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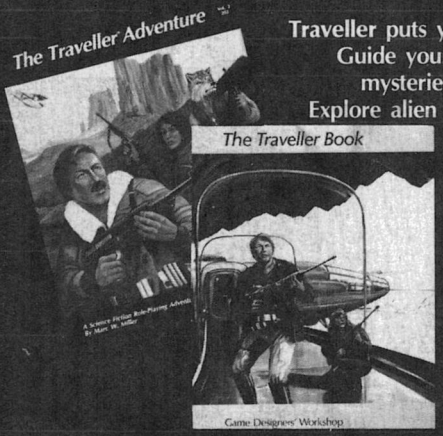

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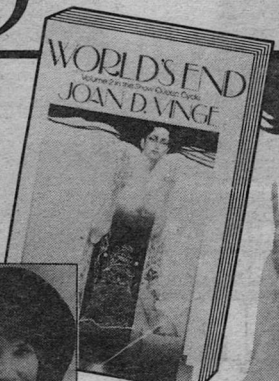

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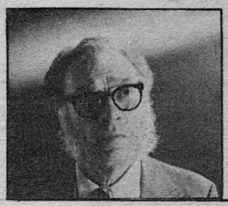
EDITORIAL



TIME-TRAVEL

by Isaac Asimov

I have often said, in speaking and in writing, that the qualified science fiction writer avoids the scientifically impossible. Yet I can't bring myself to make that rule an absolute one, because there are some plot-devices that offer such dramatic possibilities that we are forced to overlook the utter implausibilities that are involved. The most glaring example of this is time-travel.

There are infinite tortuosities one can bring to plot development if only you allow your characters to move along the time axis, and I, for one can't resist them, so that I have written a number of time-travel stories, including one novel, *The End of Eternity*.

You can get away with a kind of diluted time-travel story, if you have your character move in the direction we all move —from present to future —and suspend the usual consciousness that accompanies the move by having him (please understand that, for conciseness, I am using "him" as a short-hand symbol for "him or her") sleep away a long period of time, as Rip van Winkle did, or, better, having him frozen for an indefinite period at liquid nitrogen temperatures. Better still, you might make use of relativistic notions and have your character move into the future by having his subjective-time slowed through motion at speeds close to that of light, or motion through an enormously intense gravitational field.

These are plausible devices that do not do damage to the structure of the Universe, but they are one-way motions, with no return possible. I did it in *Pebble in the Sky* although I made use of an unknown (and unspecified) natural law involving nuclear fission, which was then quite new. This was a weakness in the plot, but I got past it in the first couple of pages and never brought it up again so I hoped no one would notice it. (Alas, many did.)

The same device can be used to make repeated jumps, always into the future, or to bring someone from the past into the present.

Once you have a device which sends someone into the future, however, it is asking too much of writer-nature not to use some device—such as a blow on the head—to send a person into the past. (Mark Twain does it in "A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court.") For that, there is some scientific justification at the subatomic level, where individual particles are involved and entropy considerations are absent. For ordinary objects, where entropy *is* involved, there is none.

But all one-shot changes in either direction are only devices to start the story, which then usually proceeds in a completely time-bound fashion. That's not the true, or pure, time-travel story. In true time-travel, the characters can move, at will, back and forth in time. Nor is it fair if this is done through supernatural intervention as in Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. It must be done by an artificial device under the control of a human being.

The first true time-travel story was H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine,* published in 1895. Wells, who was probably the best science fiction writer of all time*, carefully explained the rationale behind it. It requires four dimensions to locate an object: it is somewhere on the north-south axis, somewhere on the east-west axis, somewhere on the up-down axis, and somewhere on the past-future axis. It exists not only in a certain point of three-dimensional space but at a certain instant of time. A merely three-dimensional object is as much a mathematical abstraction as is a two-dimensional plane, or a one-dimensional line, or a zero-dimensional point. Suppose you considered the Great Wall of China as existing for zero time and therefore consisting of three dimensions only. It would then not exist at all and you could walk through its supposed position at any time.

Since duration is a dimension like height, width, and thickness, and since we can travel at will north and south, east and west, and (if only by jumping) up and down, why shouldn't we also travel yesterward and tomorrowward as soon as we work out a device for the purpose?

That was 1895, remember, and Wells' analysis at that time had some shadow of justification. But then, in 1905, came Einstein's special theory of relativity, and it became clear that time is a dimension but it is *not* like the three spatial dimensions, and it can't be treated as though it were.

And yet Wells' argument was so winning and the plots it

*If others, since, seem to have reached greater heights, it is only because they stand on Wells' shoulders.

made possible so enticing that science fiction writers generally just ignore Einstein and follow Wells. (I do so myself in *The End of Eternity*.)

The dead giveaway that true time-travel is flatly impossible arises from the well-known "paradoxes" it entails. The classic example is "What if you go back into the past and kill your grandfather when he was still a little boy?" In that case, you see, the murderer was never born, so who killed the little boy?

