'll find out," the fat man replied.

"But what do you mean?"

"Well, he confessed, and a lot of people think he's one of them."

"A hundred others confessed also."

"There's proof, but it's subjective."

"What do you mean? Come on, tell me."

"You're new here. Wait and see."

What do they know, he thought behind the door. They couldn't know anything; they had no insides.

"I admit one thing's likely," the new voice said.

"What? Give me a light."

A match snapped and hissed.

"He must have had something to do with it, the way he caved in."

"He was more sensitive than his pals. This cigarette stinks."

"There are people who'll confess to anything."

"Sure," the fat man said. "Never was any outside proof."

Coughing. Labored breathing.

"Just think, all those financial records, vaporized instantly. But I guess there were duplicates in other cities. Come on, tell me what you know."

"You'll see when you understand what he does in there all the time."

"You mean his hobby? What can that prove? You sound like you feel sorry for him."

A long drag. Exhalation.

"There's nothing else." The fat man said. "That's why he's here and not dead."

Silence.

"You'll see. He can't control it. That's proof of some kind. Good enough for me."

"I don't know; that's really reaching. . . ."

A long silence.

"Why do you think he did it, if he did?"

"Who knows?" the fat man thundered. "Maybe he needed the excitement."

"You've said that before."

Laughs and coughs. Echoes.

A longer silence.

"Maybe he didn't really know what it would be like?" the new voice asked insistently. "Didn't believe it myself when I heard. Never thought it could be that bad." A pause. "I heard he was studying to be an architect."

"Look—forget it. You're not gonna figure him out. How many times do I have to tell you?"

"Sorry. I think about it when I take the detour around the ruined part of the city."

"Take another way."

"There isn't one."

"I wish to God I could get a fresh pack of cigarettes for once."

"Maybe the machine's reloaded by now."

Footsteps.

He turned away from the door and went to the window. His eye moved ahead, leaving his body behind. The city began to appear, block by block.

Gathering all distance and perspective to itself, his eye glided hungrily along the shafts of light, passed through the bars and hovered over his city, which lay below him as if on a tabletop.

He swooped in low and spotted looters moving down a wide avenue, reaching into broken windows to fill their carts, becoming motionless shadows at the siren sound.

Young trees swayed in a summer wind, filling him with a sense of vast expectation; but a sad song played somewhere at the edge of hearing, drawing him to a hidden center of memory. Abolishing all barriers to motion, he hunted the instrument to a tavern, only to find a piano with painted-on keys.

He blossomed upward out of the bar and surveyed his city, admiring its blue-metal hues and ebony streets. An azure sky swam in the windows. A wall of glass caught his dark shape as he passed by.

He dropped through a roof into a maze of hallways, where the crystal doorknobs sparkled, imprisoning light from the shining chandeliers which he had installed. Rooms tumbled through him, measured spaces replacing every moment of his memory as he penetrated the walls.

Architectural thought, as well as steel, held the city together; it would endure as long as he held it whole in his brain.

He emerged into one hotel room at random and stopped to gaze out through the tall windows at the flood rising in the streets below.

But the city stood firm as the water covered his windows.

Giant eels swam through the city of granite and water, peering in at him and slipping away.

The watery sky became still as slate. Weathervanes turned doubtfully in the deep, elusive currents—race horses, roosters, arrows and rockets, whirlygigs of every shape and size. Silence held his lost memories as he stared through the yellow curtains and remembered the lake on that cold night when he had waited for dawn to light up the south. . . .

What other profession offered as much? Travel, the display of cleverness, honesty in life-and-death situations, the opportunity to be different persons. Historic events had pulled him into play as surely as his father had drawn him from the dark through the knothole of his mother's womb, involving him in the world's sorrows, compelling him to act. . . .

The city needed a lot of improving, he realized as the waters receded. He took a giant step through the walls of the hotel and peered into the side streets. Garbage waited in blind alleys; lice danced in the dust.

The city was not perfect; he might die of its faults if he weren't careful about repairs. Buildings needed new façades; streets had to be patched or resurfaced, so that vehicles could get by potholes without his intervention. If he did well enough, his city would stand forever.

He turned and saw that the looters were gone from the avenue of green trees, but the sad song still played on the mock piano. Leaves scattered from the branches, covering the sidewalks and gutters. Time wound forward in his city; he would have to hurry repairs.

A chill gust raked the curling leaves on the avenue. Patches of red, orange, and gold swirled into the blue sky. Shadows stabbed into the streets, draping themselves across walls and windows. A black tide was swallowing his city. . . .

His eye pulled back into his head and he looked around his cell. Where was his tray? It always came at the same time. He stood perfectly still, waiting.

Click.

The squeak pierced him as the door opened.

"Good afternoon," the fat man said as he came in and set the tray down on the bed. He stood there, flexing his pink fingers, searching the room with suspicious eyes. "Well, enjoy your food, fella," he mumbled finally. His heavy black shoes whispered on the hard floor. The door squeaked shut; the lock clicked.

He sat down on the bed, leaned over the tray, and examined

the delivery. Then he stripped the foil from the soft chocolate and emptied the bowl of soup into the garbage bag. The water in the paper cup would go into the lake of course, but on the whole it was a meager shipment of materials; mostly scrap; not enough for major construction. Couldn't they see what he was up against? His life depended on these deliveries. He would die if the city fell. Eternity was at stake here.

He stood up wearily, wandered to the door and peered through the small window. The black floor in the hall glistened from washing, but the green walls needed paint.

The hospital echoed with voices—ordering, announcing, requesting; an endless flow of names being called to action. He listened, filling with anger; they never called his name.

He turned away and considered the tabletop. He had, after all, been fortunate to get the matchboxes, the foil, tins, toothpicks, cups and watercolors, with which to build his city in the first place. More was needed, of course, but the basics were here; that much would always be his, whatever the shortages.

He squatted and brought his eyes level with the tabletop. The city stretched away to the window, merging with the skyline outside. The avenue of green trees was unbroken, right through the bars.

He stood up, snatched a bit of foil from the tray, and began to work it into a new façade for one of the Northside buildings. As he shaped the material, he remembered that he still had a large matchbox under the bed, filled with bits of balsa wood and plastic; but even that wouldn't be enough to finish the job.

The rich sections of town had all the money. Wealth bought durability, so repairs were infrequent. The poor had their labor and the privilege of useless protest. They didn't know that the power to hit back was yours only if you were willing to outweigh the world, using your strength because it was there, only waiting to be used as no power in the world could be used; better than cowering or complaining, more effective than persuasion; as powerful as wealth.

Everything is possible if you're willing to do anything.

He touched the table, rocking it slightly; small waves broke on the lake shore. He took the cup of water from the tray and poured it in, then brought his face low over the calming surface. The liquid was lifeless, but all he needed was some lightning to change that.

He stood up straight and looked out through the bars. Wind

was whipping up whitecaps on the distant lake. The clouds on the horizon resembled bruised flesh.

Lightning reached into the waters outside, and things crawled forward from the back of his mind, gnawing toward his eyes. Memory finally belched up the unfolding rose of the nuclear blast; it pulsed before him again, melting flesh, metal, and stone. North of the lake, the shock wave stripped the forest from the land, leaving only charred stumps sticking out of the black earth.

He worshipped the explosion, hoping to appease its wrath, but the carnal bloom only crushed him back into himself. He floated down into the cold fathoms of sunken rooms, and there he lingered in a rheumatic corner, waiting before a threatening door. A whispering crowded around him. The door flew open, and he bloodied himself again on the shards of oddly shaped memories.

He saw four pairs of squinting eyes floating around the dimly lit table.

"One city—purely as a convincer. They'll give in after that, but they have to know that we mean to do it."

"Why not set it off in the desert?" his own voice asked, and he despised its meek concern. "If we warn them . . ."

"No, no, no! They have to know it's not just a threat." A pair of hands moved on the table. Badly bitten fingernails drummed on the plastic covering.

"We could leave them an empty bomb mechanism somewhere, maybe a copy of of the plans . . ."

The right hand made a fist and struck the table. "No! Words won't be good enough. An empty casing will suggest that we don't have the fissionables to make the bomb go." The hands were open, pressing down on the table. "One bomb in a major city, one in a minor. One backup, so we always have a next move, if we need it."

"What if they start to evacuate?" The same whining voice.

"We'll tell them—if they start, off it goes. They won't have time."

A glowing coal drifted in the dark above the table. Fingers took it and lit a fresh cigarette. Chapped lips appeared as a face leaned under the light. Smoke curled up into the hanging lamp.

"We won't have to set off a bomb, if we do this right." The hands slipped away into the darkness.

He remembered the long train rolling out of Chicago, carrying thousands of coffins.

Click.

He whirled and saw eyes in the cell door window. For a moment he was looking in at himself, and he knew suddenly what he would see. He blinked, straining to wipe out the mushroom, but the fireball swelled, burning his eyes and melting his skin, searing his bones with the secret fire of stars.

He cried out and struck at the city, crushing matchbox buildings, pounding clay figures into lumps, crumpling foil roofs, splintering toothpick antennas, shattering plastic façades and mirrored windows. The lake rippled, flooding the streets and spilling onto the floor.

Click.

The door opened a crack, then closed. The eyes retreated into the hall.

He staggered over and put his ear to the cold metal.

"Poor bastard," the thunder announced in the limbo of the passage, "he's remembered again. You were right."

"I'd better get a tray filled for him," the fat man said.

A silence.

"You really do feel sorry for him, don't you?"

The words lost their meaning as the healing silence crept into him again, the containing, merciful silence, and he sat down to wait, watching the water run across the floor.

An age passed. It was twilight again outside the bars. The overhead light winked on. He stood up and looked out over his city. A titanic will stirred within his healing silence, bidding him to survive and act. He would rebuild with an effort as great as nature's, and his city would stand again as thought and steel. The risen dead would occupy its rooms and public places; trees would blossom and music would play. He would stroll down the green avenue and check into his favorite hotel, where the sun filtered in through yellow gauze curtains and the room service was pleasant and prompt.

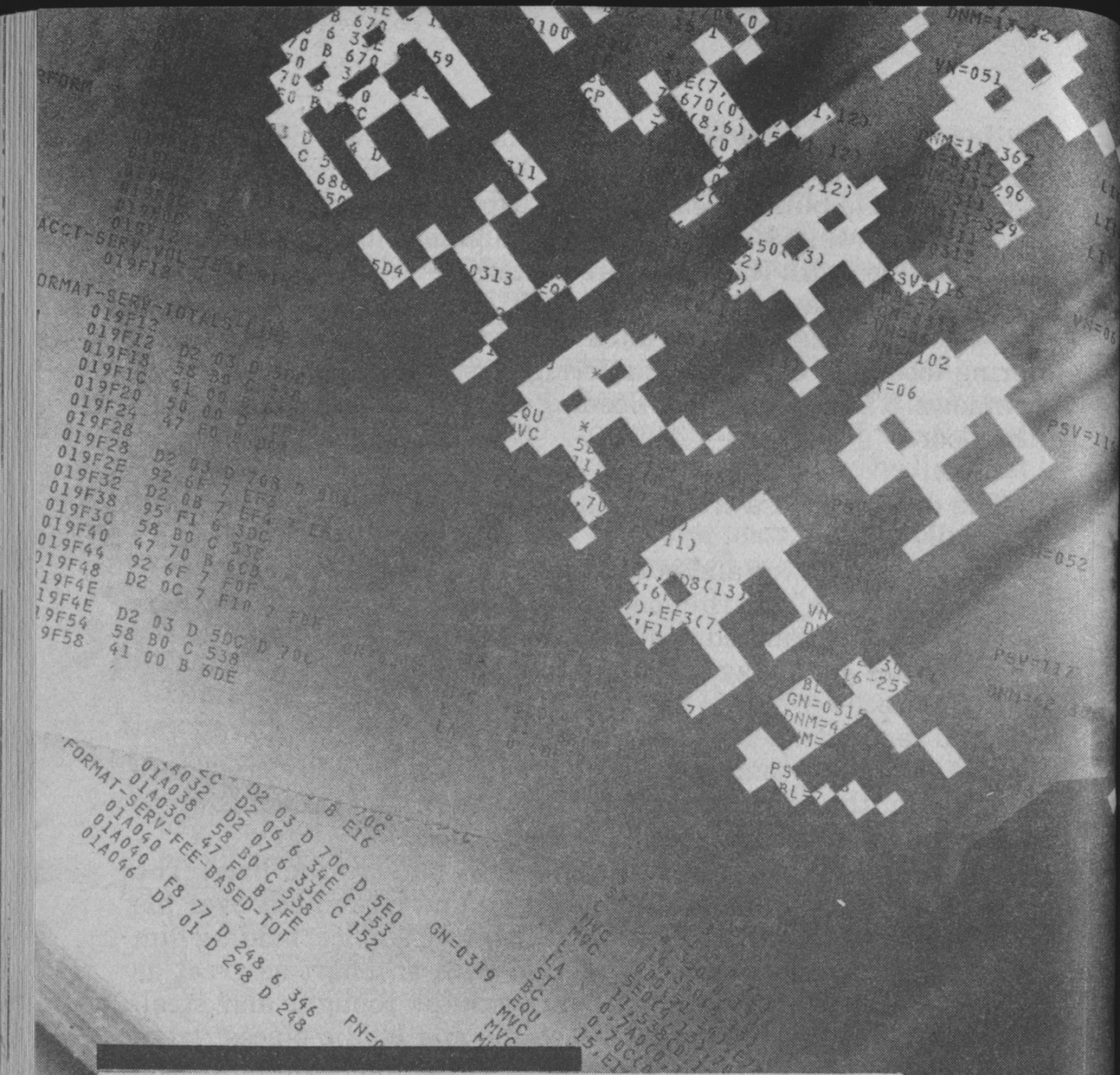
The cell door clicked, but the knothole of memory was again closed, the pain gone. The fat man came in and set the tray down at the edge of the city.

"Here's your stuff, fella, just what you need."

There was no food, but the tray was piled high with toothpick boxes, wrappers, jars of paint, a small roll of aluminum foil, large scraps of wood and plastic, tubes of glue, gobs of clay, bunches of rubber bands, rolls of tape, lettering stencils, thumbtacks, pins, a small stapler, even a pack of paper clips—

"Pretty good?" the fat man asked, half smiling.

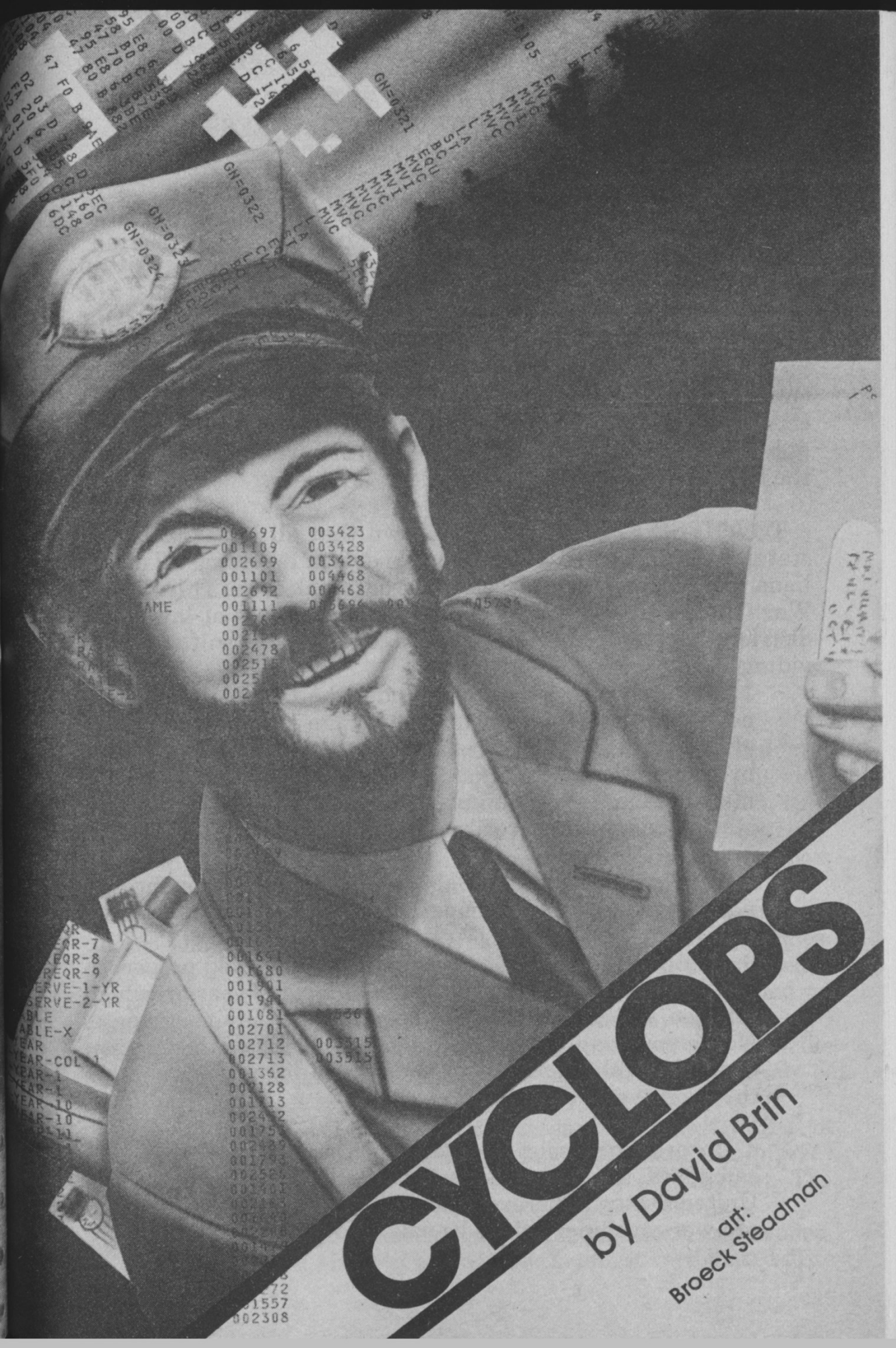
—everything he would need to rebuild his city. ●



In November 1982, we published a story called "The Postman." Set in a not-too-distant post-holocaust future, it told of one man's attempt to bring order to the chaos of his own life, and in so doing, almost accidentally bringing order to the lives of others as well. This story was very well received by the readers—so well received, in fact, that it was nominated for a Hugo for Best Novella of 1982.