But you don't need anything so drastic. What if you go back and change any of the many small items that made it possible for your father and mother to meet, or to fall in love after they met, or to marry after they fall in love. Suppose you merely interfered with *the* crucial moment of sex and had it happen the next evening, or perhaps just five minutes later than it did, so that another sperm fertilized the ovum rather than the one that should have. That, too, would mean the person committing the act would never come into existence, so who would commit the act?

In fact, to go into the past and do *anything* would change a great deal of what followed, perhaps everything that followed. So complex and hopeless are the paradoxes that follow, so wholesale is the annihilation of any reasonable concept of

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causality, that the easiest way out of the irrational chaos that results is to suppose that true time-travel is, and forever will be, impossible.

However, any discussion of this gets so philosophical that I lose patience and would rather consider something simpler.

Suppose you get into a time machine and travel 24 hours into the future. The assumption is that you are traveling only in the time dimension, and that the three spatial dimensions are unchanged. However, as is perfectly obvious, Earth is moving through the three dimensions in a very complex way. The point on the surface on which the time-machine is located is moving about the Earth's axis. The Earth is moving about the center of gravity of the Earth-Moon system, and also about the center of gravity of the Earth-Sun system, is accompanying the Sun in its motion about the center of the Galaxy, and the Galaxy in its undefined motion relative to the center of gravity of the Local Group and to the center of gravity of the Universe as a whole if there is one.

You might, of course, say that the time-machine partakes of the motion of the Earth, and wherever Earth goes, the time-machine goes, too. Suppose, though, we consider the Earth's motion (with the Solar

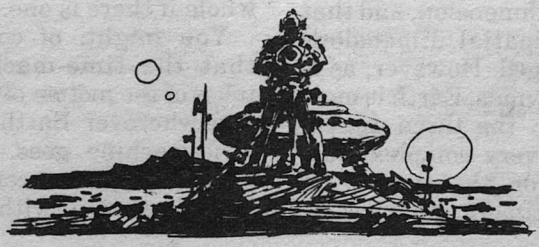
system generally) around the Galactic center. Its speed relative to that center is estimated to be about 220 kilometers per second. If the time-machine travels twenty-four hours into the future in 1 second, it travels 220 kilometers x 86,400 (the number of seconds in a day), or 19,008,000 kilometers in one second. That's over 63 times the speed of light. If we don't want to break the speed of light limit, then we must take not less than twenty-three minutes to travel one day forward (or backward) in time.

What's more, I suspect that considerations of acceleration would have to be involved. The time machine would have to accelerate to light speed and then decelerate from it, and perhaps the human body could only stand so much acceleration in the time direction. Considering that the human body has never in all its evolution accelerated at all in the time direction, the amount of acceleration it ought to be able to endure might be very little indeed, so that the time machine would have to take considerably more than an hour to make a one-day journey—say, at a guess, 12 hours.

That would mean we could only gain half a day per day, at most, in traveling through time. Spending ten years to go twenty years into the future, would not be in the least palatable. (Can a time machine carry a life-support system of that order of magnitude?)

And, on top of that, I don't see that having to chase after the Earth would fail to cost the usual amount of energy just because we're doing it by way of the time dimension. Without calculating the energy, I am positive time-travel is insuperably difficult, quite apart from the theoretical considerations that make it totally impossible. So let's eliminate it from serious consideration.

But not from science fiction! Time-travel stories are too much fun for them to be eliminated merely out of mundane considerations of impracticability, or even impossibility. ●



LETTERS

Dear Dr. Asimov (also Shawna and Tom Rainbow):

We here in Lexington have read with interest the activities going on at Transylvania University (see Tom Rainbow's article *Superpowers!*, September 1983). Although I live just up the street from this famous university (oldest institution of higher education west of the Alleghenies), I had no idea what was up in the Transylvania physics department. I went over there to see if I could act as a subject for one of the superpower experiments (middle-aged persons think about this a lot, Dr. Asimov, a fact that will become clear to you when you reach middle age), and I was interested in acquiring a superpower or two. They stonewalled it, as you might guess, so I am writing to you.

I think that Tom Rainbow could achieve tenure there. Some of their faculty are pretty weird and he would fit in fine. It is probably true, as Rainbow points out, that the Transylvanian scientists are ten or twenty years ahead of time, but I have never heard of any of the local villagers (I guess that's me) going as far as disembowelling one. Maybe a few rocks, dogs, and whips— but disembowellment—gee, that's a lot of trouble. Most of us villagers are content with a little scorn and derision. On the other hand, there's a lot going on here in Lexington that I don't know about. Maybe Rainbow could inform me when a really good scientist hunt might be scheduled.

Well, anything you can tell me about the superpower lab would be greatly appreciated. I'd settle for a substitute for these damn bifocals, or maybe a zero-calorie junk food. But if you hear of something *really* good, remember your subscribers and let us in on it early.

Robert N. Bostrom
Lexington, KY

When I was even younger than I am now, the one superpower I yearned for was the ability to write material that unfailingly sold. I have it now (almost) and worry about how I got it. Which reminds me of a plot for a story I hand out freely. The Devil shows up and says to Superman, "Of course you don't remember our agreement. I wanted you to enjoy your powers while you had them, since I am so kind. Besides" (smiling demonically) "I didn't want you to spend time figuring out a way of getting out of this."

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov,

I very much enjoyed the October issue of your magazine, but I was

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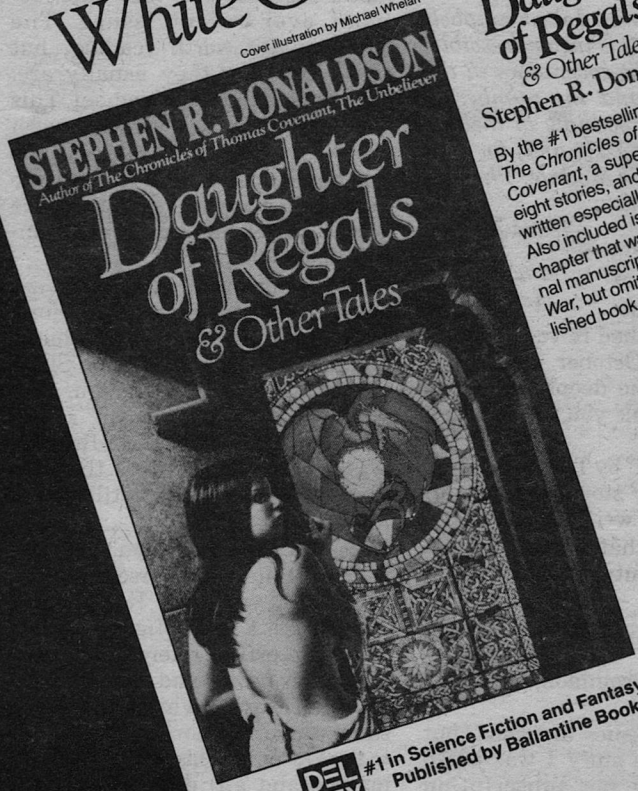

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disappointed that the crossword puzzle had been left out. I do a lot of puzzles here and there, and it's hard to find one that's a real challenge, and doesn't use just the same old words. You may have gotten a lot of mail from people who thought it was a waste of space—I hope now you will get some mail from people who miss it as I do, and will put it back.

Nell Allison
Ann Arbor, MI

The trouble is (as John Campbell used to say) print is incompressible. The length of the cover story in the October issue and the number of ads made it impossible to include the crossword puzzle and, for that matter, Mooney's Module. The loss is not permanent.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov:

I've just finished re-re-reading a story in your October 1983 issue that touched me deeply. I had to write and thank you for printing it.

"Chand Veda" by Tanith Lee was a two-hanky SF story—a really affecting piece of writing—I loved it.

I'm hopeful that I'll see more of Tanith Lee in future issues.

Thank you,

Rita M. Hansen
PO Box 297
Roscommon, MI 48653

PS: *All* your issues are good, but because of this story I was jolted into renewing my subscription early.

Renewing your subscription is very important. Alas for the changes since I became an SF reader. Newsstands have grown so few, magazine distributors even fewer, and the stands themselves so clogged with non-SF trivia or worse that, really, subscription is the only safe way.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Ms. McCarthy and Dr. A:

The October 1983 issue of *Asimov's* represents a vast improvement over recent issues. The contents are worth reading, but that's the way they usually are. The cover is the improvement. This is the first issue in some while with a cover worthy of the interior (the mid-September issue of *Analog* also represents an improvement). I hope this improvement represents a continuing trend.

The insides were good, too. I enjoyed all the stories (though I don't understand why Martin Gardner's puzzle piece is listed under "Short Stories"). I do think, though, that Andrew Weiner's "Invaders" rather closely resembles Fredric Brown's *Martians Go Home*! (it's the idea turned inside-out, but still recognizable).

Re: the editorial. I don't see why the Lije Baley "universe" can't be connected with the Foundation "universe." I feel obliged to point out that certain references in the Lije Baley novels and the novelette "Mother Earth" (which shares the same universe, more or less) point to the Outer Worlds (long-lived humanity and all) dying out and a new society growing out of both.

I do agree with the Good Doctor about hooking his novels together

in *Foundation's Edge*. It was one of the things I really liked and laughed over.

Best and all for the future,
Sincerely,

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

Martin Gardner likes to cast his puzzles in the form of a science fiction story, and we willingly go along with him.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Doctor Asimov, Shawna, and Gang,

I have been a science fiction fan for many years, and your magazine has provided me with a wonderful variety of fiction and authors. On this, you all deserve my sincerest congratulations and deepest gratitude.

I have noticed, however, in the Letters column you often receive letters which discourage fantasy in your magazine. I also noted there are little or no letters that are encouraging in this area. But please do not change!!!

This magazine appealed to me (and to others, I'm sure) because it had the type of format which fulfilled my intellectual and creative needs.

Please keep in mind that more and more writers have begun to intermingle science fiction and fantasy. Such authors in this new field are Andre Norton (my favorite), Piers Anthony, and Philip Jose Farmer and many, many more. Such fiction includes *Dark is the Sun, Daybreak 2250* A.D., *Blue Adept, Lord Valentine's Castle*, and on and on.