Thus we are happy to be able to present to you David Brin's sequel to "The Postman." We believe you'll find it as satisfying as you did the original.

The author's latest publication (also very well received) is *Startide Rising* from Bantam.


CYCLOPS
by David Brin
art:
Broeck Steadman

NATIONAL RECOVERY ACT
PROVISIONALLY EXTENDED CONGRESS OF
THE RESTORED UNITED STATES

DECLARATION

TO ALL CITIZENS: Let it be known by all now living within the legal boundaries of the United States of America that the people and fundamental institutions of the nation survive. Our enemies have failed in their aggression against humanity, and have been destroyed. A provisional government, acting in continuous succession from the last freely elected Congress and Executive of the United States, is vigorously moving to restore law, public safety, and liberty once more to this beloved land, under the Constitution and the mercy of the Almighty.

TO THESE ENDS: Let it be known that all lesser laws and statutes of the United States are suspended, including all debts, liens, and judgments made before the outbreak of the Third World War. Until new codes are adopted by due process of law, local districts are free to meet emergency conditions as suitable, providing—

1. The freedoms guaranteed under the Bill of Rights shall not be withheld from any man or woman within the territory of the United States. Trials for all serious crimes shall be by an impartial jury of one's peers. Except in cases of dire martial emergency, summary judgments and executions violating due process are absolutely forbidden.

2. Slavery is forbidden. Debt bondage shall not be for life, nor may it be passed from parent to child.

3. Districts, towns, and other entities shall hold proper secret ballot elections on every even-numbered year, in which all men and women over 18 years of age may participate. No person may use official coercion on any other person unless he or she has been so elected, or is directly answerable to a person so elected.

4. In order to assist the national recovery, citizens shall safeguard the physical and intellectual resources of the United States. Wherever and whenever possible, books and pre-war machinery shall be salvaged and stored for future

generations. Local districts shall attempt to maintain schools to teach the young.

The Provisional Government hopes to reestablish nationwide radio service by the year 2018. Until that time, all communications must be carried via surface mail. Postal service should be reestablished in the Central and Eastern States by the year 2008, and in the West by 2015.

5. Cooperation with United States Mail Carriers is a requirement of all citizens. Interference with a letter carrier's function is a capital crime.

By order of the Provisional Congress
Restored United States of America
May 2007

1.
Curtin

The black bull terrier snarled and foamed. It yanked and strained at its chain, whipping froth at the excited, shouting men leaning over the low wooden walls of the arena. A scarred, one-eyed mongrel growled back at the pit bull from across the ring. Its chain tugged and rattled, threatening to tear out the ring bolt in the wall.

The dog-pit stank. The sick-sweet smoke of locally grown tobacco—liberally cut with marijuana—rose in thick, roiling plumes. Farmers and townspeople yelled deafeningly from rows of benches overlooking the crude arena. Those nearest the ring pounded on the wooden slats, encouraging the dogs' hysterical frenzy.

Leather-gloved handlers pulled their canine gladiators back far enough to get a grip on their collars, then turned to a group of men sitting on a VIP bench, overlooking the center of the pit.

A burly, bearded dignitary, better dressed than most, puffed on his home-made cigar. He glanced quickly at the slender man, eyes shaded by a visored cap, who sat impassively on his right. The stranger was quite still, in no way showing his feelings.

The heavyset official turned back to the handlers, and nodded.

A hundred men shouted at once as the dogs were loosed. The

snarling animals shot at one another like quarrels, their argument uncomplicated. Fur and blood began to fly as the crowd cheered.

On the dignitaries' bench, the elders yelled no less fiercely than the villagers. Like them, most had bets riding on the outcome.

But the big man with the cigar—the "Chairman of Public Safety" of Curtin, Oregon—puffed furiously without enjoyment, his thoughts cloudy and thick. Once more he glanced at the stranger sitting to his right.

The thin fellow was unlike anyone else in the arena. His beard was neatly trimmed, his black hair cut and combed to barely pass over his ears. The hooded blue eyes seemed to pierce and inspect critically, like the images of Old Testament prophets the chairman had seen in Sunday School as a boy, long before the Doomwar.

He had the weathered look of a traveler. And he wore a *uniform* . . . one no living citizen of Curtin had ever expected to see again.

On the peak of the stranger's cap, the burnished image of a horseman gleamed in the light from the oil lanterns. Somehow it seemed shinier than any metal had a right to be.

The chairman looked about at the shouting townspeople, and could sense a difference about them tonight. The men of Curtin were yelling with more than their usual gusto at the Wednesday Night Fights. They, too, were aware of the visitor, who had ridden up to the city gates five days ago, erect and proud like some god, demanding food and shelter and a place to post his notices. . . .

. . . and who then began distributing *mail*. . . .

The chairman had money riding on one of the dogs—old Jim Schmidt's Walleye. But he couldn't concentrate on the bloody contest on the sand below. He could not help glancing repeatedly at the . . . at the *postman*.

He isn't enjoying himself, the chairman realized unhappily. They had staged a special fight just for him, since he was leaving Curtin tomorrow for Cottage Grove.

The man who had turned their lives upside down was obviously trying to be polite. But, just as obviously, he did not approve of dog-fights.

The chairman leaned over to speak to his guest. "I suppose they don't do this sort of thing back East, do they, Mr. Inspector?"

The cool look on the man's face told him his answer. The chairman cursed himself for a fool. Of *course* they wouldn't have dog-fights—not in St. Paul City, or Topeka, or Odessa, or any of the

civilized regions of the Restored United States. But *here,* here in ruined Oregon, so long cut off from civilization . . .

"Local communities are free to handle their affairs as they see fit, Mr. Chairman," the man replied. His compelling voice carried softly over the shouting in the arena. "Customs adapt to the times. The government in St. Paul City knows this. I've seen far worse in my travels."

Absolved, the chairman read in the postal inspector's eyes. The chairman slumped slightly and looked away again.

He blinked, and at first he thought it was the smoke irritating his eyes. He dropped the cigar and ground it out under his foot. But the stinging would not depart. The bull-pit was out of focus as if he was seeing it in a dream . . . as if for the very first time.

My God! the chairman thought. Are we really doing this? Only seventeen years ago I was a member of the Willamette Valley ASPCA!

What has happened to us?

What has happened to *me?*

Coughing behind his hand, he hid the wiping of his eyes. Then he looked around and saw that he was not alone. Here and there in the crowd at least a dozen men had stopped shouting, and were instead looking down at their hands. A few were crying openly, tears streaming down tough faces, hardened from the long battle to survive.

Suddenly, for a few of those present, the years since the war seemed compressed—insufficient excuse.

The cheering was ragged at the end of the fight. Handlers leapt into the pit to tend the victor and clear away the offal. But half the audience seemed to be glancing nervously at their leader, and the stern, uniformed figure next to him.

The slender man straightened his cap. "Thank you, Mr. Chairman. But now I think I had better retire. I have a long journey tomorrow. Good night all."

He nodded to the elders, then rose and slipped into a worn leather jacket with a multi-colored shoulder patch—a red, white, and blue emblem. As he moved slowly toward the exit, townsmen stood up silently and made way for him, their eyes downcast.

The chairman hesitated, then got up and followed, a murmur of voices rising behind him.

The second event was never held that evening.

* * *

2.
Cottage Grove

Cottage Grove, Oregon
February 16, 2009

To Mrs. Adele Thompson
Mayor of Pine View Village
Unreclaimed State of Oregon

Transmittal route: Cottage Grove, Curtin
Culp Creek, McFarland Pt.,
Oakridge, Pine View.

Dear Mrs. Thompson,

This is the second letter I've sent back along our new postal route through the Willamette Forest region. By now, of course, you know that your neighbors in Oakridge have chosen to cooperate—after a few initial misunderstandings. I appointed Mr. Sonny Davis postmaster there, a pre-war resident of the area liked by all. By now he should have reestablished contact with you in Pine View.

Gordon Kranz lifted his pencil from the sheaf of slightly yellowed paper the citizens of Cottage Grove had donated. A brace of copper oil lamps and two candles flickered over the antique desk. Light reflected from glass-framed pictures on the bedroom wall. The room was snug, clean, and warm—even better than where he had stayed in Curtin. The locals had insisted Gordon take the best quarters in town. It was a big change from the way things had been for Gordon only a few months before. In the letter he had quickly passed over the setting up of a post office in the town of Oakridge. Now it was an accomplished fact. But back in October it had not been that simple.

The citizens of that mountain town had opened their hearts to him from the first moment he had revealed himself as a representative of the Restored U.S. But the tyrannical "mayor" and his gang of heavies had been another matter. The bossman had almost had the unwelcome guest murdered before Gordon managed to convince him he was only interested in setting up his post office, and moving on—no threat to the mayor's power.

Perhaps the mayor was afraid of the people's reaction if he didn't help Gordon. In the end, though, he gave Gordon the supplies he asked for, and a valuable, if somewhat elderly, horse.

On leaving Oakridge, Gordon had seen relief on the mayor's face. The local boss and his gang were only too glad to see him

go, certain they could keep control in spite of the stunning news that a United States still existed out there somewhere.

But as he left, townspeople had followed Gordon for over a mile, shyly pressing hopeful little letters into his hands, eagerly talking about the reclamation of Oregon and asking what they could do to help. They complained openly of the the petty local tyranny.

Gordon had been surprised by the change in the people of Oakridge, in just a few days.

The local bossman didn't know it yet, but Gordon figured his days were numbered.

Since my last letter from Culp Creek, I've established post offices in Palmerville and Curtin. Today I completed negotiations with the mayor of Cottage Grove. Included in this packet is a report on my progress so far, to be passed on to my superiors in the Reclaimed State of Wyoming. When the courier following my trail arrives in Pine View, please give him my records and my best wishes.

And be patient if it takes a while. The trail west from St. Paul City is dangerous, and it may be more than a year before the next man arrives.

Gordon could well imagine Mrs. Thompson's reaction, on reading that paragraph. The scrappy old matriarch would shake her head, and maybe even laugh out loud at the sheer blarney that filled every sentence.

Better than anybody else in the wild territory that had once been the great state of Oregon, Mrs. Adele Thompson knew that there would be no couriers from the civilized East. There was no headquarters for Gordon to report back to. The only thing the city of St. Paul was capital of was a still slightly radioactive bend in the Mississippi River.

There had never been a Reclaimed State of Wyoming, or a Restored United States for that matter, except in the imagination of an itinerant, dark-age con artist, who was doing his best to survive in a deadly and suspicious world.

Mrs. Thompson was one of the rare folks Gordon had encountered in the seventeen years since the Third World War who still saw with her eyes, and thought with a logical mind. The illusion Gordon had created—at first by accident, and later in desperation—had meant nothing to her. She had liked Gordon for himself, and shown him charity without having to be coaxed by a myth.

He was writing the letter in this convoluted way—filled with references to things that never were—for other eyes than hers.

The mail would change hands many times along the route he had set up, before finally reaching Pine View.

No matter. Mrs. Thompson would read between the lines. And she wouldn't tell. For the mirage Gordon was spreading down the central Cascades could only help her little village.

He only hoped she could contain her laughter.

This part of the Coast Fork is pretty peaceful these days. The communities have even started trading with each other in a modest fashion, overcoming the old fear of war-plague. They're eager for news of the outside world.

That's not to say all is placid. They say the Rogue River country south of Roseburg is still totally lawless—survivalist country. So I'm headed northward, toward Eugene. It's the direction most of the letters I'm carrying are addressed, anyway.

Deep in his saddlebag, under the bundled letters he had accepted from excited, grateful people all along his way, was one from a pretty black-haired girl he had met back in Pine View. Gordon would try to see it delivered, whatever eventually happened to the others.

Now I must go. Perhaps someday soon a letter from you and all my friends back there will catch up with me. Until then, please give my love to Amy and Michael and the others.

At least as much as anywhere, the Restored United States of America is alive and well in beautiful Pine View.

Sincerely yours,
Gordon K.

That last remark might be a little dangerous, but Gordon had to include it, if only to show Mrs. Thompson that he wasn't caught up completely by his own hoax—the scam that he hoped would get him safely across the almost lawless countryside to . . .

To what? After all these years Gordon still wasn't sure what it was he was looking for.

Perhaps only someone, somewhere, taking responsibility—trying to do something about the Dark Age.

He shook his head. After all these years, the faint hope and dream had not quite died.

He folded the letter into an old envelope, dribbled wax from a candle and pressed it with a seal salvaged from the Oakridge Post Office. The letter went atop the "progress report" he had labored

over earlier, a tissue of fantasy addressed to officials of a government that had actually evaporated like smoke within a year of that terrible war, so long ago.

Gordon spared a moment to wish that the report really had a destination . . . that the myth he was spreading was somehow, miraculously true.

Next to the packet lay his postman's cap. The flickering lamplight reflected from the brass image of a Pony Express rider, Gordon's silent companion and mentor for months, now.

One day late last summer, in the bone-dry forests of eastern Oregon, he had been robbed by bandits and barely escaped with his life. In a misty fog, half naked and shivering in the twilight, he had come upon a ruined vehicle, almost covered with dead pine needles. Miraculously, when he needed it most, the ancient, rusting Jeep provided shelter from the cold night.

In the morning he found the cap and uniform and jacket—hanging limply on a long-dessicated skeleton. He had buried the remains of the postman, and taken the clothes the long-dead public servant no longer needed. There were also tools and shoes and a leather bag to replace the backpack that had been taken from him.

Then an odd thing happened. At first it seemed little more than a strange and somewhat inconvenient fixation, but in the first village he came to, friendly little Pine View, Gordon found that once-sophisticated citizens—now hardened survivors of the great winnowing—became tremulous when they saw his uniform, and leapt to conclusions that he, in his wildest imaginings, had never even considered.

Except for elderly Mrs. Thompson, the village matriarch, the good folks of Pine View were all soon convinced he was a *real* postman! Nothing he could say would dissuade them from this hopeful, desperate fixation.

At darker, more dangerous Oakridge, it happened again. This time he didn't bother to fight the impression. He nurtured it, and won a battle with a tyrant.

By quirk and coincidence Gordon had stumbled onto a new survival plan, a new scheme to make his way in this suspicious, insular world.

Now, in town after town, people fell over themselves to believe, especially when he actually *delivered* letters from places he had already visited.

After all these years, it seemed, people still dreamed forlornly of a lost, shiny age—of cleanliness and order and a great nation

now lost. It overwhelmed their hardwon skepticism like a spring thaw cracking the icy crust over a stream.

Gordon quashed a threatening sense of shame. No one alive was guiltless after the last seventeen years, he recalled, and his scam actually seemed to do a little good in the towns he passed. In exchange for supplies and a place to rest, he sold hope.

One did what one had to do.

There was a knock on the door. Gordon called "Come!!"

Johnny Stevens, the newly appointed "Assistant Postmaster of Cottage Grove," poked his head in. Johnny's boyish face had a barely-sprouted fuzz of beard. But his lanky legs promised a great cross-country stride, and he was reputed to be a dead shot.

Who could tell? The lad might even deliver the mail.

"Uh, sir?" Johnny said, unwilling to disturb whatever important business Gordon had been up to. "It's ten o'clock. The mayor wanted to have a beer with you in the pub, since it's your last night here in Cottage Grove."

Gordon stood up. "Right, Johnny. Thanks." He grabbed his cap and jacket then scooped up the phony report and the letter to Mrs. Thompson.

"Here you are then. These are official packets for your first run over to Culp Creek. Ruth Marshall is postmistress there. She'll be expecting somebody, and I believe folks there'll treat you real well."

Johnny took the envelopes as if they were made of butterflies' wings. "I'll protect them with my life!" The youth's eyes shone with pride, and a fierce determination not to let Gordon down.

Gordon pushed away another sudden wave of guilty misgivings. The last thing he wanted was for a sixteen-year-old to get hurt protecting a chimera.

Of course the boy would probably just have an exciting adventure, following the forest paths farther than anyone from his village had traveled in over a decade, coming back with tall stories to tell.

There were still a few survivalists in those hills. But this far north of the Rogue River country the odds were Johnny'd make it to Culp Creek and back just fine.

Gordon had himself almost convinced.

"Good lad," he said as he turned to blow out the candles.

The youth must have been rummaging in the ruins of Cottage Grove's old post office. His homespun shirt now proudly bore a U.S. MAIL patch on the shoulder, the colors still bright after almost twenty years.

"I've already got ten letters from people here in Cottage Grove and nearby farms," Johnny added. "I think most of them don't even know anybody back East. But they're writing anyway for the excitement of it, and hoping somebody will write back."

So. At the very least, Gordon's visit had gotten people to practice their literacy skills a little. "You warned them that east of Pine View the route is slow yet, and not guaranteed at all?"

"Sure. They don't care."

Gordon smiled. "That's okay then. The Postal Service has always carried mostly fantasies, anyway."

The boy looked at him, puzzled. But Gordon set his cap on his head and said nothing more.

Since departing the ruins of Minnesota so long ago, Gordon had seen few villages as prosperous and apparently happy as Cottage Grove. The farms now brought in a surplus most years. The militia was well drilled, yet unoppressive. As hope of finding true civilization faded, Gordon had slowly reduced the scope of his dreams until a place like this seemed almost paradise.

Ironically though, the very hoax that had gotten him safely here through the suspicious villages and hamlets of the mountains now kept him from staying in beautiful Cottage Grove. For in order to maintain his illusion, he had to keep moving.

And if his illusion ever failed, even the good people of Cottage Grove would certainly turn on him.

The walled village covered one corner of prewar Cottage Grove. Its pub was a large, snug basement with two big fireplaces and a bar where the bitter local homebrew was served in tall clay steins.