Remember that one of the definitions of fantasy according to *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* is: "Imaginative fiction featuring especially strange settings and grotesque characters—called also fantasy fiction."

Finally I'd like to tell the good Doctor to Keep On Writing!! Write what makes YOU feel good. Your talent won't let you go wrong. Why don't you just start freewriting and let a new idea flow out of you?

Good luck with your new novel! And keep up the good work.
Sincerely yours,

Laura McCormick
Route #2 Box 202A
Autora, MO 65605

Ah, but I always *freewrite in part. First I need a general idea, second I need an ending, third I need a beginning. I then begin and let my fingers take over until I reach the ending. As for fantasy, well, no editor ought to be held to the strict line of a predecessor. Shawna has her likes and dislikes, too, and I thoroughly approve them.*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov and Shawna,

All I can say is that I am extremely disappointed. I once could open an issue of your magazine and count on reading at least three excellent stories. For example, "Jenning's Operative Webster," "SHAWNA, Ltd.," and "Enemy Mine" (Sept., '79), or "The Portrait of Baron Negay," "Trial Sample," "When the Old Man Waves the Banner," and "Wind Instrument"

(June 8, '81). (Three of the above were by Barry Longyear. Whatever happened to him, anyway?) I just finished the August issue, and only two pieces of fiction struck me as being anything except totally forgettable: "The Peacemaker" and "The Catch." These two were good, but not great. I did, however, love "A Stroll to the Stars," the non-fiction piece.

This distresses me. In the letters section of this issue, I saw expressed the desire for more of the Good Doctor's fiction, or at least more fiction of that type from anybody. I remember reading letters a few years ago expressing extreme happiness that your magazine did not print fantasy, and asking that such policies continue. With all of that support for good, hard science fiction, why did you stop printing it? My guess is that editorial preferences changed with editors. This is inevitable to a certain extent, but I always thought that the readers dictated the type of story an editor selected, not the other way around.

A couple of years ago, I sent a few absolutely abysmal (as I realize now) stories to George Scithers. When they were rejected, a brief note from George explained why. This was a great help to me. I received my rejected latest effort the other day with a printed rejection slip. Couldn't you at least *circle* the reason the story is unacceptable on a printed form? I realize that you receive hundreds of manuscripts a week, and it seems to me that the ones you select would jump out and hit you in the face, glittering jewels in a pile of slush. This does not seem to be the case, in my opinion. I have not seen any glittering jewels lately, and if what you print is the best, the rest must be terrible.

Then I see in *Writer's Market* that *IAsfm* will accept some fantasy. Horrors! A complete reversal of policy. All you readers who campaigned against fantasy before, make yourself known! If your magazine gets so many manuscripts, with some fantasy, why not start a new magazine devoted mainly to fantasy? I'd sure love to have the old style *IAsfm* back.

I see that George Scithers is the editor of the new *Amazing*. If he does for *Amazing* what he did for *IAsfm*, you may be sure that I will subscribe to his magazine before I subscribe to yours.

Mournfully,

Steve Bishop
1005 N. Boston Ave.
DeLand, FL 32724

Now, now, Steve, you are perfectly within your rights to disagree with Shawna's taste in stories, but please don't make the common error of supposing that your own taste is an absolute standard. If it were, we would hire you as editor at an enormous salary, and keep your identity secret, so no one could steal you away.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Shawna,

I wrote a while back because I suspected behind-the-scenes trickery. It seemed that most of the stories in *IAsfm* were by professional authors with impending novels. You explained that the amateur material on hand just wasn't good enough, so you HAD to depend on

professionals. I understand and applaud—I don't see how you turn out such a quality publication month after month all by yourself. The August issue was a gem as usual. (I especially like "Mooney's Module".)

Now. The real reason for this letter is anger. You see, after reading the latest editorial, "Shrugging it Off", I dashed to the library and found the offending article in the December 1982 issue of *Harper's*.

So the author is a poet, is he? Who says? The magazine? Himself? How *can* he be, without a sense of wonder? If he *has* said attribute, why doesn't he realize that science fiction will cultivate it? (If he's already read as much science fiction as he says, he must have overlooked this obvious characteristic of the genre, in which case he's *not* a poet, and never will be.) No, I suspect the Good Doctor is right—*I* think with all that reading, and all that spleen against science fiction, he's tried to write it and failed to sell any. Only personal bias could blind a man to the truth like that! (Sorry. I know this isn't an elegant, "literary" letter, but I'm so mad I can't think.) As Dr. Asimov says in another editorial about someone else, "He's heroically, mastodonically wrong!" In fact, every point he made was exactly opposed to the truth! If I weren't so emotionally high that I can't think, I'd love to oppose him point by point.