Mayor Peter Von Kleek sat at a corner booth talking earnestly with Eric Stevens, Johnny's grandfather and newly appointed "postmaster" of Cottage Grove. The two men were poring over a copy of Gordon's "Federal Regulations" as he and Johnny stepped into the pub.

Back in Oakridge Gordon had run off a few score copies on a hand-cranked mimeograph machine he had managed to get working in the old, deserted post office. He had put a lot of thought and care into those regulations. They had to have the flavor of authenticity, and at the same time present no obvious threat to local strongmen—giving them no reason to fear Gordon's mythical Restored United States . . . or Gordon himself.

So far those sheets had been his most inspired prop.

Tall, gaunt-faced Peter Von Kleek stood and shook Gordon's

hand, motioning him to a seat. The bartender hurried over with two tall steins of thick brown beer. It was warm, of course, but still delicious—like pumpernickel bread. The mayor waited, puffing nervously on his clay pipe until Gordon put his stein down.

Von Kleek tapped the paper in front of him. "These regulations here aren't very detailed, Mr. Inspector."

"Call me Gordon, please. These are informal times."

"Ah, yes. Gordon. Please call me Peter." The mayor was clearly uncomfortable.

"Well, Peter," Gordon said, "the Restored U.S. Government has learned some hard lessons. One has been not to impose rigid standards on far-flung localities who have problems St. Paul City can't even imagine, let alone regulate."

Gordon reached into one of his prepared pitches.

"There's the question of money, for instance. Most communities dropped prewar currency soon after the food-center riots. Barter systems are the rule, and they usually work just fine, except when debt service turns into a form of slavery."

That much was all true. In his travels Gordon had seen versions of feudal serfdom rising all over. Money was a joke.

"The federal authorities in St. Paul have declared the old currency moot. There are just too many bills and coins out there for sparse rural economies.

"Still, we're trying to encourage national commerce. One way is by accepting old-time two-dollar bills to pay postage for letters carried by US Mail. They never were very common, and are impossible to forge with present-day technology. Pre-1965 silver coins are also acceptable."

"We've already taken in over forty dollars worth!" Johnny Stevens said. "Folks are hunting all over for those old bills and coins. And they've started usin' them to pay off barter debts too."

Gordon shrugged. It had started already. Sometimes the little things he added to his tale, to lend verisimilitude, took off by themselves in ways he never expected. He couldn't see how a little money back in circulation, given value by a local myth in the "Restored U.S.," could hurt these people much.

Von Kleek nodded. He moved on to the next item.

"This part here about no 'coercion' without elections," he tapped the paper. "Well, we do have sort of regular town meetings, and people from the surrounding hamlets take part when something big is up. But I can't rightly say I or my militia chief were ever really *voted* for . . . not in a real secret ballot, like it says here."

He shook his head. "And we've had to do some pretty drastic

things, especially during the early days. I hope we're not going to have that held too hard against us, Mr. Inspe . . . I mean, Gordon. We really have been doin' our best.

"We have a school, for instance. Most of the younger kids attend now, after harvest. And we can make a start salvaging machines and voting like it says here. . . ." Von Kleek wanted reassurance; he was trying to catch Gordon's eye. But Gordon lifted his beer mug in order not to have to oblige.

One of the major ironies he had found in his travels had been this phenomenon—that those who had fallen the least far into savagery were those who seemed the most ashamed of having fallen at all.

Gordon cleared his throat.

"It seems . . . it seems to me you've been doing a pretty good job here, Peter. The past doesn't matter as much as the future, anyway. I don't think you have to worry about the federal government interfering at all."

That last, at least, was the honest truth.

Von Kleek looked relieved. Gordon was sure there would be a secret ballot election here within weeks. The people of this area would deserve what they got if they elected anyone as their leader but this gruff, sensible man.

"One thing bothers me."

It was Eric Stevens who spoke. The spry old man had been Gordon's obvious choice as postmaster. For one thing he ran the local trading post, and was the best educated man in town. He had once almost completed college long before the war.

Another reason was that Stevens had seemed the most suspicious when Gordon rode into town several days ago, proclaiming a new era for Oregon under the Restored U.S. Appointing him postmaster would persuade him to believe, if only for his own prestige and profit.

Incidentally, he would also probably do a good job—as long as the myth lasted.

Old Stevens turned his beer stein on the table, leaving a broad oval ring. "What I can't figure out is why nobody's been out here from St. Paul City *before*. Sure, I know you had to cross a helluva lot of wild country to get here, almost all of it on foot you say.

"But what I want to know is why they didn't just send somebody out in an *airplane?*"

There was a brief silence at the table. Gordon could tell that townsmen nearby were listening in, as well.

"Aw, gramps!" Johnny Stevens shook his head in embarrass-

ment for his grandfather. "Don't you realize how bad the war was? All the airplanes and complicated machines were wrecked by that *pulse* thing that blasted all the radios and such right at the beginning of the war! Then, later on, there wouldn't have been anybody around who knew how to fix 'em. And there'd be no spare parts!"

Gordon blinked in brief surprise. The kid was good! He had been born after the fall of industrial civilization, yet he had a grasp of the essentials.

Of course everyone knew about the electromagnetic pulses, from giant H-bombs exploded high in space, that had screwed up electronic devices all over the world on that deadly first day. But Johnny's understanding went beyond that to the interdependence of a machine culture.

Still, if the kid was bright he must have gotten it from his grandfather. The older Stevens looked at Gordon archly.

"That right, Inspector? No spares or mechanics left?"

Gordon knew that explanation wouldn't hold under close scrutiny. He blessed those long, tedious hours on broken roads since leaving Oakridge, when he had worked out his story in detail.

"No, not quite. The pulse radiation, the blasts, and fallout destroyed a lot. The bugs and riots killed a lot of skilled people. But actually, it didn't take long to get many machines going again. There were airplanes ready to fly within days. The R.U.S. has hundreds of them, repaired and tested and waiting to fly.

"But they can't take off. They're all grounded, and will be for years to come."

The old man looked puzzled. "Why's that, Inspector?"

"For the same reason you wouldn't pick up a broadcast even if you put together a working radio," Gordon said. He paused for effect. "Because of laser satellites."

Peter Von Kleek slapped the table. "Son of a bitch!" All over the room heads turned their way.

Eric Stevens sighed, giving Gordon a look that had to be total acceptance . . . or admiration of a better liar than himself.

"What . . . what's a lay . . ?"

"Laser sat," Johnny's grandfather explained. "We won the war," he snorted at the famous marginal victory that had been trumpeted in the weeks before the riots began. "But the enemy must have left some sleeper satellites in orbit. Give a few months, then anything so much as lets out a peep over the radio, or tries to fly, *zap!*" He sliced the air decisively. "No wonder I never picked up anything on my crystal set!"

Gordon nodded. The story fit so well, it could even be true. He hoped so. For it might explain the silence and the lonely emptiness of the sky, without the world having to be totally vacant of civilization.

And how else to explain the slag heaps that remained of so many radio antennas he had passed in his travels?

"What's the government *doing* about it?" Von Kleek asked earnestly.

Fairy tales, Gordon thought. His lies would grow more complex as he traveled until someday someone finally caught him up.

Gordon smiled confidently. "We have some scientists. We hope to find facilities in California, for making and launching orbital rockets." He left the implication hanging.

The others looked disappointed.

"If only there was a way to take care of the damned satellites sooner," the mayor said. "Think of all those aircraft, just sitting there! Can you imagine how surprised the next raiding party out of the damned Rogue River would be, to find us farmers backed up by the *US Air Force* and some bloody A-10s!"

He gave out a whooshing sound and made diving motions with his hands. Then the mayor did a pretty good imitation of a machine gun. Gordon laughed with the others. Like boys, they lived briefly in a fantasy of rescue, and power to the good guys.

Other men and women gathered around now that the mayor and the postal inspector had apparently finished their business. Someone pulled out a harmonica. A guitar was passed to Johnny Stevens, who proved to be quite gifted. Soon the crowd was singing bawdy folk songs and old commercial jingles.

The mood was high. Hope was thick as the warm, dark beer, and tasted at least as good.

On his way out of the men's room—grateful that Cottage Grove had somehow retained gravity-flow indoor plumbing—Gordon stopped suddenly near the back stairs.

There had been a sound. . . .

The crowd by the fireplace was singing . . . *"Gather around and listen to my tale—a tale of a fateful trip. . . ."*

Gordon cocked his head. Had he imagined the other sound? It had been faint, and his head *was* ringing a bit on its own from the beer.

But a queer feeling at the back of his neck, an intuition, made him turn around and climb the back stairs, into the building above the basement pub.

The stairs were dimly lit by a candle at the landing. The song-fest faded away behind him as he climbed, careful of the creaking steps.

At the top he listened, and for a long moment heard nothing. He was about to turn around, writing it off to an overworked imagination, when it came again.

. . . a series of faint, eerie noises. They brought back half-memories. A shiver climbed his back. He had not heard their like since . . . since long, long ago.

At the end of a hall there was faint light under a door. He approached, quietly as he could.

Bloop, went the sound.

Gordon reached out and touched the cold metal knob.

Wah-wah . . . bleat bleat!

The absent weight of his revolver—left in his guest room in supposedly safe Cottage Grove—made him feel half naked as he opened the door. It creaked softly.

Dusty tarpaulins covered stacked crates and odds and ends, hoarded for a rainy day by the survivors. Around the boxes came faint, flickering light. There were hushed voices just ahead, whispering in urgent excitement.

Gordon crept forward until he reached an opening in the salvage. Then a floorboard creaked under his left foot.

There were gasps. Five faces turned suddenly, cast into deep relief by the light from a single candle.

In a breathless instant Gordon saw that they were *children,* staring up at him in terrified awe—the more so because they all clearly knew who he was. But he cared about none of that. His eyes were only for a little box that lay on an oval rug in the center of the small coven.

Across its bottom was a row of buttons. In the center was a flat screen that gave off a pearly light.

Pink spiders emerged from flying saucers and stepped imperiously down the screen, to a crunching, marching sound. They bleated in triumph when they reached the bottom. Then their ranks reformed and the assault began all over again.

Gordon's throat was dry.

"Where . . ." he breathed.

The children stood up. One of the boys swallowed. "Sir?" he said.

Gordon pointed. "Where in the name of all that's holy did you get that?" He shook his head. "More important . . . where did you get the *batteries!*"

One of the children began to cry. "Please, sir, we didn't know it was wrong. Jimmy Smith told us it's just a game the oldtime children used to have! We find 'em all over, only they don't work no more. . . ."

"Who," Gordon asked carefully, "is Jimmy Smith?"

"A boy. His pa has come down from Cresswell with a wagon to trade the last couple years. Jimmy swapped this game for twenty old ones we found that wouldn't work no more. He said . . ."

Gordon recalled the map he had left in his room. Cresswell was just a little north of here, not far off the route he had planned to take to Eugene.

"Did Jimmy Smith say where he got the toy?" He tried not to spook the children, but some of his urgency must have spilled over, frightening them.

A girl wailed. "He said he got it from *Cyclops!*"

Then in a panicked flurry the children were gone, disappeared down little alleys in the dusty storage room. Gordon was left there, standing quite still, watching the tiny invaders descend in the glow of the little gray screen.

"Crunch- crunch- crunch," they marched.

The game *blooped* victoriously, then began to play all over again.

3.
Eugene

The pony's breath puffed as it pushed resignedly through the dank drizzle, led by a man in a rain-slick poncho. Its only burdens were a light saddle and two thick bags, plastic-covered against the damp.

The gray Interstate glistened wetly. Deep puddles lay like small lakes in the concrete. Dirt had blown over the four-lane highway during the postwar drought years, and grass had later begun to grow on the road as the old Northwest weather reasserted itself at last. The highway was now a ribbon of meadow, a flat notch in the forested hills overlooking the sluggish Willamette.

Gordon raised his slicker tentlike to consult his map. Ahead to his right a large fen had formed where the south and east forks of the Willamette came together, before cutting west between Eugene and Springfield. According to the old map there was a modern industrial park below. Now only a few old roofs poked above the mire, a realm for water fowl.

Back in Cresswell they had told him the Interstate was impassable a little north of here. He would have to cut through Eugene itself, find an open bridge across the river, and then somehow get back onto the highway to Coburg.

The Cresswellers had been a little vague on details. Few travellers had made the trip since the war.

Eugene had been one of Gordon's milestones for months. But now it only stood in his path toward a deeper mystery, further north.

Soon he came upon a large sign half buried in a puddle. Gordon kicked away debris and knelt to examined the rusting plate—like a tracker reading a cold trail in a forest path.

"30th Avenue," he read.

A broad road cut into the hills to the west, away from the Interstate. According to the map, downtown Eugene was just over the forested rise that way.

The horse puffed stoically as he led it down the offramp and then up the slope to the west.

From the top of the hill the light mist seemed somehow to soften the ruined city's old wounds. Rains had long since washed away the fire-stains. Slow beards of climbing greenery, sprouting from cracks in the pavement, covered many of the signs of violence.

As Gordon descended to the ghostly streets, strewn with broken glass, the rain-wet pavement sparkled with another era's shattered panes. The folk in Cresswell had warned him what to expect. What the riots and fires hadn't ruined had been finished off by the river of mud that had slammed into the city when the Fall Creek and Lookout Point dams had given way.

The collapse of those reservoirs had wiped out Route 58 west of Oakridge, forcing Gordon to make his long detour south and west through Curtin, Cottage Grove, and Cresswell before finally swinging up north again.

Back in Cresswell, between all the meetings and celebrations—the election of the new postmaster and excited plans to extend the new mail delivery network east and west—the citizens had regaled Gordon with stories of the valiant struggle of Eugene. They told about how the city had managed to hold out for four long years after the war had isolated it from the outer world. In a strange alliance of the University community and red-neck country farmers, somehow the city-state had overcome all threats . . . until at last the bandit gangs finished her off by blasting the upland reservoirs all at once.

The tale was already legendary, almost like the fall of Troy. And yet the storytellers hadn't sounded forlorn in telling it. It was more as if they now looked upon the disaster as a temporary setback, to be overcome within their own lifetimes.

For Cresswell had been in a tizzy of optimism even before Gordon's visit. His tale of a "Restored United States" was the town's *second* dose of good news in less than three months.

Last winter *another* visitor had arrived—this one from the north, a grinning man in a white-and-black robe—who passed out startling gifts for the children, then departed, speaking the magical name, *Cyclops*.

Cyclops, the stranger had said.

Cyclops would make things right again. Cyclops would bring comfort and progress back into the world, redeeming the people from drudgery and lingering hopelessness, the legacy of the Doomwar.

All the people had to do was collect their old machinery, particularly electronics. Cyclops would take their donations of useless, ruined equipment, plus perhaps a little surplus food to maintain its volunteer servants. In return, Cyclops would give the Cresswellans things that *worked.*

The toys were only tokens of what was to come. Someday there would be *real* miracles.

Gordon had been unable to get anything coherent from the people of Cresswell. They were too deliriously happy to be completely logical. Half of them assumed his "Restored United States" was *behind* Cyclops, and half thought it was the other way around. It hardly occurred to anybody that the two wonders could be unconnected—two spreading legends encountering one another in the wilderness.

Gordon didn't dare disabuse them, or ask too many questions. He had left as quickly as he could—loaded down with more letters than ever—determined to follow the tale to its source.

It was about noon as he turned north on University Street. The gentle rain was no bother. He could explore Eugene for a while and still make it by nightfall to Coburg, where a settlement of gleaners supposedly lived. Somewhere north of there lay the territory from which the followers of Cyclops were spreading word of their strange redemption.

As he walked quietly past the gutted buildings, Gordon wondered if he should even try to pull his "postman" hoax in the north. He remembered the little spiders and saucers, flashing in the darkness, and found it hard not to hope.

Maybe he could give up the scam, and find something real to believe in. Perhaps someone, at last, had taken responsibility.

The shattered storefronts of the deserted town gave way at last to 18th Avenue and the University of Oregon campus, the broad athletic field now overgrown with aspen and alder saplings. There, in front of the old gymnasium, Gordon stopped abruptly and held the pony still.

Somewhere, not too far away, somebody was screaming.

He pushed back the plastic cover of his holster and looked about. But could see nothing amiss.

The faint crying crescendoed then fell away. It was a woman's voice, carrying notes of pain and deadly fear. Gordon drew his revolver. Had it come from the north? The east?

He pushed into the semi-jungle between the university buildings, hurriedly seeking a place to go to ground. He had had an easy time of it since leaving Oakridge months ago, too easy. Obviously he had acquired bad habits. It was a miracle no one had heard *him,* traipsing down these deserted streets as if he owned them.

He led the pony into the gymnasium through an ajar side door, and tethered the animal behind a fold-down stand of bleachers. He dropped a pile of oats near the animal, but he left the saddle in place and cinched.

Gordon took out his bow and quiver. In the rain they were probably more reliable, and certainly quieter than his carbine or revolver.

He stuffed one of the bulging mail sacks into a ventilation shaft. As he was searching for a place to hide the other, Gordon suddenly realized what he was doing. He smiled ironically.

Next thing you'll be risking your life to protect the mail! He laughed at his momentary foolishness.

Leaving the second bag lying on the floor, he set off to find the source of the trouble.

The sounds came from a brick building just ahead, whose long bank of glass windows still gleamed. Apparently looters hadn't thought the place worth bothering with.

Now Gordon could hear faint, muttering voices, the soft nickering of horses and the creaking of tack.

Seeing no watchers at the roofs or windows, he dashed across the overgrown lawn and up a broad flight of concrete steps, flattening against a doorway around the corner and breathing open-mouthed to make no sound.

The door bore an ancient, rusted padlock and an engraved plastic sign.

ERB MEMORIAL STUDENT UNION
Remodeled May 1989
Cafeteria Hours
11–3:30
5–8 pm

The voices came from just within.

An outside stairway led up to several floors overhead. He stepped back and saw that a door into the building lay ajar three flights up.

Gordon knew he was being a fool once again. Now that he had the trouble located he really should go collect his pony and get the hell out of here, as quickly as possible.

The voices within grew angry. Through a crack in the door he heard a blow being struck. A woman's voice cried out in pain, followed by coarse male laughter.

Sighing softly at the flaw in his character that kept him here—instead of running away as anyone with any brains would do—Gordon started to climb the concrete stair, careful not to make a sound.

Rot and mold covered an area just within the half-open door. But beyond that the fourth floor of the student center looked untouched. Miraculously, none of the glass panes in the great atrium skylight had been smashed. Under its pale glow, a carpeted ramp spiralled downward connecting each floor.

As Gordon cautiously approached the open atrium, it felt momentarily like he had stepped backward in time. Looters had left the student organization offices—with their passionate tornadoes of paper—completely untouched. Bulletin boards were plastered with announcements of sporting events, shows, political rallies. Only at the far end were there a few notices in bright red, having to do with the final crisis that had struck almost without warning. Otherwise, the clutter was homey, radical, enthusiastic.

Gordon hurried past, down the spiralling ramp toward the sounds of voices below.

On the second floor, a balcony extended out over the main lobby. He got down on his hands and knees and crawled the rest of the way.

On the north side of the building, to the right, part of the two-storey glass facing had been shattered to make room for a pair

of large wagons. Steam rose from six horses tethered over by the left hand wall behind a row of dark pinball machines.

Outside, amid the broken glass shards, the sulking rain created spreading pink pools around four sprawled bodies, recently cut down by automatic weapons fire. Only one of the victims had even managed to draw a sidearm during the ambush. The pistol lay in a puddle, inches from a motionless hand.

The voices came from his left where the balcony made a turn. Gordon crawled cautiously forward and looked out.

Several ceiling-high mirrors remained along the west wall, giving Gordon a wide view of the floor below, where a blaze of smashed furniture crackled in a large fireplace between the reflecting panes.

He hugged the moldy carpet and lifted his head just enough to see four heavily-armed men arguing by the fire. A fifth lounged on a couch over to the left, his automatic rifle aimed idly at a pair of prisoners—a boy of about nine years and a young woman.

The red weals on her face matched the pattern of a man's hand. Her brown hair was matted and she held the boy close. Neither prisoner seemed to have energy left for tears.

The bearded men all wore one-piece camouflage suits, prewar army surplus.

Survivalists. Gordon felt a wave of revulsion. The word itself was loathsome.

Everywhere he had gone in his travels, folk shared this reaction. More than the Enemy, whose bombs and germs had wrought such destruction during the One-Week War, people in every wrecked county and hamlet blamed these macho outlaws for the lawlessness that had led to the final fall.

But there weren't supposed to *be* any survivalists anymore in the valley of the Willamette! In Cottage Grove, Gordon had been told the last big bunch had been driven south of Roseburg years ago, into the wilderness of the Rogue River country!

What were they doing here then? He moved a little closer and listened.

"I dunno, Strike-leader. I don't think we oughta go any deeper on this recon. We've already had enough surprises with this 'Cyclops' thing the broad here let slip about, before she clammed up. I say we oughta head back to Site Bravo and report what we found!"

The speaker was a short, bald man with a wiry frame. He warmed his hands over the fire. An M-16 assault rifle equipped with a flash suppressor was slung muzzle-down over his back.

The man he addressed as "Strike-leader" was big and mean-looking. A scar ran from one ear to his chin, only partly hidden by a gray-flecked black beard. He grinned, displaying several gaps in his teeth.

"You don't really believe that bull the broad was spouting, do you? All that crap about a big computer that talks? What a crock! She's just feedin' it to us to give us a stall!"

"Oh yeah? Well how do you explain all *that?"* The little man gestured back to the wagons.

In the mirror, Gordon could see the corner of the nearest. It was loaded down with odds and ends no doubt collected here on the University campus. The haul seemed to consist mostly of electronic equipment.

Not farm tools, not clothes or jewelry—*electronics*.

It was the first time Gordon had ever seen a gleaner's wagon filled with salvage like this. The implication of that loaded wagon caused Gordon's pulse to pound. In his excitement, he barely ducked down in time as the little man turned to pick up something from a nearby table.

"And what about *this?"* The small survivalist asked. In his hand was a toy—a small video game like the one Gordon had first seen in Cottage Grove.

Lights flashed and the box gave out a cheerful little melody.

The strike-leader stared for a long moment at the game. Finally he shrugged. "Don't mean shit," he grumbled.

One of the other survivalists spoke. "I agree wit lil Jim. . . ."

"That's Blue Five," the big man growled. "Maintain discipline!"

"Right," the third man nodded. He didn't seem perturbed. "I agree wit Blue-Five, then. I think we gotta report on this. It could affect the invasion. What if the farmers *do* got high-tech up north of here? We could wind up doin' an end-run right into some heavy duty lasers or something, especially if they got some old Air Force or Navy stuff working again!"

"All the more reason to continue the recon," Blue One growled. "We gotta find out more about this Cyclops thing."

"But you saw how hard we had to work to get the woman to tell us even what we learned! And we can't leave her here while we go deeper on recon! If we turned back we could put her on one of the boats and . . ."

"*Off* the damned woman! We finish with her tonight. The boy, too. You been in the mountains too long, Blue Four. These valleys are *crawling* with broads. We can't risk this one making noise, and we sure can't take her along on a recon!"

The argument didn't surprise Gordon. All over the country these postwar crazies had taken to raiding for women, as well as food. After the first few years of slaughter, the survivalist enclaves had found themselves with incredibly high male-female ratios. Now, women were valuable chattel in the loose, macho, survivalist societies.

No wonder some of the raiders below wanted to carry this one back. Gordon could tell that she would be quite pretty if she healed up, and if the pall of terror ever left her eyes.

The boy in her arms watched the men with fierce anger.

Gordon surmised that the Rogue River gangs must have become organized at last, perhaps under a charismatic leader. Apparently they were planning to invade by sea, skirting the Roseville defenses altogether. It was a bold plan, and it could very well mean the end of whatever flickering civilization remained in the Willamette Valley.

Until now, Gordon had been telling himself he would somehow stay out of this trouble. But the last seventeen years had long ago made almost everybody alive take sides in this particular struggle. Rival villages with bitter feuds would drop their quarrels to join and wipe out bands like these. The very sight of army surplus camouflage elicited a loathing response that was almost the same everywhere. Gordon could not leave this place without at least trying to think of a way to do harm to the men below.

The raiders moved to the wagons and began rummaging through them for anything valuable. From their curses it seemed the search was futile. Gordon heard the smashing of delicate and totally unreplacable electronics parts under their boots.

Only the guard with the captives was still in view, his back turned to both Gordon and the mirrors. He was cleaning his weapon, not paying particular attention.

Wishing he were less a fool, Gordon felt compelled to take a chance. He lifted his head above the level of the floor and raised his hand.

The motion made the woman look up. Her eyes widened in surprise.

Gordon put a finger to his lips. He hoped she would understand that these men were his enemies, too.

The woman blinked, and Gordon feared for a moment she was about to speak. She looked quickly at her guard, who remained absorbed in his weapon and did not look up.

When she glanced back at Gordon and nodded slightly, Gordon

gave her a thumbs-up sign. Then he backed away from the balcony.

He found an office in which the dust wasn't too thick—he couldn't afford to sneeze—and chewed on a strip of Cresswell beef jerky while he settled down to wait.

His chance came before dusk. Three of the raiders left on a patrol. The one called "Little Jim" stayed to cook a raggedly butchered haunch of deer in the fireplace. Another man guarded the prisoners, staring at the young woman while whittling slowly on a piece of wood.

Gordon wondered how long it would take for the guard's lust to overcome his fear of the leader's wrath. He was obviously trying to work up his nerve.

Gordon had his bow ready. An arrow was nocked and two more lay on the carpet before him. His holster flap was free and the pistol's hammer rested on a sixth round.

The guard put down his whittling and stood up. The girl held the boy close and looked away as he walked over to her.

"Blue One ain't gonna like it." The bandit by the fire warned lowly.

The guard stood over the woman. She tried not to flinch, but shivered anyway when he touched her hair. The boy's eyes shone with anger.

"Blue One already said we're gonna waste her later, after takin' turns. Don't see why my turn shouldn't come first. Maybe I can even get her to talk about that 'Cyclops' thing.

"How 'bout it babe?" He leered down on her. "If a beatin' won't make you loosen your mouf, I know what'll tame you down."

"What about the kid?" Little Jim asked.

The guard shrugged casually. "What about him?" Suddenly a hunting knife was in his right hand. With his left he siezed the boy's hair and yanked him out of the woman's grasp. She screamed.

In that telescoped instant, Gordon acted completely on reflex. There was no time to think. Even so, he did not do the obvious, but what was necessary.

Instead of shooting at the man with the hunting knife, he swung his bow up, and put an arrow into *Little Jim's* chest.

The small survivalist hopped back and stared in blank surprise down at the shaft. With a faint gurgle he slumped to the ground.

Gordon quickly nocked another arrow and turned in time to see the other survivalist yank his knife out of the girl's shoulder. She

must have hurled herself in between him and the child, blocking the blow with her body. The boy lay stunned in the corner.

Gravely wounded, she still tore at her enemy with her nails, incidentally blocking Gordon from a clear shot. The surprised bandit fumbled at first, trying to catch hold of her wrists, but finally he managed to hurl her to the ground.

Angered by the painful scratches—and apparently unaware of his partner's demise—the survivalist grinned and hefted his knife to finish the woman off. He took a step toward her.

At that point Gordon's arrow tore through the fabric of his camouflage suit, slicing a shallow bloody gash along the raider's back. The shaft struck the couch and quivered.

For all their loathsome attributes, survivalists were probably the best fighters in all the world. In a blur, before Gordon could snatch up his last arrow, the man had leapt to one side and rolled up with his assault rifle in his hands. Gordon threw himself back as a rapid, accurate burst of individual shots tore into the balustrade, ricocheting from the ironmongery where he had just been.

The rifle was equipped with a silencer, forcing the survivalist to fire on semi-automatic; but the zinging bullets clanged all about Gordon as he rolled over and pulled out his own revolver. He scurried over to another part of the balcony.

The fellow down below had good ears. Another burst sent slivers flying inches from Gordon's face as he ducked aside again, barely in time.

Silence fell, except that Gordon's pulse rushing in his ears sounded like thunder.

Now what? he wondered.

Suddenly there was a loud scream. Gordon raised his head and caught a blurry motion reflected in the mirror . . . the small woman below was charging her foe with a large chair raised over her head!

The survivalist whirled and fired. Bright red blotches bloomed across the young gleaner's chest and she tumbled to the ground; the chair rolled to a halt at the survivalist's feet.

Gordon might have heard the click as the rifle's magazine emptied. Or perhaps it was only a wild guess. But without thinking he leapt up, arms extended, and squeezed the trigger of his .38 over and over again—pumping until the hammer struck five times on empty, smoking chambers.

The survivalist remained standing, a fresh clip already in his left hand, ready to be slammed into place.

But dark stains had begun to spread across the camouflage suit. Looking somewhat surprised, his gaze met Gordon's over the barrel of the pistol.

The assault rifle fell clattering from limp fingers. Then the survivalist crumpled to the floor as well.

Gordon ran downstairs and vaulted the rail at the bottom. First he stopped at both men and made sure they were dead. Then he hurried over to the fatally wounded young woman.

Her mouth made a round inquiry as he lifted her head. "Who. . . ?" Eyes took in his face, his uniform—the embroidered RESTORED US MAIL SERVICE patch over his breast pocket. They widened briefly in question.

Let her believe, Gordon told himself. *She's dying. Let her believe it's true.*

But he couldn't make himself say the words—the lies that he had told so often, that had taken him so far for so many months. Not this time.

"I'm just a traveler, miss," he shook his head. "I'm . . . I'm just a fellow citizen trying to help."

She nodded, only slightly disappointed it seemed.

"North . . ." she gasped. "Take boy . . . warn . . . warn *Cyclops*. . . ."

In that last word, even as her dying breath sighed away, Gordon heard reverence, loyalty, and a confident faith in ultimate redemption . . . all in the spoken name of a machine.

Cyclops, he thought numbly, as he laid her body down. Yes, he would do as she asked. Now he had still another reason to follow the legend to its source.

There was no time to spare for a burial. The bandit's rifle had been muffled, but Gordon's .38 had echoed like thunder. The other raiders would certainly have heard. He only had moments to collect the child and clear out of this place.

But ten feet away there were horses to steal. And up north was something a brave young woman had thought worth dying for.

If only it's true, Gordon thought as he gathered up his enemy's rifle and ammunition.

He would drop his postal play-act in a minute if he found that someone, somewhere, were taking responsibility—actually trying to do something about the Dark Age. He would offer his allegiance, his help, however meager it might be.

Even to a giant computer.

There were distant shouts . . . sounds of running feet coming closer rapidly.

Gordon turned to the boy, who was looking up at him, wide eyed, from the corner of the room.

"Come on, then," he said to the child, holding out his hand. "We'd better be on our way."

PART II

In those blurry moments, as he and the boy made their getaway, Gordon realized that the survivalists must have found his horse and cache.

Holding the boy on the saddle in front of him, Gordon rode away from the grisly scene in the wrecked student center as fast as his stolen mount would go. Behind them there were angry shouts. A glance showed figures in faded camouflage fatigues charging down Sixth Avenue. One raider knelt to take careful aim with his assault rifle.

Gordon bent forward as he sawed on the reins and kicked. His mount snorted and wheeled around a looted Rexall store, just as high-velocity bullets tore apart the granite facing behind them. Stone chips flew across the street.

But in that last instant, looking back, he had seen one more raider gallop up, riding Gordon's own pony!

For a moment he felt an unreasoning fear. If they had his horse they might also have taken or harmed the *mailbags!*

Gordon shook away the irrelevant thought as he sent the horse dashing down a side-street. To hell with the letters! They were only props, anyway. What mattered was that only one of the survivalists could pursue at the moment. That made the odds even, almost.

He snapped the reins and dug in his heels, sending his mount galloping hard down one of downtown Eugene's silent, empty streets. He heard the clatter of other hooves, too close! Not bothering to look back, he swerved into an alley. The horse pranced past a fall of shattered glass, then sped across the next street, through a serviceway and down another alley. Gordon turned the animal toward a flash of greenery, cantering quickly across an open plaza, and pulled up behind an overgrown stand of blackberry in a small park.

There was a roar in the air. After a moment Gordon realized that it was his own pulse, pounding in his ears.

"Are . . . are you all right?" he panted softly, looking down at the boy.

The nine-year-old swallowed and nodded, not wasting breath on words. The boy had witnessed savage things today, but he had the sense to keep quiet, his brown eyes intense on Gordon.

Gordon stood in the saddle and peered through the seventeen-year growth of urban shrubbery, listening. For the moment at least, they seemed to have lost their pursuer.

Of course the fellow might be less than fifty meters away, quietly listening himself.

Gordon's fingers were shaking from reaction, but he managed to draw his empty .38 from its holster and reloaded while he tried to think.

If all there was was the single rider, they might do better to just stay quiet and wait it out. Let the bandit search, and inevitably drift farther away.

Unfortunately, the other survivalists would collect their scattered mounts soon. It would probably be better to risk a little noise now than let those master trackers and hunters from the Rogue River country collect themselves and organize a real search of the local area.

He stroked the horse's neck, letting the animal catch its breath for a moment longer. "What's your name?" He asked the boy.

"M-Mark," he blinked.

"My name's Gordon. Was that your sister, who saved our lives back there at the fireplace?"

Mark shook his head. A child of the dark age, he would keep his tears for later. "No . . . it was my mom."

Gordon grunted, surprised. These days it was uncommon for women to look so young after having children. Mark's mother must have lived under unusual conditions—one more clue pointing to mysterious happenings in northern Oregon.

In any event, the lady had sacrificed herself bravely back at the Student Center campsite—partly for her son, obviously, but also for something else—something called *Cyclops*.

Gordon listened again, and still heard nothing. With his knees he nudged the horse into motion once more, letting it choose soft ground where it could. He kept a sharp lookout, and stopped often to listen.

Some minutes later they heard a shout. The boy tensed.

But the source was blocks away. Gordon headed in the other direction, thinking of the Willamette River bridges at the northern end of town.

The long twilight was over before Gordon rode up to the Route 105 bridge. The clouds had stopped dripping, but they still cast

a dark gloom over the ruins on all sides, denying even the starlight.

Gordon stared, trying to penetrate the gloom. Rumor to the south had it the bridge was still up, and there were no obvious signs of an ambush.

But anything could hide in that mass of dark girders, including an experienced bushwhacker with an assault rifle.

Gordon shook his head. He hadn't lived this long by taking foolish chances. He had wanted to take the old interstate, the direct route to Corvallis and the mysterious domain of Cyclops, but there were other ways. He swung the horse about and headed west, away from the dark, glowering towers.

The clouds parted just enough to let him find old highway 99, after a hurried, twisting ride down side streets. The 99 bridge was open and apparently clear. Bent low over the boy, he took it at a gallop.

Gordon continued to ride hard until he was certain all pursuit had been left behind. Then he dismounted and led the horse, letting the animal catch its breath. When he finally climbed back into the saddle he found that the boy had fallen asleep.

About an hour before dawn, they arrived at the walled village of Harrisburg.

The stories Gordon had heard about prosperous northern Oregon must have been understated. The town had apparently been at peace much, much too long. Thick undergrowth covered the freefire zone all the way to the town wall. And there were no guards on the watchtowers! Gordon had to shout for five minutes before anyone arrived to swing back the village gate.

The sleepy-eyed townsmen were slow to believe his story, and even more reluctant to sally forth in the wet weather. They stared at Gordon suspiciously, and shook their heads sullenly when he insisted they call up a posse.