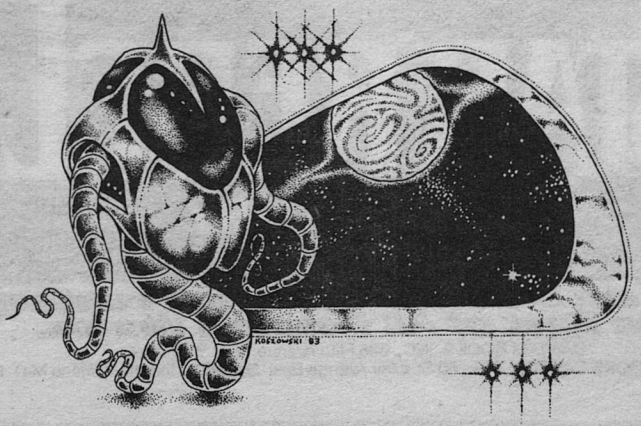
But why bother? He reminds me of a smartalecky critic of the 19th century, Relstab, who thought he was being clever by putting down Chopin when everyone else hailed him as a genius. The whole world knows what Chopin was—critic and peasant alike. There's never been any question about it, even from the first. Who remembers Relstab?

Sincerely,

A. G. Probst

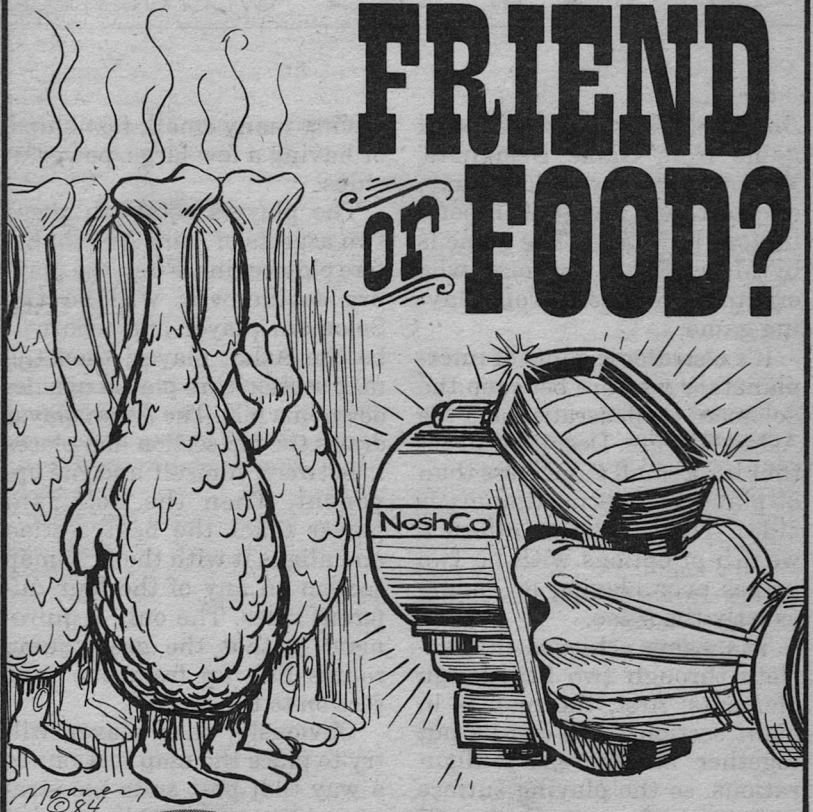
I think you have put your finger on the nub. Critics generally are sure-fire candidates for oblivion. If it were not that they irritate authors, who are professionally articulate and temperamentally woundable, and who therefore can't be prevented from moaning and hissing in public, no one would ever hear of critics even while they were alive.

—Isaac Asimov



Alien Life Forms . . .

FRIEND or FOOD?



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GAMING

by Dana Lombardy

Dark Nebula is a new SF board game from Game Designers' Workshop ($8 at your local store, or direct from Box 1646, Bloomington, IL 61701). The game is by Marc Miller, the man who created *Traveller*® role-playing game.

It's a strategic game of interplanetary warfare between the Solomani Confederation and the Aslan Hierate. Despite the fact that it's a small game (less than 50 playing pieces maximum per side), *Dark Nebula* offers a wealth of options with no two games ever playing or ending exactly the same.

The game achieves this variety through two key design elements: first, the map is in eight sections that can be put together in different configurations, so the playing surface and strategic map change in each game. Second, each player "builds" his own starships and troops, using the points he starts the game with, plus points he receives when he captures star systems. Players can try to create a balanced military force, or opt for extremes, such as having many small, fast ships, or having a few large, powerful ships.

The players establish these two aspects of *Dark Nebula* before play begins. First, the players decide who will be the Solomani player and who will be the Aslan player, then the map sections are placed upside-down in a pile. The Aslan player draws the top section and places it between himself and his opponent. Then the Solomani player takes the next section and aligns it with the first map section on any of the four different sides. The only requirement is that the green jump routes line up from one map section to the next.

Obviously, each player will try to place the map sections in a way that best suits his strategic plan—or complicates his opponent's plan. This procedure continues until the Aslan Home Worlds, Solomani Home Worlds, and unexplored dark nebula sections have been placed down. Thus, the game map could consist of as few as three sections or as many as eight.