Young Mark had collapsed in exhaustion and wasn't much of a witness to corroborate his story. The locals obviously preferred to believe he was exaggerating. Several men stated baldly that he must have run into a few local bandits from south of Eugene, where *Cyclops* still had little influence. After all, nobody had seen any survivalists around these parts in many years. They were supposed to have killed each other off long ago.

Folk started drifting away to their homes.

Gordon couldn't believe this was happening. Didn't these idiots

realize their very lives were at stake? If the scouting party got away, the barbarians would be back in force!

Their sullen, rural obstinacy was impervious to logic. They refused to listen.

Finally, in desperation, Gordon flung back his poncho revealing the postal inspector's uniform beneath. In a fury he *commanded,* in the name of the *Restored United States,* that an armed party be gathered at once!

Gordon had had a lot of practice with the role in recent months, but never had he dared such an arrogant pose. It completely carried him away. His voice shook with outrage as he told the villagers the wrath that would fall on them when the restored nation learned of this shame—how a silly little hamlet had cowered behind its walls and so let their country's sworn enemies escape!

The townsfolk blinked in astonishment. The true danger that faced them they could try to ignore, but this fantastic story had to be swallowed whole or not at all.

For a long moment the tableau held—and Gordon stared them down.

All at once the tension snapped. Men shouted at one another, and began running about to gather horses and weapons. Gordon was left standing there—his poncho like a cape whipping behind him in the blustery wind—cursing silently while the Harrisburg militia turned out around him.

Maybe his role was starting to get to him, he pondered. For during those tense moments, as he had faced down an entire town, he had truly *believed!* He had felt the power of his role—the potent anger of a servant of the People, thwarted in his high task by little men. . . .

The episode left him shaken, and a little uncertain of his own mental equilibrium.

One thing was clear, now. He had hoped to give up the postman scam on reaching northern Oregon; but that was no longer possible. He was stuck with it, for better or for worse.

All was ready in an hour. He left the boy in the hands of a local family, and departed with the posse in the drizzling rain.

The ride was quicker this time, in daylight and with remounts. Gordon made sure they sent out scouts and flankers to guard against ambush, and kept the expedition in separated squads. When they finally arrived at the UO campus the militia dismounted to converge on the Student Center.

Although the locals outnumbered the survivalist band by at

least six to one, Gordon figured the odds were about even. Wincing at every sound as the clumsy farmers approached the scene of the massacre, he nervously scanned the rooftops and windows.

But when they finally burst into the Student Center, the raiders, horses, and wagons were all gone. The fireplace was cold. Tracks in the muddy street led westward, toward the coastal passes and the sea.

The victims of the massacre were found laid out in the old cafeteria, all of their ears missing—trophies apparently. The villagers stared at the havoc the automatic rifles had wrought, rediscovering uncomfortable memories of the early days.

Gordon had to remind them to get a burial detail together.

It was frustrating. There was no way to prove who the bandits had been without following them, but Gordon wasn't about to try with this reluctant band of farmers. They already wanted to go home. Sighing, Gordon insisted that they make one more stop.

In the dank, ruined university gymnasium he found his mail sacks—one untouched where he had hidden it, the other torn open, letters scattered and trodden on the floor.

Gordon put on an irate fury for the benefit of the locals, who hurried obsequiously to help him collect and bag the remains. He played the role of the outraged Postal Inspector to the hilt, calling down vengeance on those who dared interfere with the mail. But this time it really was an act. Inside, all Gordon could think of was how hungry and tired of it all he was.

The slow, plodding ride back in the fog was sheer hell. But the ordeal went on at Harrisburg. There Gordon had to go through all the motions, passing out a few letters he had collected in the towns south of Eugene, appointing a local postmaster, enduring another silly, hope-drunk celebration. The next day he awoke stiff and sore. Still, nothing the villagers could say would make him remain another hour. He saddled a fresh horse, secured the mailbags, and headed north immediately after breakfast.

It was time, at last, to go and meet *Cyclops*.

4.
Corvallis

April 18, 2009

Transmittal via: Shedd, Harrisburg, Cresswell, Cottage Grove, Culp Creek, Oakridge, to Pine View

Dear Mrs. Thompson,

Your first three letters finally caught up with me in Shedd, just south of Corvallis. I can't tell you how glad I was to get them. And news from Amy and Michael too—I'm very happy for them both, and hope it will be a girl.

I note that you've expanded your local mail route to include Gilchrist, New Bend, and Redmond. Enclosed are temporary warrants for the postmasters you recommended.

It was quiet in the paneled guest room as the silver fountain pen scritch-scratched across the slightly yellowed paper. Through the open window, with a pale moon shining through the scattered nightclouds, Gordon could hear distant music and laughter from the hoedown he had left a little while ago, pleading fatigue.

By now Gordon was used to these exuberant first-day festivities, as locals pulled out the stops for the visiting government man. The only real difference here was that he had not seen so many people in one place since the food-center riots, long, long ago.

Gordon rolled the fountain pen and touched the letters he had received just yesterday from his friends in Pine View. They had been a real help in establishing his bona fides. The mail courier from the southern Willamette, whom Gordon himself had appointed only two weeks ago, had arrived on a steaming mount and refused even a glass of water until he reported to "the Inspector."

The earnest young man's behavior emphatically dissolved all remaining doubts the locals might have had.

Gordon picked up the pen again and wrote.

By now you'll have received my warning of a possible invasion by Rogue River survivalists. I know you'll take appropriate measures for the defense of Pine View.

Still, here in the strange domain of Cyclops *I find it hard to get anyone to take the threat seriously. By today's standards they have been at peace here a very long time. They treat me well, but people apparently think I am exaggerating the threat.*

Tomorrow, at last, I have my interview. Perhaps I can persuade Cyclops of the danger.

It would be sad if this strange little society led-by-machine fell to the barbarians. It is the the finest thing I have seen since leaving the civilized east.

* * *

Gordon amended the remark in his own mind. The lower Willamette was the most civilized area he had seen in fifteen years, *period.* It was a miracle of peace and prosperity, apparently entirely wrought by an intelligent computer and its dedicated human servants.

Gordon stopped writing and looked up as the lamp by his desk flickered. Under a chintz shade, the forty-watt incandescent bulb returned to a steady glow as the wind-generators two buildings away regained their stride. The light was soft, but Gordon found his eyes watering each time he looked at it for a little while.

He still had not gotten over it.

On arriving in Corvallis he had seen his first working electric light in over a decade. He had been forced to excuse himself even as local dignitaries gathered to welcome him, and took refuge in a washroom to regain his composure. It just wouldn't do for a supposed representative of the "government in Saint Paul City" to be seen weeping openly at the sight of a few flickering bulbs.

Corvallis and its environs are divided into independant boroughs, each supporting about three hundred people. All the land hereabouts is cultivated or ranched, using modern farming arts and hybrid seed the locals raise themselves.

Of course they're limited to horse-plows, but their smithies make implements from high-quality steel. They have even started producing hand-built water and wind-power turbines—designed by Cyclops, of course.

Local craftsmen have expressed an interest in trading with customers to the south and east. I'll enclose a list of items they're willing to barter for. Copy it and pass it along the line, will you?

Gordon had not seen so many happy, well-fed people since before the war, nor heard laughter so easy and often. There was a newspaper, a lending library, and every child in the valley got at least four years of schooling. Here, at last, was what he had been looking for since his militia unit broke up in confusion and despair, a decade and a half ago—a community of good people engaged in a vigorous effort to rebuild.

Gordon wished he could be a part of it, not a con-artist ripping them off for a few nights' meals and a free bed.

Ironically, these people would have accepted the old Gordon Kranz as a new citizen. But he was indelibly branded by the uniform he wore and by his actions back at Harrisburg. If he revealed the truth now they would never forgive or accept him.

He had to be a demigod in their eyes, or nothing at all. If ever a man was trapped in his own lie . . .

Gordon shook his head. He would have to take the hand he had been dealt. Perhaps these people really could use a mailman.

So far I have not been able to find out much about Cyclops itself. I've been told that the supercomputer does not govern directly, but insists that all the villages and towns it serves live together peaceably and democratically. In effect, it has become judge-arbiter for the entire lower Willamette.

The Council tells me Cyclops is very interested in seeing a formal mail-route created, and has offered every assistance. It seems anxious to cooperate with the Restored U.S.

Everyone here was glad to hear that they would soon be in contact with the rest of the country again. . . .

Gordon looked at the last line for a long moment, and found he couldn't go on with the lies tonight. It was no longer amusing, knowing Mrs. Thompson would read through them. It made him feel sad.

Just as well, he thought. It would be a busy day tomorrow. He covered the pen and got up to prepare for bed.

While he washed his face he thought about the *last* time he had met one of the legendary supercomputers. It had been only months before the war, when he was a teenaged junior in college. All the talk was about the new "intelligent" machines just being unveiled in a few locations.

It was a time of excitement. The media trumpeted the breakthrough as the end of humanity's long period of loneliness. Only instead of coming from outer space, the "other intelligences" with whom man would share his world would be his own creations.

At the University of Minnesota, Gordon had a brief encounter with one of the supercomps at a public demonstration.

They had sealed the helium-cooled cylinder inside a mammoth Faraday cage, suspended on a cushion of air. There was no way anyone from the outside could fake its responses. When Gordon's turn came to step forward and face the narrow camera lens, he brought out a list of test questions, riddles, and a complicated pun.

It was all so very long ago, yet Gordon remembered as if it was yesterday the low, mellifluous voice, the friendly, open laughter of the machine. On that day *Millichrome* met all his challenges, and responded with an intricate pun of its own. It also gently

chided him for not doing as well as expected in a recent history exam.

When it was over, Gordon had walked away feeling a great, heady joy that *his* species had created such a wonder.

The Doomwar came soon thereafter. For seventeen awful years he had simply assumed that all of the beautiful supercomps were dead, like the broken hopes of a nation and a world. But here, by some wonderful miracle, one still lived! Somehow, by pluck and ingenuity, the techs here at Oregon State had managed to keep the machine going through the bad years.

He couldn't help feeling unworthy and presumptuous to have come posing among such men and women.

Gordon reverently switched off the electric light and lay in bed, listening to the night.

In the distance, the music from the Corvallis hoedown finally ended with a whooping cheer. Then he could hear the crowd dispersing for home. Finally, the night quieted down. There was wind in the trees outside his window, and the faint whine of the nearby compressors that kept the delicate brain of Cyclops supercold.

And there was something else, as well. Through the night came a rich, soft, sweet sound that he could barely place, though it tugged at his memory.

After a while it came to him, at last. Somebody, probably one of the technicians, was playing classical music on a stereo.

A stereo . . . Gordon tasted the word. After fifteen years of listening to banjos and fiddles . . . to hear Beethoven once again . . .

Sleep came at last, and the symphony blended into his dreaming. It rose and fell, and finally melded with a gentle, melodious voice that spoke to him across the decades. An articulated metal hand extended past the fog of years and pointed straight at him.

"Liar!" the voice said softly, sadly. "You disappoint me so. Tell me. How can I help you, my makers, if you tell only lies?"

"This former factory is where we salvage equipment for the Millennium Project. You can see we've really hardly begun. We can't start building true robots, as Cyclops plans for later on, until we've recovered some industrial capability."

Peter Sage, a lanky blond man about Gordon's own age, must have been only a student at Corvallis State University when war broke out. He was the youngest to wear the black-trimmed white coat of a Servant of Cyclops.

He also was the uncle of the small boy Gordon had rescued in

the ruins of Eugene. He had volunteered to show Gordon around Cyclops's visionary "Millennium Project."

"Here we've begun repairing some small computers and other simple machines," he told Gordon. "The hardest part is replacing circuits burnt out in those first few instants of the war. It's painstaking work, but as soon as electricity can be provided on a wider scale we'll put these microcomputers back in the outlying villages, schools, and machine shops."

The large, open factory floor lay under a long bank of overhead skylights, so the fluorescents were used sparingly. Still, there was a faint hum of electricity all around. White-coated techs carted equipment to and from vast storage rooms where Gordon had seen the stacked tribute from the surrounding towns and hamlets —payment for the benign guidance of Cyclops. Machinery of all kinds, especially electronic, was piled on great shelves, and more came in every day.

That salvage—plus a small tithe of food and clothing for Cyclops's servants—was easily spared by the people of the valley. They had no use for the old machines anyway. No wonder there were no complaints of a "tyranny by machine." The supercomputer's price was easily met.

"Cyclops has planned out the transition well," Sage explained. "Besides a small assembly line for water and wind turbines, we've started a charging facility for Nicad batteries. By distributing old hand video games to children in the valley, we hope to make them receptive for better things, such as computers, when the time comes."

Gordon passed a bench where gray-haired workers bent over flashing lights and screens bright with computer code. He felt as if he had stepped into a wondrous workshop where shattered dreams were being put back together by earnest, friendly gnomes.

Most of the technicians were now well into or past middle age. To Gordon it seemed they were in a hurry to accomplish as much as possible before the educated generation passed away forever.

"Of course now that contact has been re-established with the Restored U.S.," Peter Sage continued, "we can hope to make faster progress. For instance, we could give you a long list of chips we haven't the capability to manufacture. They would make a world of difference. Only eight ounces worth could push Cyclops's program ahead by four years, if Saint Paul City can provide what we need."

Gordon didn't want to meet the fellow's eyes. He bent to look over a disassembled computer.

"I know little about such matters," he said, swallowing. "Anyway, back East there have been other priorities than distributing video games."

He had said it that way in order not to lie any more than he had to. But the Servant of Cyclops paled as if he had been struck.

"Oh. I'm sorry, I forgot. Of course they've had to deal with terrible radiation and plagues and famine back East. I guess maybe we've been pretty lucky here in Oregon. We'll just have to manage on our own until the rest of the country can help out."

Gordon nodded. Both men were speaking literal truths, but only one knew how sadly true the words were.

He looked at his old-fashioned mechanical watch—one of the techs had adjusted it so that it no longer ran half a minute fast on the hour. "My interview is in ten minutes, Peter," he reminded his guide.

"Ah. Of course. We mustn't be late, or Cyclops will scold us!" He grinned, but Gordon got the feeling Sage was only partly jesting.

"I do hope your talk with Cyclops goes well, Gordon," his guide said as they exited the repair facility. "We're all excited to be in contact with the rest of the country again, of course. I'm sure Cyclops will want to cooperate in any way he can."

Gordon steeled himself to playing out the charade. "I hope so," he said.

But as he followed Peter Sage across the neatly mowed lawn toward the House of Cyclops, Gordon wondered. Had he imagined it, or had he seen, for just a moment, a strange expression in the tech's eyes—one of profound and sad *guilt*?

The foyer of the House of Cyclops—once the OSU Artificial Intelligence Laboratory—was a striking reminder of a more elegant era. The gold carpet was freshly vacuumed and only slightly faded. Bright fluorescents shone on fine furniture in the paneled waiting area, where peasants and officials from villages as far as forty miles away nervously twisted rolled-up petitions as they waited for their brief interviews with the great machine.

When the waiting townsmen and farmers saw Gordon enter all of them stood up. A few of the more daring approached, and earnestly shook his hand in calloused, work-roughened clasps. The hope and wonder was so intense in their eyes, it took a little while to disengage politely. Finally, the pretty receptionist at the end of the foyer smiled and motioned them through.

As Gordon and his guide passed down the long hallway to the

interview chamber, two men approached from the other end. One was a Servant of Cyclops, in the black-trimmed white coat. The other—a citizen dressed in a frayed but carefully tended prewar suit—frowned over a long sheet of computer printout.

"I'm *still* not sure I understand, Dr. Grober. Is Cyclops sayin' we dig the well near the north hollow or *not?* His answer isn't any too clear, if you ask me."

"Now, Herb, you tell your people it isn't Cyclops's job to figure everything. He can narrow down the choices, but he can't make the final decisions for you."

"Sure, everybody knows that. But why can't he be clearer this time?"

"Well, for one thing, it's been over twenty years since the geological maps in Cyclops's memory banks were updated. Then you're certainly aware that Cyclops was designed to talk to high-level experts, so of course a lot of his explanations will go over our heads . . . even the few of us scientists who survived."

"Yes, but . . ." At that moment the citizen glanced up and saw Gordon. He moved as if to remove the hat he was not wearing. Then he wiped his hand and nervously extended it.

"Herb Kalo of Sciotown, Mr. Inspector. This is indeed an honor, sir."

Gordon muttered pleasantries as he shook the man's hand.

"Yes sir, Mr. Inspector. An honor! I sure hope you're planning to come up our way and set up a post office for us. I can promise you a wingding like you've never . . ."

"Now, Herb, Mr. Kranz is here for a meeting with Cyclops," the older technician looked at his digital watch pointedly.

Kalo blushed and nodded. "Remember that invite, Mr. Kranz. We'll take good care of you . . ." He seemed almost to bow as he backed down the hall toward the foyer.

Gordon's cheeks felt as if they were on fire.

Gordon's life in the wilderness had made his ears more sensitive than these townsmen perhaps realized. So when he heard a mutter of argument ahead—as he and his guide approached the open door of the conference room—Gordon purposely slowed down to brush lint from his uniform.

". . . how do we even know those documents he showed us were real!" someone asked. "Sure they had seals all over them, but they *still* looked pretty crude. And that story about laser satellites is pretty damn pat, if you ask me."

"It also explains why we've heard nothing in fifteen years!"

another voice replied. "And if he were faking, how would you explain those letters that courier brought? Elias Murphy over in Albany heard from his long-lost sister. And George Seavers has left his farm in Greenbury to go see his wife in Curtin, after all these years thinking she was dead!"

"I don't see where it matters," a third voice said softly. "The people believe, and that's what counts. . . ."

Peter Sage hurried ahead and cleared his throat at the doorway. As Gordon followed, four white-coated men and two women rose from a polished oak table in the softly lit conference room. All except Peter had hair that had grayed over the years.

Gordon shook hands all around, but it was still a good thing he had met them all earlier; for it would have been impossible to remember introductions under these circumstances. He tried to be polite but his gaze kept drifting to the broad sheet of thick glass that split the meeting room in half.

The table suddenly ended at the glass. Although the conference room's lighting was low, the chamber beyond was even darker. A single spotlight shone on a shimmering, opalescent face—like a pearl, or a moon in the night.

Below the gleaming gray camera lens was a dark cylinder upon which were two banks of little flashing lights, rippling in a complex pattern that seemed to repeat over and over again.

Something in the pattern of lights touched Gordon inside . . . he couldn't pin down exactly how. It was hard to tear his gaze away.

The machine was swaddled in a soft cloud of thick vapor. And although the glass was thick, Gordon felt a faint but definite sense of *cold* coming from the far end of the room.

The First Servant, Dr. Edward Taigher, took Gordon by the arm and faced the glass eye.

"Cyclops," he said "I'd like you to meet Mr. Gordon Kranz. He has presented credentials showing him to be a United States Government postal inspector, and representative of the restored republic.

"Mr. Kranz, may I present *Cyclops*."

Gordon looked at the pearly lens—at the flashing lights and the drifting fog—and had to quash the feeling of being a small child who had seriously over-reached himself in his lies.

"It is very good to meet you, Gordon. Please, be seated."

The gentle voice had a perfect human timbre. It came from a speaker set on the end of the oak table. Gordon sat in a padded chair Peter Sage offered. There was a pause. Then Cyclops spoke again.

"The tidings you bring are joyous, Gordon. After all these years caring for the people of the lower Willamette, it seems almost too good to be true. It has been rewarding, working with my friends who insist on calling themselves my 'servants.' But it has also been lonely and hard, imagining the rest of the world in ruins.

"So please tell me, Gordon. Do any of my brothers still survive in the East?"

Finding his voice, Gordon shook his head.

"No, Cyclops. I'm sorry. None of the other great machines made it through the destruction. I'm afraid you are the very last of your species left alive."

Though he regretted having to give it the news, he hoped it was a good omen to be able to start out telling the truth.

Cyclops was silent for a long moment. Surely it was only his imagination when Gordon thought he heard a faint sigh, almost like a sob.

During the long pause the tiny parity lights below the camera lens went on flashing repetitiously, as if saying something to him over and over again in some secret, hidden language.

Gordon knew he had to keep talking, or be lost in that hypnotic pattern. "Uh, in fact, Cyclops, most of the big computers died in the first seconds of the war—you know, the electromagnetic pulses. I can't help being curious how you yourself survived it."

Like Gordon, the machine seemed to shake aside a sad contemplation in order to answer.

"That is a good question. It turns out that my survival was a fortunate accident of timing. You see the war broke out on Visitor's Day, here at OSU. When the pulses flew I happened to be in my Faraday Cage for a public demonstration. So you see . . ."

Interested as he was in Cyclops's story, Gordon felt a momentary sense of victory. He had taken the initiative in this interview, asking questions exactly as a "federal inspector" would. He glanced at the serious faces of the human Servants, and knew he had won a small victory. They were taking him very seriously.

Maybe this would work out, after all!

Still, he avoided looking at the rippling lights, and soon he felt himself begin to sweat even in the coolness near the superchilled pane of glass.

In four days the meetings and negotiations were over. Suddenly, before he had expected, it was time to leave again.

Peter Sage walked with him. "I'm sorry it took so long, Gordon. I know you've been anxious to get back to building your postal

network. Cyclops only wanted to fix up the right itinerary for you, so you can swing through north Oregon most efficiently."

"That's okay," Gordon sighed, pretending. "The delay wasn't too bad, and I appreciate the help."

If Peter only knew how much Gordon would have preferred to stay! He had grown to love the simple comfort of his room, the large and pleasant commissary meals, the impressive library of well-cared-for books.

Most of all he would miss the electric light by his bed.

Gordon had the distinct feeling that most of the Servants of Cyclops were happy to be rid of him. It was his role, of course. It made them nervous. Perhaps, deep inside, they sensed some falseness. He really couldn't blame them.

Even if the majority of the techs believed his story, they had little reason to love a representative of a remote "government" certain to meddle in what they had spent so long building. They *talked* about eagerness for contact with the outisde world. But Gordon sensed that many of them felt it would be an imposition, at best.

Not that they really had anything to fear, of course.

Gordon still wasn't sure about the attitude of Cyclops itself. The great machine who had taken responsibility for an entire valley had been rather tentative and distant during their interviews. There had been no jokes, or clever puns, only a smooth and involute seriousness. The coolness had been a bit disappointing after his memory of that long ago day in Minneapolis.

Of course his recollection of that other supercomputer long ago might have been colored by time. Cyclops and its servants had accomplished so much here. He was not one to judge.

All he was sure of was that he was determined to do what he could to help. He would go on with the postman charade in order to be useful in the only way he could. Perhaps when he returned, with a mail network in place, he could confide the truth to Cyclops.

Perhaps it would even forgive him.

A pair of tan-jacketed guards tipped their hats as Gordon and Sage turned the corner of the House of Cyclops on their way to the stables.

"It looks like there was a lot of fighting here once," Gordon commented.

Peter frowned at the memory. "We fought one of the AntiTech mobs right here by the old utility shed. You can see the melted transformers and the old emergency generator. We had to convert to wind and water power after they blew it up."

Blackened shards of power-converting machinery still lay in shrivelled heaps where the techs had fought desperately to save their lifework. It reminded Gordon of his other worry.

"I still think more ought to be done about the possibility of a survivalist invasion, Peter. It'll come soon, if I overheard those scouts right."

"But you admit you only heard scraps of conversation that could have been misinterpreted," Peter shrugged. "We'll beef up our patrols, of course, as soon as we can draw up plans and discuss the matter some more. But you must understand that Cyclops has his own credibility to consider. There hasn't been a general mobilization in ten years. If Cyclops made such a call, and it turned out to be a false alarm . . ."

He let the implication hang.

Gordon knew that local village leaders had misgivings over his story. They didn't want to draw many men from the spring planting. And Cyclops had expressed doubts that the bandit gangs really could organize for a truly major strike several hundred miles upcoast. It just wasn't in the survivalist mentality, Cyclops explained.

Gordon finally had to take the great machine's word for it. After all, in its superconducting memory banks it had access to nearly every psychology text ever written.

Perhaps, he told himself, the Rogue River scouts were merely on a smalltime raid, and had talked big to impress themselves.

The stable hands saddled his new mount, a fine, strong gelding. A large, placid mare carried supplies and two bulging sacks of hope-filled mail. If one in twenty of the intended recipients still lived, it would be a miracle. But for those few a single letter might mean a lot.

Perhaps enough to counterbalance a great lie . . .

Gordon swung up onto the gelding. He patted and spoke to the spirited animal until it was calm.

"We'll see you again in three months, when you swing by on your way back east again." Peter Sage offered his hand. "By then Cyclops promises to have a proper report on conditions here in north Oregon worked up for your superiors."

Sage gripped Gordon's hand for another moment. Once again Gordon was puzzled. The fellow looked as if, somehow, he were unhappy about something he could not say.

"Godspeed in your valuable work, Gordon," he said earnestly. "If there's ever anything I can do to help, anything at all, be sure to let me know."

Gordon nodded. No more words were needed, thank heaven. He nudged the gelding, and swung about onto the road north. The pack horse followed close behind.

5.
Sciotown

The Servants of Cyclops had told him the Interstate was broken up and unsafe north of Corvallis, so Gordon used a county road that paralleled not far to the west. Debris and potholes made for slow going, and he was forced to take his lunch in the ruins of the town of Buena Vista.

It was still fairly early in the afternoon, but clouds were gathering, and tattered shreds of fog blew down the rubble-strewn streets.

By coincidence, it was the day when area farmers gathered in a park in the center of the unpopulated town for a country market. Gordon chatted with them as he munched on cheese and bread from his saddlebags.

"Ain't nothin' wrong with the Interstate up here," one of the farmers told him, shaking his head in puzzlement. "Them perfessers must not get out this way much. They aren't lean travelin' men such as yourself, Mr. Kranz. Must've got their wires crossed, for all their buzzin' brains." The farmer chuckled at his own weak pun.

Gordon didn't mention that his itinerary had been planned by Cyclops itself. He thanked the fellow and went back to his saddlebags to pull out the topographic map he had been given.

It was covered with an impressive array of computer-graphics, charting out in fine symbols the path he was should take in establishing a postal network in northern Oregon. The itinerary was supposed to be designed to take him most efficiently through north Oregon, avoiding hazards such as known lawless areas and the belt of radioactivity near Portland.

Gordon stroked his beard, puzzled. Cyclops *had* to know what it was doing. Yet the winding path looked anything but efficient to him.

Against his will he began to suspect it was designed instead to take him far out of his way.

But why would Cyclops want to do such a thing?

It couldn't be that the super machine feared his interference. By now Gordon knew just the right pitch to ease such anxiety

. . . emphasizing that the "Restored U.S" had no intention to meddle in local matters. Cyclops had appeared to believe him.

Gordon lowered the map. Drifts of fog flowed along the dusty street. A fluff swirled between him and his reflection in a surviving storefront windowpane.

The foggy wisps reminded him of superchilled vapor—his reflection in the cool glass wall as he met with Cyclops back in Corvallis—and the strangeness he had felt from watching the rows of little flashing lights, repeating the same rippling pattern over and over. . . .

Repeating . . .

Suddenly Gordon's spine felt very cold.

"No," he whispered. "Please, God." He closed his eyes.

He felt an almost overwhelming need to change his thoughts onto another track, to think about the weather, about pretty little Abby back in Pine View, about anything but . . .

"But who would *do* such a thing?" he protested aloud. "*Why* would they do it?"

Reluctantly, he realized he knew why. He was an expert on the strongest reason why people told lies.

Recalling the blackened wreckage behind the House of Cyclops, he found himself all at once wondering how the techs could possibly have accomplished what they claimed to have done.

It had been almost two decades since Gordon had thought about physics, and what could or could not be done with technology. The intervening years had been filled with the struggle to survive—and his persistent dreams of a golden place of renewal. He was in no position to say what was or was not possible.

But he had to find out if his wild suspicion was true! He could not sleep until he knew for sure.

"Excuse me!" he called to one of the farmers. The fellow gave Gordon a gap-toothed grin and sauntered over, doffing his hat. "What can I do for you, Mr. Inspector?"

Gordon pointed out a spot on the map, no more than ten miles from Buena Vista as the crow flew. "This place, Sciotown, do you know how to get there?"

"Sure do, boss. If you hurry, you can get there tonight."

"I'll hurry," Gordon assured the man. "You can bet your ass I'll hurry."

"Just a darn minute! I'm coming!" the mayor of Sciotown hollered. But the knock on his door went on insistently.

Herb Kalo carefully lit his new oil lantern—made by a craft

commune five miles west of Corvallis. He recently had traded two hundred pounds of Sciotown's best potterywork for twenty of the fine lamps and three thousand matches from Albany, a deal sure to mean his re-election this fall.

The knocking grew louder. "All right! This had better be important!" He threw the bolt and opened the door.

It was Douglas Kee, the man on gate duty. Kalo blinked. "Is there a problem, Doug? What's the . . ."

"Man here to see you, Herb," the gateman interrupted. "I wouldn't of let him in after curfew, but you told us about him when you got back from Corvallis—and I didn't want to keep him standin' out in the rain."

Out of the dripping gloom stepped a tall man in a slick poncho. A shiny badge on his cap glittered in the lamplight. He held out his hand.

"Mr. Mayor, it's good to see you again. I wonder if we could talk."

6.
Corvallis

Gordon had never expected to forsake an offer of a bed and a hot meal to go galloping off into a rainy night, but this time he had no choice. He had commandeered the best horse in the Sciotown stables, but if he had had to, he would have run all the way.

The filly moved surefootedly down the old county road toward Corvallis. She was brave, and trotted as fast as Gordon considered marginally safe in the dark. Fortunately, a nearly full moon lit the ragged, leaky clouds from above.

Gordon feared he had left the mayor of Sciotown in a state of utter confusion. Sparing no time for pleasantries, he had come straight to the point, sending Herb Kalo hurrying back to his office to retrieve a neatly folded fan of paper.

Gordon had taken the printout over to the lamp, and carefully pored over the lines of text.

"How much did this advice cost you, Mr. Mayor?" he asked without looking up.

"Only a little, Inspector," Kalo answered nervously. "Cyclops's prices have been dropping as more villages have joined the trade pact. And there was a discount because the advice was kinda vague."

"How *much?*" Gordon insisted.

"Uh, well. We found about ten of those old handheld vid-games, plus about fifty rechargable batteries. Oh yes, and an old home computer that wasn't too badly corroded."

Gordon suspected that Sciotown actually had much more salvage than that, and was hoarding it for future transactions. It was what he would have done.

"What else?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"What *else* did you pay?" he asked severely.

"Why nothin' else," Kalo looked confused. "Unless, of course, you include the food and cloth for the Servants. But that's got hardly any value compared to th' other stuff. It's just added on so's the scientists will have something to live off while they help Cyclops."

Gordon breathed heavily. His heart didn't seem to want to slow down. It all fit, heartbreakingly.

He laboriously read the printout.

". . . incipient seepage from plate tectonic boundaries . . ." Words he had not seen or thought of in seventeen years rolled off his tongue, tasting like old delicacies, lovingly remembered.

". . . variation in aquifer sustenance ratios . . . tentative analysis only, due to teleological hesitancy . . ."

"We think we've got a line on what Cyclops meant," Kalo offered. "We'll start digging at the two best sites come dry season. Of course if we didn't interpret his advice right, it'll be our fault. We'll try agin' in some other spots he hinted at. . . ."

The mayor's voice had trailed off, for Gordon was standing very still, staring at empty space.

"Delphi," Gordon had breathed, hardly above a whisper.

Then the hasty ride through the night had begun.

Years in the wilds had made Gordon hard; all the while the men of Corvallis had suffered prosperity. It was almost ludicrously easy to slip by the guardposts at the city's edge. He made his way down long empty side streets to the OSU campus, and thence to long-abandoned Moreland Hall. Gordon spared ten minutes to rub down his damp mount and fill a feedbag. He wanted the animal to be in shape in case he needed her quickly.

It was only a short run through the drizzle to the House of Cyclops. When he got near he forced himself to slow down, though he wanted desperately to get this over with.

He ducked out of sight behind the ruins of the old generator

building as a pair of guards walked past, shoulders hunched, their rifles covered against the dank.

As he crouched behind the burnt-out shell, the wetness brought to Gordon's nose—even after all these years—the scent of burning from the blackened timbers and melted wiring. What was it Peter Sage had said about those frantic early days, when authority was falling apart, and the riots raged?

He'd said that they had converted to wind and water power, after the generator house was torched.

Gordon didn't doubt it would have worked, too, if it were done in time. But *could* it have been?

When the guards had moved off, Gordon hurried to the side entrance of the House of Cyclops. With a prybar he had brought for the purpose, he broke the padlock in one sharp snap. He listened for a long moment, and when nobody appeared to be coming, he slipped inside.

The back halls of the OSU Artificial Intelligence Lab were dustier than those the public got to see. Racks of forgotten computer tapes, books, papers, all lay under thick layers of dust. Gordon made his way to the central service corridor, almost stumbling twice over debris in the darkness.

He hid behind a pair of double doors as someone passed by, whistling. Then he rose and took a look through the crack.

A man wearing thick gloves and the black and white robe of a Servant put down a thick styrofoam picnic chest by a door down the hall.

"Hey, Elmer!" The man knocked. "I've got another load of dry-ice for our lord 'n master. Come on, hurry it up! Cyclops gotta eat!"

Dry ice, Gordon noted.

Another voice was muffled by the door. "Hold your horses. It won't hurt Cyclops any to wait."

At last the door opened and light streamed into the hall, along with the heavy beat of an old rock and roll recording.

"What kept you?"

"I had a run going! I was up to a hundred thousand in Missile Command, and didn't want to interrupt . . ." The closing door cut off the rest. Gordon pushed through and hurried down the hallway.

A little further, he reached another door that was slightly ajar. From within came a narrow line of light, and the sounds of a late-

night argument. Gordon paused as he recognized some of the voices.

"I still think we ought to track him down and kill him," said one. "That fellow could wreck everything we've set up here."

"Oh, I don't really think he's much of a threat." It was the older woman Servant's voice. "The fellow really seemed rather earnest and harmless."

"Yeah? Well did you hear those questions he was asking Cyclops? He's not one of these rubes our average citizen has become after all this time. The man is *sharp!* And he remembers an awful lot from the old days!"

"So? Maybe we should try to recruit him."

"No way! The fellow's an idealist. He'd never do it. I can tell. Our only option is to kill him! Now! And hope it's years before they send someone else in his place."

"And I still think you're crazy," the woman said. "If the act were ever traced to us, the consequences would be disastrous!"

"I agree with Marjorie." It was the voice of Dr. Teigher himself. "Not only would the people—our people of Oregon—turn on us, but we'd face the retribution of the rest of the country, if it were found out!"

There was a long pause. Then, the next voice to speak was that of young Peter Sage.

"Haven't you all forgotten the biggest reason why nobody should touch him, or interfere with him in any way?"

"What's that?"

"Good lord, hasn't it occurred to you who this fellow is, and what he represents? How low have we sunk, to even consider doing him harm, when we really owe him our loyalty and any help we can give him!"

The first voice spoke again, without conviction. "You're just biased because he rescued your nephew, Peter."

"Perhaps. Or maybe it's because of the flags."

"Flags? What flags?"

"Peter is referring to the flags the townsmen have been putting up in all the boroughs in the area. You know, Old Glory? The Stars and Stripes? You should get out more, Ed. Get a feel for what the people are thinking.

"I've never seen anything stir the villagers up like it, even before the war."

There was another long silence before anyone spoke again. Then the woman said, softly, "I wonder what Joseph thinks."

Gordon frowned. He recognized all the voices inside as senior

Servants of Cyclops whom he had met. But he didn't remember being introduced to anyone named Joseph.

"Joseph went to bed early, I think," Teigher said. "And that's where I'm headed now."