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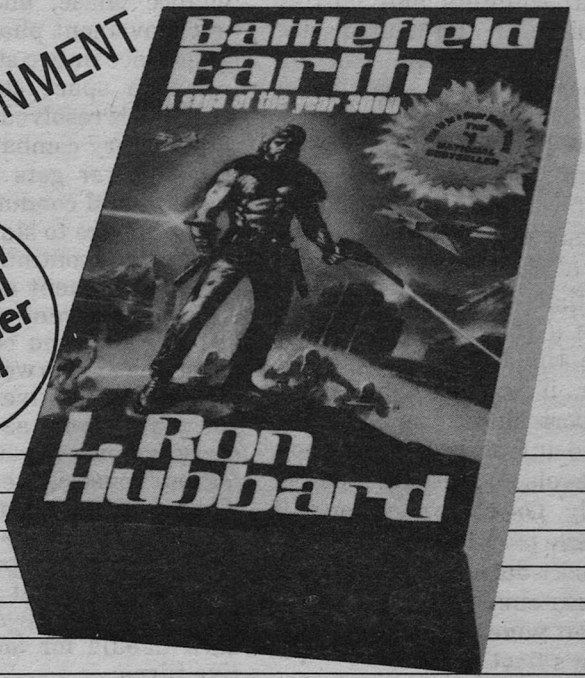

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After the map sections are in place, the players take turns assigning neutral forces to the map sections neither control. This is done with each player randomly drawing upside-down neutral counters and putting that piece on the neutral star system of his choice. You can put these potential enemies far away, or in blocking positions.

Now that the "battlefield" is laid-out, you design your military forces of starships and planetary assault/defense troops. A lot of thought must go into this stage—an error could put you in a strategic "hole" even before the first turn. For example, if you don't have any transport ships, you won't be able to increase your technology levels or resource points quickly. On the other hand, if you have too few military ships for escort duties, or to conquer star systems, you may leave yourself wide open to your opponent's fleet.

Marc Miller, the game's creator, has not made this design dilemma any easier for you either because he provides no less than 13 different starships and four different troop counters to select from.

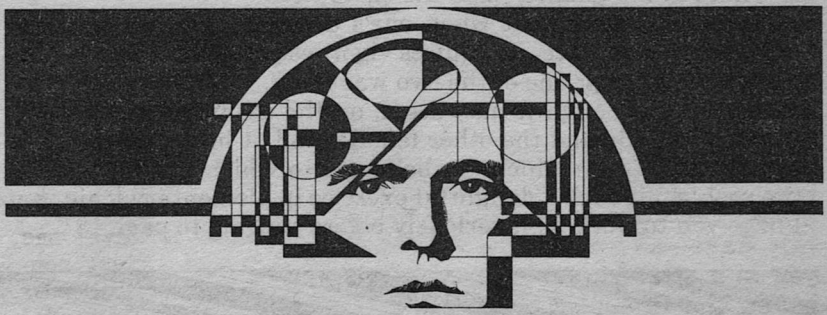
Each game turn, which represents two years, is played as follows: The Solomani player does his production and maintenance phase, and then his first movement phase. Combat takes place in two stages, starting with space combat, and once this is resolved, moving on to planetary combat. Then the Aslan player gets to move in reaction and conduct any combat he wishes to start.

The game continues until you or your opponent achieves one of three different victory conditions: 1. if you control your opponent's home worlds' capital for two consecutive turns; 2. if you control twice as many planetary systems as your opponent for four consecutive turns; or 3. if the dark nebula map section has the only jump routes between the two opposing home world maps and if you control all the planetary systems in the dark nebula for four consecutive turns.

If you like a game with a lot of play options, and one that's never the same set-up twice, you'll really enjoy *Dark Nebula*. ●

MARTIN GARDNER

TWO ODD COUPLES



In the early years of the 21st century the trend toward the unisex look and the blending of genders had reached so advanced a stage that it was almost impossible to tell males from females unless they were completely unclothed. Men and women looked alike, dressed alike, talked alike, thought alike, behaved alike.

Females regularly swallowed powerful male hormone pills that allowed them to grow beards and mustaches. Males just as regularly took female hormones to enlarge their breasts, slow the growth of facial hair, and raise the pitch of their voices. Both sexes usually wore tight-fitting pants to which were attached large, padded, ornamental codpieces. It was customary for men to have a small *M* embroidered on their codpiece, and for women to turn the *M* around to make a *W*.

During one of my infrequent out-of-body time travels, based on a secret meditation technique developed by the Edgar Cayce Trance Laboratory, at Stanford Research International, I found myself strolling barefooted along the sunny oceanside of St. Augustine, Florida. The year was 2029. A pair of handsome youths walked toward me, one much taller than the other. Both had small blonde mustaches, and long yellow hair that bounced around their shoulders. They wore only bathing trunks so it was impossible to guess their sexes, although they held hands and acted very much like a couple in love.

We stopped to chat. Out-of-body journeys to the future had become so commonplace by 2029 that the two youths seemed not at all surprised when I told them my real body was snoring on a bed in the mountains of western North Carolina, back in the year 1984.