Gordon hurried down the hall as footsteps approached the door. He didn't much mind being forced to leave his eavesdropping spot. The opinions of the people in the room were of no importance. There was only one voice he wanted to hear right now, and he headed straight to where it could be found.

He ducked around a corner and found himself in the elegant hallway where he had first met Herb Kalo. The light was dim now, but he was able to pick the conference-room lock with pathetic ease.

Gordon's mouth was dry as he slipped into the chamber. He stepped forward, fighting the urge to walk on tiptoes.

As the door sighed closed behind him, soft light shone on the gray cylinder beyond the glass wall.

"Please," he wished, "let me be wrong."

If he was, then surely Cyclops itself would be amused by his chain of faulty deduction. How he longed to share a laugh over his foolish paranoia!

He approached the great glass barrier dividing the room, and the speaker at the end of the table. "Cyclops?" he whispered. He stepped closer, clearing his throat. "Cyclops, it's me, Gordon."

The glow on the pearly lens was subdued. But the row of little lights still flashed—a complex pattern that repeated over and over like an urgent message in some lost code—ever, hypnotically the same.

Gordon felt a frantic dread rise within him, like when, as a boy, he had encountered his grandfather lying perfectly still on the porch swing, and feared to find that the beloved old man had died.

The pattern of lights repeated over and over.

Gordon wondered. How many people would recall, after the hell of the last seventeen years, that the parity displays of a great computer never repeated themselves? Gordon remembered a cyberneticist friend telling him that the patterns of lights were like snowflakes, none ever the same as any other.

"Cyclops," he said evenly. "*Answer me!* I *demand* you answer—in the name of decency! In the name of the United St . . ."

He stopped. He couldn't bring himself to meet this lie with another. Here the only living mind he would fool would be himself.

The room was warmer than it had seemed during his interview.

He looked for, and found, the little vents through which cool air could be directed at a visitor seated in the guest chair, giving the impression of great cold just beyond the glass wall.

"Dry-ice," he muttered. "To fool the citizens of Oz."

Dorothy herself could not have felt more betrayed. Gordon had been willing to lay down his life for what had seemed to exist here. And now he knew it was nothing but a cheat. A way for a bunch of surviving sophisticates to fleece their neighbors of food and clothing, and have them grateful for the privilege.

By creating the myth of the "Millennium Project," and a market for salvaged electronics, they had managed to convince the locals that the old electronic machines were of great value. All through the lower Willamette Valley, people now hoarded home-comps and toys—because *Cyclops* would accept them in trade for its advice.

The "Servants of Cyclops" had made it so that people like Herb Kalo hardly even counted the tithe of food and cloth that was added *for the servants themselves.*

The scientists ate well, Gordon remembered. And none of the farmers ever complained.

"It's not your fault," he told the silent machine, softly. "You really *would* have designed the tools, made up for all the lost expertise—shown us the road back. You and your kind were the greatest thing we had ever done. . . ."

He choked, remembering the warm, wise, *human* voice in Minneapolis, so long ago.

"You are right Gordon. It is nobody's fault."

Gordon gasped. In a flash, hope burned that he had been mistaken! It was the voice of Cyclops!

But it had not come from the speaker grille!

He turned quickly, and saw that a thin old man sat in the shadowed back corner of the room, watching him.

"I often come here, you know," the old man spoke with the voice of Cyclops—a sad voice, filled with regret. "I come to sit with the ghost of my friend, who died so long ago right here in this room."

He leaned forward a little. The pearly light shone on his face. "My name is Joseph Lazarensky, Gordon. I built Cyclops, so many years ago." He looked down at his hands. "I oversaw his programming and education. I loved him as I would my own son.

"And like any good father, I was proud to know that he would be a better, kinder, more human being than I had been."

Lazarensky sighed. "He really did survive the onset of the war, you know. That part of the story is true. Cyclops *was* in his Far-

aday Cage, safe from the battle-pulses. And he remained there while we fought to keep him alive.

"The first and only time I ever killed a man was on the night of the AntiTech riots. I helped defend the power house, shooting like somebody crazed.

"But it was no use. The generators were destroyed, even as the militia arrived to drive the mad crowds back."

The old man spread his hands.

"As you seem to have figured out, Gordon, there was no time to do anything but sit with Cyclops, then, and watch him die."

Gordon remained very still, standing in the ghostly ashlight. Lazarensky went on.

"We had built up great hopes, you know. Before the riots we had already conceived of the Millennium Plan. Or I should say *Cyclops* conceived of it. He already had the outlines of a program for rebuilding the world. He needed a couple of months, he said, to work out the details."

Gordon felt as if his face were made of stone. He waited silently.

"Do you know anything about quantum-memory bubbles, Gordon? Compared to them, Josephson junctions are made of sticks and mud. The bubbles are as light and fragile as thought. They allow mentation a million times faster then neurons. But they must be kept super-cold to exist at all. And once destroyed, they cannot be remade.

"We tried to save him, but we could not." The old man looked down again. "I would rather have died myself, that night."

"So you decided to carry out the plan on your own," Gordon suggested dryly.

Lazarensky shook his head. "You know better. Without Cyclops the task was impossible. All we could do was present a shell. An illusion.

"It offered a way to survive in the coming Dark Age. All around us was chaos and suspicion. The only leverage we poor intellectuals had was a weak, flickering thing called Hope."

"Hope!" Gordon spat. Lazarensky shrugged.

"Petitioners come to speak with Cyclops, and they speak with me. It isn't hard, usually, to give good advice, or to mediate disputes with common sense. They believe in the impartiality of the computer where they would never trust a living man."

"And where you can't come up with a common sense answer, you go oracular on them."

Again the shrug. "It worked at Delphi and Ephesus, Gordon. And honestly, where is the harm?

"The people of the Willamette have seen too many power-hungry monsters over the last twenty years to unite under any man or group of men. But they remember the machines! As they recall that ancient uniform you wear, even though in better days they so often treated it with disrespect."

There were voices in the hall. They passed close by, then faded away. Gordon stirred. "I've got to get out of here."

Lazarensky laughed. "Oh don't worry about the others. They're all talk and no action. They aren't like you at all.

"You're a rarity, Gordon. Somehow out there in the wilderness you managed to retain a modern mind, while gaining a strength suited for these times. Even if that bunch did try to harm you, you would outsmart them."

Gordon moved to the door, then stopped. He turned and looked back one last time at the soft light from the dead machine, the parity displays rippling hopelessly over and over again.

"I'm not so smart." His breath was hard in his throat.

"You see, I *believed!*"

He met Lazarensky's eyes, and finally the old man looked down heavily, unable to answer. Gordon stumbled out then, leaving behind the crypt and its corpses.

He made it back to where his mount was tethered as the faint glimmers of dawn were lightening the east. He remounted and with his heels he tiredly guided the filly up the service road to the north.

Within he felt a hollow grief. It was as if a freezing cold had locked up his heart. Nothing within him could move, for fear of shattering the precarious state.

He had to get away from this place. That much was clear. Let the fools have their myths. He was finished!

He would not return to Sciotown, where he had left the mailbags. That was behind him now. He began unbuttoning the blouse of his uniform, intending to drop it in a roadside ditch—along, forever, with his share in all the lying.

Unbidden, a phrase echoed in his mind.

Who will take responsibility now. . . ?

What? He shook his head to clear it, but the words would not go away.

Who will take responsibility now, for these foolish children?

Gordon cursed and dug in his heels. The horse gamely trotted northward, away hopefully forever from Oz.

Who will take responsibility . . .

The words repeated over and over again within his head, like a tune that would not let go.

It was the same rhythm, he realized at last, as the parity display on the face of the old, dead machine, rippling again and again.

. . . for these foolish children?

The filly trotted on as a strange thought occured to Gordon. What if—at the end of its life, as the last of the liquid helium evaporated away and the deadly heat rushed in—what if the final thought of the innocent, wise machine had somehow been caught in a loop, preserved in peripheral circuits, to flash forlornly over and over again?

Would that qualify as a ghost?

He wondered, what would Cyclops's final thoughts, its last words, have been?

Can a man be haunted by the ghost of a machine?

Gordon shook his head. He was tired, or else he would not think up such nonsense. Yet the words echoed round and round in his head. *Who will take responsibility now . . .*

It took a few moments, at first, for him to recognize the sounds of faint shouting behind him. Gordon pulled up on the reins and turned to look back, his hand resting on the butt of his revolver. Anyone who pursued him did so at great peril. Lazarensky had been right about one thing. Gordon knew he was more than a match for this bunch.

He saw there was a flurry of frantic activity in front of the House of Cyclops. But the commotion apparently did not have to do with him.

Gordon shaded his eyes against the glare of the new sun, and saw steam rising from a pair of heavily lathered horses. One exhausted man stumbled up the steps of the House of Cyclops, shouting at those hurrying to his side. Another messenger, apparently badly wounded, was being tended on the ground.

Gordon heard one word cried out loudly. It told all.

"Survivalists!"

Gordon had one word to offer in reply. "Shit," he muttered, and he turned the filly back around northward.

A day ago he would have helped. He had been willing to lay down his life trying to save Cyclops's dream, and probably would have.

He would have died for a hollow farce, a ruse, a con-game!

If the survivalist invasion had really begun, the villagers south of Eugene would put up a good fight. The raiders would turn north toward the front of least resistance.

The soft north Willametters didn't stand a chance against the Rogue River men.

Still, there probably weren't enough survivalists to take the entire valley. Corvallis would fall, but there would be other places to go. Perhaps he would head east on highway 22, and swing back around to Pine View. It would be nice to see Mrs. Thompson again. Maybe he could be there when Abby's baby arrived.

The filly trotted on. The shouts died away behind him, like a bad memory slowly fading. It promised to be fair weather, the first in weeks without clouds. A good day for traveling.

As Gordon rode on, a cool breeze blew through his half open shirtfront. A hundred yards down the road he found his hand drifting to the buttons again, twisting one slowly, back and forth.

The pony sauntered to a halt. Gordon sat, his shoulders hunched forward.

Who will take responsibility . . .

The words would not go away, lights pulsing his mind.

The horse tossed her head and snorted, pawing at the ground.

"Aw, *hell!*" Gordon cursed aloud. Calling himself every name he could imagine, he wheeled the filly about, sending her cantering southward.

A confused, frightened crowd of men and women ceased their terrified babble and stepped back into hushed silence as he clattered up to the portico of the House of Cyclops. His spirited mount danced and blew as he stared down at the people for a long, silent moment.

Finally, Gordon threw his poncho back. He rebuttoned his shirt and set the postman's cap on his head so the bright brass rider shone in the light of the rising sun.

Then he began pointing and giving terse commands.

In the name of survival—and the Restored United States—the people of Corvallis and the servants of Cyclops hurried to obey. ●

GAMING

(Continued from page 19)

the template makes play go quickly once you understand how to fly your craft.

The basic game of *Deep Space Navigator* has one destroyer per player, played on blank paper. The advanced game gives each side a destroyer and two small fighters, and you play on either blank paper or the asteroid sheets provided. Team play is possible.

Deep Space Navigator is a good game that really lives up to the claim of "different."

A game that uses a conventional card-and-board format for play is *Star Commander* by Historical Concepts (Box 1502, Burlingame, CA 94010).

Star Commander is a fast-paced game for two to five players. Each player attempts to construct a battle fleet of space ships while preventing the other players from building theirs. Game play involves bluff, battles, and sabotage. The winner is the first player to fill his Fleet Board with the following ships, all with their complete complement of crewmen: one base, one dreadnaught, one cruiser, and two scouts.

The game consists of five Fleet Boards with spaces for each ship type and special cards, an 8-page rules folder, and 151 playing cards. Less than five pages in the folder are of actual rules. The remainder is mostly illustration. The cards represent the different ships; the crews; operations, such as commissioning ships and sabotaging; weapons, such as shields, missiles, novaguns, and lasers; battle tactics, such as engage, disengage, evade, and ram; and several special reference and battle reference cards.

Each player starts with one scout ship on his Fleet Board at the zero crew level, and is dealt seven non-ship cards. Play begins with the player on the dealer's left drawing a card and performing one of four play options: play a crew card to make a ship or add to an existing one; engage in battle with one of your ships against another player's ship; discard a card; or play a special action card, such as spy, sabotage, convoy, or commission ship.

Combat can occur only if you play an "engage" card. The player you attack can either fire back with a weapon card, or use a shield card. If the weapon you fire is not blocked, that weapon's damage value is subtracted from the crew level of the hit ship.

Star Commander is not a realistic, tactical simulation of space combat, but it is a fun and interesting card game and could become addictive. ●

ON BOOKS

by Baird Searles

Welcome, Chaos
By Kate Wilhelm
Houghton Mifflin, $13.95

The term "writer's writer" is almost as loaded these days as "man's man"; Kate Wilhelm is known as a writer's writer in SF, very much respected by her peers but not of superstar status to the public.

Her latest novel, *Welcome, Chaos,* gives a clue as to why this might be. It's very unglamorously of today, highly-political, and hallmarkedly thoughtful and skillfully done. It's really a thriller with a science fictional base, sort of a *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Immortal.*

Author/academic Lyle Taney (female) finds herself by sheerest chance involved in helping a (she is told) govenment agency in tracking down a (she is told) bigtime dope importer. She is unwillingly willing, because her young son died of an overdose some years previously. It very soon becomes obvious that nothing is what she has been told; the quarry, it turns out, is a man who previous to World War II, discovered a total immunilogical system—anyone treated with it gets no disease, heals from almost any wound immediately, and seems, in addition, immune to aging.

The discoverer, Saul Werther, has ever since been both desperately trying to prevent the process from being rediscovered, and disseminating it slowly to a very few people whom he trusts. Lyle becomes one of these; soon after, word comes through that the Russians have found the process and, in addition, have solved one of its problems, that of sterility. A not-so-obvious corollary is that it can immunize a population to radiation; any country that can subject its people to it first will have the upper hand temporarily.

Needless to say, there are lots of plots and counterplots. The man who first involved Lyle turns out to be ex-CIA working privately, but he has let enough leak to get some former colleagues on *his* trail, and Werther's people manage to abduct a like-minded Soviet researcher who has already been

treated. Chases and captures abound.

The emphasis is such in *Welcome, Chaos* that it *is* more of a spy novel than SF, and as such, it for the most part succeeds. Perhaps the good guys are a little *too* good, though not one-dimensionally so; like all Wilhelm's characters, they are drawn in some depth. All of them operate on the assumption that every major government is insane, and that almost everyone connected with them is insane, so one must judge that to be the author's opinion also. She seems to imply this as a given, and it is as necessary for the reader's positive view of the heroine as her other good qualities are. This disregards the fact that not everybody thinks this way, but for the novel to work, one must. Lyle's emotional involvement with Saul and his "young" assistant, Carmen (male), smacks more of adolescence than of mature, potential immortals. (The logic seems to be that if you have an indefinite amount of time to play around in, why bother to fall in love with only one at a time, which escapes me.) There is, in fact, an overall simplistic quality to *Welcome, Chaos* despite the complexity of plot, depth of character, and raising of vital social questions that is typical of the international thriller.

The Zanzibar Cat
By Joanna Russ
Arkham House, $13.95
The Adventures of Alyx
By Joanna Russ
Timescape, $2.50 (paper)

When she's not on a soapbox, Joanna Russ is an extraordinarily good writer, and the lessening of her contributions lately has been science fiction's loss. In way of partial compensation, we have been given a new-old Russ book. A collection, *The Zanzibar Cat* consists of short stories published 1962-1976. Astonishingly, there's been no Russ collection before, though her stories have been frequently anthologized.

Russ writes about people; the science fiction and fantasy ideas are the backgrounds of her stories, and they sneak in rather unobtrusively to affect the people she's writing about. Even then, it's the interplay of people that's the main point, not just the characters but the social systems that have been set up, from an interstellar colony to a just-integrated school in the 1950s, and technology (in the science fictional stories) is only a means to this end.

In "Nobody's Home," for instance, we are given a taste of what a social life might be like in a world where matter transmission is more common than car travel today. "When It Changed," probably the best known story of the lot, suc-

cinctly tells of what happens when men return to Whileaway, a human colony whose males were wiped out in a plague and which has maintained itself parthenogenetically for thirty generations.

Social systems play their part in the fantasies also. A Commisioner of the People's Republic of Poland has an encounter with a centuries-old survivor of the *ancien regime* in "The New Men"; two social outcasts in 1952, a misfit who reads Lovecraft and the first black to attend a toney Long Island high school, take off for their own worlds in "My Boat."

And social differences are certainly at the heart of the humor of "Useful Phrases For the Tourist," which might be the funniest SF short story ever published if you can consider it a short story; it's really what it says—phrases for the visitor to an alien culture. A couple of samples will give the idea: from the section AT THE HOTEL: "That is my companion. It is not intended as a tip."; AT THE PARTY: "Is that all of you? How much (many) of you is (are) there?" Wonderful stuff.

The book has handsome drawings by Dennis Neal Smith, and an even handsomer jacket by James C. Christensen.

Russ's Alyx stories were written as a reaction to the mucho machoness of Conan and his clones; Alyx is a barbarian woman from the hills who thieves, fights, and does all the requisite sword-and-sorcery hero(ine) stuff, but in a peculiar register that's not quite satire and not quite straight. Her early adventures take place in a Hyborian never-ever land, but she metamorphoses into a Trans-Temporal Agent in the novel *Picnic on Paradise* and proceeds to shake up interplanetary humanity of the future. All the Alyx stories, including the novel, are available together for the first time in paperback in *The Adventures of Alyx*.

The Mirror of Helen
Richard Purtill
DAW, $2.50 (paper)

The most beautiful woman ever to have lived (at least in legend) is a bitch . . . to write about; of the many authors who *have* written about the Trojan War and have included Helen as a major or minor character, maybe only Euripides succeeded in making her memorable *as* a character. (Giraudoux, in *Tiger At the Gates,* came close.)

She most often, in point of fact, is drawn as a bitch, which seems slightly illogical. Anyone with her powers, even allowing her demigoddess status, must have had charm to match her looks; nowhere in Homer or legend does she do anything base except run off with Paris.