"I assume one of you is male and the other female," I said, "but I don't know which is which."

"I'm the male," said the tall youth, smiling.

"And I'm the female," said the short one.

I should explain that when one's astral body is on a trip to another time or place, it acquires vigorous psychic powers. I could sense that at least one of the two was lying.

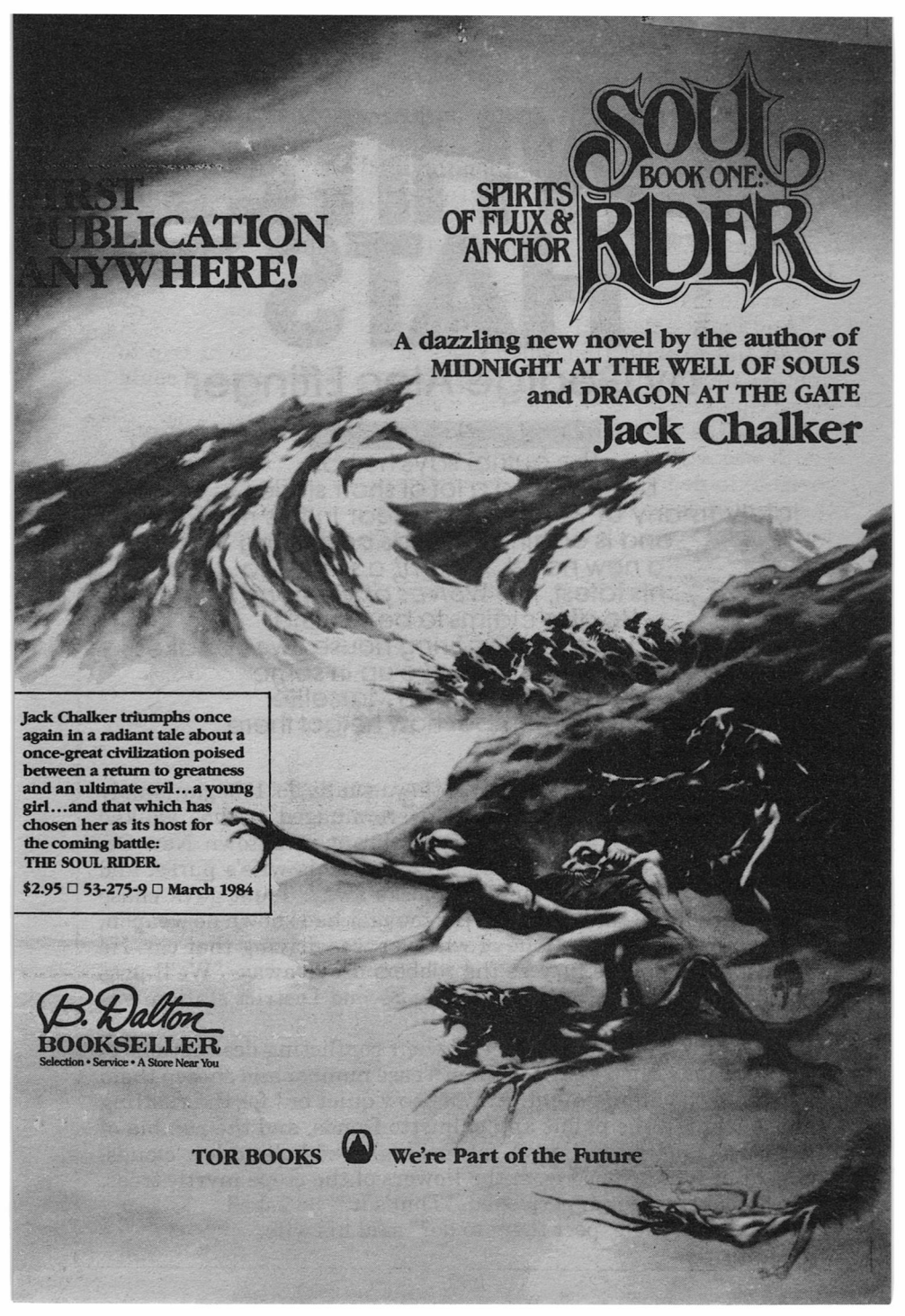
Impossible though it may seem, on the assumptions that one youth was male and the other female, and at least one lied, it is possible to deduce which sex belonged to which height. Solving the problem is such a delightful exercise in elementary logic that I urge you to work on it seriously before turning to page 131.

THE SPACE INSTRUMENT

Chiefly I see it in the aeons of space-light
Steadily streaking on a fore-planned track
To some neighboring planet perhaps;
Invisible to the stationary eye—so bullet-swift;
And yet so steady-smooth, so long upon its journey,
So vast the empty gulf—fixed as this table.

Would I might convey the superb crawling lines of this metal—
Into the mystery man's physical tentacle;
Beautiful in the naked light and loneliness;
Intricate, clean, contrived;
Afloat and unsuspended:
Man's finger, ear and eye extended.