Given the likelihood of what Sparta and Menelaus were like, one can supply lots of justification for that.

Richard Purtill's *The Mirror of Helen* is an historical fantasy with the lady as the major character, rather superficially handling three episodes in her career: her abduction in girlhood by Theseus (hardly anybody knows about *that* incident); her choice among the suitors that inspires the oath of fealty to the winner which makes the Trojan War possible; and the end of the ten-year brouhaha, with the detour to Egypt where one variation of the myth says that she waited out the war's decade (Purtill gives a neat explanation of this odd twist).

The fantasy element is provided by the Olympians, who make vivid cameo appearances throughout (especially Aphrodite), more or less pulling the strings. Proteus, the Old Man of the Sea, has an especially engaging scene with his flock of seals.

The only one of the myriad Trojan subplots given more than passing reference here is another obscure one, that of the Amazon Queen, Penthesileia, and Achilles (the original mixed singles on the battlefield story). Alas, the author doesn't tackle the major Homeric mystery of why Helen's brothers, Castor and Pollux (who appear in the earlier section of the novel), have no part in the War. But Helen herself, at least, is shown in a better light than usual. *This* Helen is a good woman, and an intelligent one, finally fighting back at being used as a pawn by the manipulative Gods.

Richard Purtill seems well on the way to inheriting the mantle of the late Thomas Burnett Swann, whose curious little plays with classical legend decorated the 1960s and '70s. Purtill's variations don't have the almost perverse quirkiness that made Swann's way so distinctive, but they're still diverting for the lover of history *and* fantasy.

Space Viking
By H. Beam Piper
Ace, $2.75 (paper)

Though there are more epitomal examples, and more famous ones, whenever I think of the perfect space opera, I think of H. Beam Piper's *Space Viking,* now back in print after a longish hiatus. It postdates the Golden Age of Space Opera, and is really a part of that transition period when classic SF was changing into something more complex. *Space Viking* is one of those in-between works that captures the best of both worlds.

Many worlds, to be accurate. Laid in a far future where the Terran Federation of dozens of colonized planets is crumbling, the focus is on the Sword Worlds

(all with really sharp names such as Excalibur, Flamberge, Durendal, and Gram). These, due to an accident of history, have developed their own subculture, and while in some ways they are as, or more, civilized than the Federation planets, part of their economy is based on raids of the older cultures. They are—you got it—space vikings!

Lucas Trask, a baron of Gram, is about to be united in marriage to Elaine, a high born lady, which is not only a love match but which will combine two important political and economic factions of the planet. (The Sword Worlds are determinedly feudal, not just on the surface for a colorful ambience, but politially and culturally, which Piper spells out in some detail.) At an elaborate and wonderfully described reception before the wedding ("a trumpet, considerably amplified, blared; the *Ducal Salute.*"), Elaine is killed by a half mad suitor, who then steals an interstellar ship and escapes off world. Trask is wounded; when he recovers, he abandons Gram, his estates and his position to go aviking (a way of life he has decried earlier) in pursuit of the villain. Since this means combing two hundred billion cubic light years, he has a Herculean task ahead.

The novel follows the quest over the years, in which, because of Trask, his Vikings, and his search, planets get destroyed and, conversely, recivilized, trade routes and alliances are established, and the dismembered human culture seems on its way back. The clue to Piper's purpose lies early in the story, where a character observes that "practially everything that's happened on any of the inhabited planets has happened on Terra before the first spaceship." He wasn't the first SF author to use history as a model for the future, but he did it to perfection, with intelligence and the ability to tell a great story.

The Circus of Dr. Lao
By Charles G. Finney
Vintage, $3.95 (paper)

The fact that Charles G. Finney's *The Circus of Dr. Lao* (rhymes with show) is again available proves that there is some justice in the world, even if it is in a small sized paperback without the weird, wonderful and mostly irrelevant illustrations by Artzybasheff which have been with it since its initial publication in 1935. It has been a cult book ever since; it is one of the great fantasies and the temptation is simply to say that there is no other book like it and leave it at that, since its peculiar flavor is probably uncommunicable.

But that's cheating. The basic situation is simply put—and

part of the novel's peculiarity is that it isn't a story, it's a situation. A small, dingy and highly unusual circus comes to a small, dingy, and hideously ordinary town—Abilone, Arizona. The circus has a mermaid, a sea serpent, a chimera, a sphinx, a medusa, a satyr, and the hound of the hedges, and as a final spectacle " . . . would be erected the long-dead city of Woldercan and the terrible temple of its fearful god Yottle . . . a virgin would be sanctified and slain to propitiate this deity . . . Eleven thousand people would take part in this spectacle . . . admission 10 cents to the circus grounds proper, 25 cents admission to the big top," according to the newspaper ad. This duly takes place before the largely uncomprehending and unimpressed citizenry of Abilone, who beforehand have had their encounters with the various denizens of the show.

Mrs. Howard T. Cassan, a widow, goes to the fortune teller, Apollonius of Tyana, who unlike other such, tells the exact truth—nothing whatever will happen to her for the rest of her life. Miss Agnes Birdsong, a schoolteacher, ventures into the satyr's tent and learns of things far beyond English composition. A traffic officer tells his children that the roc's egg is just a lump of concrete—just before it hatches.

Finney's curious digressions and commentaries, and his black humor make *The Circus of Dr. Lao* a bitter view of humanity and its general inability and lack of desire to cope with the wonderful. It's cynical, hilarious, sad, and unique.

(Note—the George Pal film, *The Seven Faces of Dr. Lao,* while charming in its own right, has little to do with the essential quality of the novel.)

Shoptalk . . . The third of Robert Silverberg's Majipoor cycle has appeared; this one continues the adventures of Lord Valentine. The title—*Valentine Pontifex* (Arbor House, $15.95; there's also a special limited edition from the same publisher at $35.00) . . . Probably the most wanted of Philip K. Dick's older novels is *The Cosmic Puppets;* it has been out of print for a long, long time. It's been republished by Berkley ($2.50, paperback) . . . A curious and interesting item: *New Worlds From the Lowlands,* subtitled "Fantasy and Science Fiction of Dutch and Flemish Writers," compiled and edited by Manuel Van Loggem (Cross-Cultural Communications, $20.00 cloth, $12.00 paper) . . . There is also a special edition of Isaac Asimov's *The Robots of Dawn* limited to 750 copies (Phantasia Press, $60.00).

Recent publications from those connected with this mag-

azine . . . *The Complete Guide To Science Fiction Conventions* by Erwin S. Strauss, Loompanics Unlimited, Box 1197, Port Townsend, WA 98368, $4.95 + $2.00 p&h (paper); *The Great Science Fiction Stories #10 (1948),* edited by Isaac Asimov and Martin H. Greenberg, DAW, $3.50 (paper); *The Robots of Dawn* by Isaac Asimov, Doubleday, $15.95.

Books to be cnsidered for review in this column should be submitted to Baird Searles, % The Science Fiction Shop, 56 8th Ave., New York, New York 10014. ●

MARTIN GARDNER

(From page 46)

SECOND SOLUTION TO ON TO CHARMIAN

The earth, of course!

It was while the *Bagel* was making plans to explore the barren surface of Iras that it received an unexpected bulletin from home base. A newly-launched infrared satellite probe had just transmitted convincing evidence of an eleventh planet! It was promptly named Charmian because Iras and Charmian are the two faithful attendants of Cleopatra in Shakespeare's famous play. Some readers may recall that just before she died Cleopatra kissed them both, saying "Farewell, kind Charmian. Iras, long farewell." After the kiss, Iras dropped dead, either from a heart attack or because she, too, had allowed the asp to bite her.

Larc Snaag, the *Bagel's* captain, was a great admirer of Shakespeare. "Iras, farewell," he said over the intercom after canceling plans for a landing. "On to Charmian!"

Now see how quickly you can find a familiar English word that can be made by scrambling the letters of CHARMIAN? This time it would spoil the fun to give the only answer.

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SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR

by Erwin S. Strauss

As I write, I'm just back from the 1983 WorldCon, with news of the big 1985 con(vention)s. Join early and save. Meanwhile, make plans for social weekends with your favorite SF authors, editors, artists and fellow fans. For a longer, later list, an explanation of cons, and a sample of SF folksongs, send me an SASE (addressed, stamped #10 (long) envelope) at 9850 Fairfax Sq. #232, Fairfax VA 22031. (703) 273-6111 is the hot line. If a machine answers, leave your area code and number. I'll call back on my nickel. Send a #10 SASE when writing cons. Look for me behind the Filthy Pierre badge at cons, playing a musical keyboard.

FEBRUARY, 1984

17-19—**Boskone.** For info, write: **Box G, MIT PO, Cambridge MA 02139.** Or phone: **(703) 273-6111** (10 am to 10 pm only, not collect). Con will be held in: Boston MA (if city omitted, same as in address). Guests will include: Gene Wolfe, David (ex-Timescape editor) Hartwell, artist Vincent DiFate. At the Park Plaza Hotel.

24-26—**WisCon. (608) 251-6226 (days), 233-0326 (eves).** Jessica Amanda ("Amazons!") Salmonson, Elizabeth ("Sardonyx Net") Lynn and others will demonstrate martial arts. Masquerade. Workshops. Accompanied kids under 12 free. Traditionally, has a feminist emphasis. At the Concourse Hotel.

MARCH, 1984

2-4—**ConCave, Box 116, Park City KY 42160.** Mike Lalor. 24-hour party room. Banquet. Very low-key.

2-4—**BayFilk, Box 424, El Cerrito CA 94530.** San Jose CA. About SF folk singing ("filksinging"). This is the annual West Coast con of the Filk Foundation. Membership fee includes midnight supper.

9-11—**KingKon, Box 1284, Colorado Springs CO 80901.** Connie & Courtney Willis, Ed Bryant. Masquerade, Stardust SF Music Awards, King Gong Show (you, too, can win the Banana).

16-18—**MidSouthCon, 1229 Pallwood, Memphis TN 38122.** C. J. (Downbelow) Cherryh, M. Middleton.

16-18—**LunaCon, Box 779, Brooklyn NY 11230.** Hasbrouck Heights NJ (near New York City). Editor Terry Carr, artist Tom Kidd, fan Cy Chauvin. Time was when this was the only big East Coast con.

23-25—**NorWesCon, Box 24207, Seattle WA 98124.** This con usually draws a hundred or more authors.

23-25—**StellarCon, % SFFF, Fed., Box 4 EUC, UNC-Greensboro, Greensboro NC 27412.**

24-25—**Nova, % Order of Liebowitz, Box 61, Madison Hts, MI 48071.** At Oakland U., Rochester MI.

29-Apr. 1—**AggieCon, Box J1, MSC, Texas A&M U., College Station TX 77844. (409) 845-1515.** L. S. & C. C. deCamp, J. P. Hogan, W. A. Tucker, H. Waldrop, L. Kennedy, R. Vardeman, R. Musgrave.

30-Apr. 1—**IstaCon, % Howell, 959-A Waverley Ct., Norcross GA 30071.** Tucker (near Atlanta) GA. Anne (Pern) McCaffrey, artists Kelly Freas & Mike Whalen, Ralph Roberts, B. Linaweaver, M. Resnick.

AUGUST, 1984

30-Sep. 3—**LACon 2, Box 8442, Van Nuys CA. 91409.** Anaheim CA WorldCon 84. Join early and save.

AUGUST, 1985

22-26—**AussieCon 2, Box 428, Latham NY 12110 USA.** Melbourne, Australia. 1985 World SF Con.

30-Sep. 2—**Chilicon, % FACT, Box 9612, Austin TX 78766.** The North American SF Con for 1985 (NASFiC's are held only in years when WorldCon is outside North America). 3000 fans expected.

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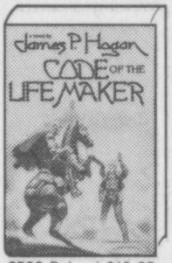

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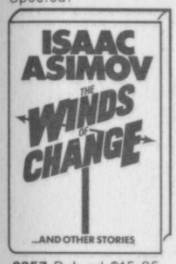

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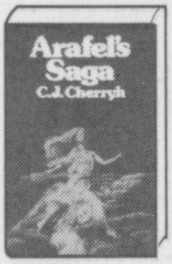

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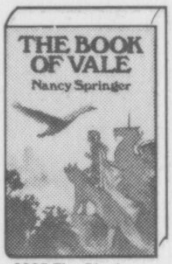

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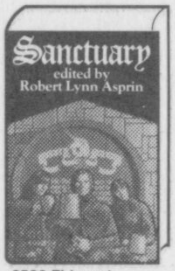

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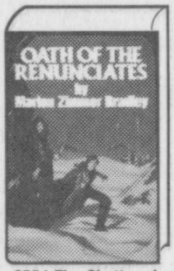

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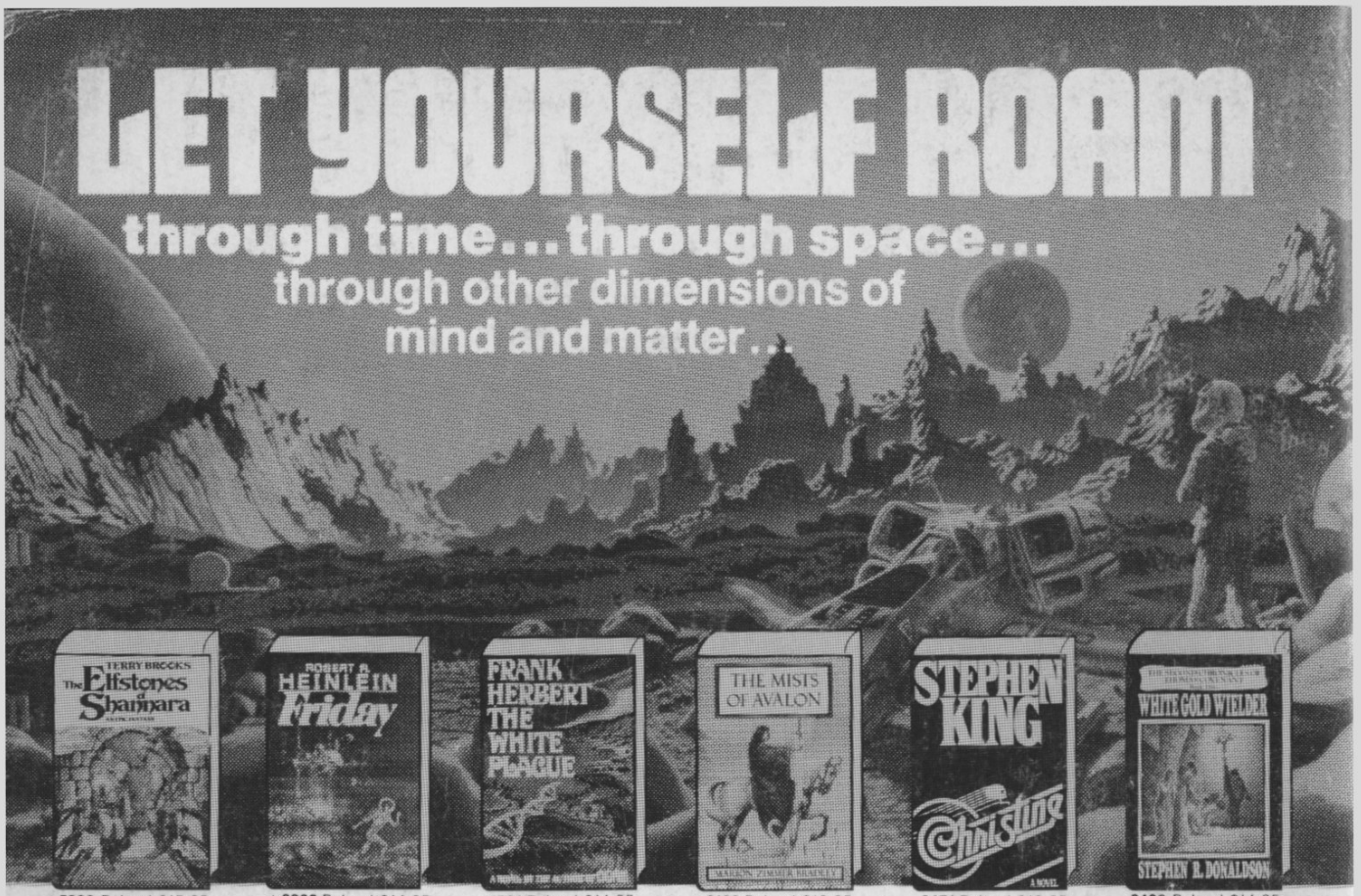

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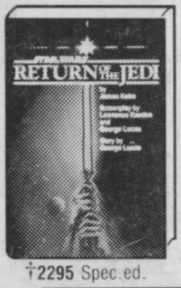

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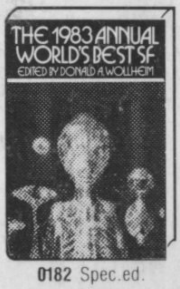

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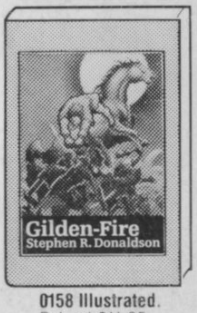

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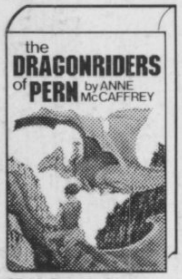

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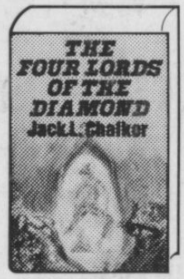

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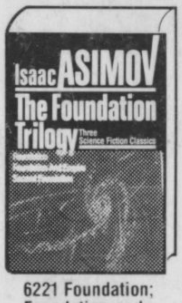

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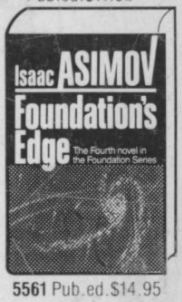

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