—C. Denis Pegge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WHITE HATS

by George Alec Effinger

The author says he has
been writing a lot of short stories
lately (many of which will appear in this magazine)
and is edging towards beginning
a new novel, *Twilight*, a sequel to
his latest, *The Wolves of Memory*.
He also claims to be waiting
to win the Publishers Clearing House Sweepstakes
so that he can wake up in some
sordid little hotel in Marseille
and not remember how he got there.

Arthur Trent's dream eroded as they usually do. It began simply enough; he and his wife, Audrey, were mugged as they walked home from dinner at a Chinese restaurant in uptown New Orleans. The robber took Trent's wallet and his wife's purse, and ran to a waiting car a couple of blocks away. Trent gave chase until he realized that although the mugger had shown no weapon, the same might not be true of whoever was driving that car. He watched in helpless fury as the robbers drove away. "We'll pass by the police," said Mrs. Trent. The Second District station was not far away.

The police took their story and their conflicting descriptions of the criminals, then assigned them a case number and shooed them back into the humid night. All was now quiet but for the rustling of the wind in the palms and palmetto fronds, and the rumble of the Magazine Street bus. A fat moon glowed behind low clouds, and raindrops dripped from the flowers of the crepe myrtle trees. Trent looked around, perplexed. "That's it?" he asked.

"What did you expect them to do?" said his wife.


HA
HA
HA
HA
HA

"That's *it*? That's all they're going to do?"

"What did you expect?"

"I don't know," said Trent, shaking his head. He was bothered more by the police's lack of enthusiasm than by the mugging itself. They walked slowly back home, staying to well-lighted streets and starting at every sound. When they got home, their half of the house looked dark and frightening from the sidewalk; for a long while, Trent suspected, he would leave a light burning all night. If the landlord had allowed pets, Trent might even have bought a big dog. He went to bed that night bitter and resentful. He tossed restlessly for a long time before he fell asleep.

He was awakened by the doorbell. He sat up and squinted his eyes at the clock; it was only four thirty. He grimaced and decided not to answer the doorbell, but then he thought he really ought to. It might be the police with his wallet. He threw on a robe and went barefoot to the door. "Yes?" he called. "Who is it?"

A deep voice answered. "A friend," it said.

Trent opened the door, realizing as he did so that he might possibly be falling for one of the older tricks in the book. Fortunately, this time it *was* a friend. A tall man stood there, dressed handsomely in white, with black leather boots, a ten-gallon hat, two holstered pistols, and a black mask hiding his eyes. Trent gasped.

The man in white raised a hand and smiled. "Don't be alarmed by the mask," he said. "I'm a friend of law and order."

Yeah, your right, thought Trent. "Come in," he said in a shaky voice.

The Lone Ranger came into the Trents' living room. "I understand you were robbed earlier tonight," he said.

"Yes. I reported it to the police, but they said there was really very little they could do."

The Lone Ranger nodded. "That's why I've come. Someone has to make certain that justice is done. Tonto is making camp outside of town."

"Outside of town? Outside of town is thirty miles away."

The man in white frowned. "It was easier in the old days. Now I spend most of my time just commuting."

"You could spend the rest of the night here," said Trent. "We have an extra bedroom. And Silver?"

"He's tied up in the driveway. I'm grateful for your hospitality, Mr. Trent, and I'll get to work first thing in the morning."

"Sunup," said Trent with satisfaction. "What you call daybreak."

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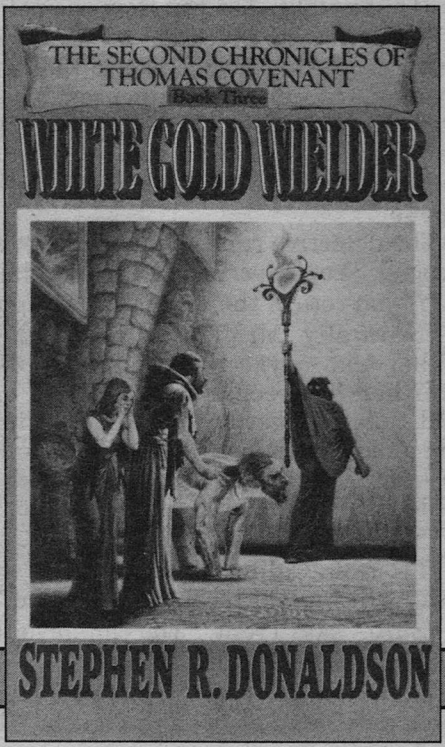

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The Lone Ranger smiled. "No, about ten, really. And I'll need a good breakfast. You can't neglect the importance of good nutrition."

"No, indeed," murmured Trent, as he showed the masked man to the spare room. He wondered how he was going to explain this to his wife. He decided to wait until she woke up in the morning.

About seven o'clock, with the sun already warming up the day, the doorbell rang again. Once more Trent padded slowly through the house. There was a man in a rumpled suit standing on the porch, examining the shuttered windows with idle curiosity. "Yes?" said Trent.

"You're Mr. Trent? You were mugged last night?" said the man.

"That's right. Are you from the police?"

"I'm a private investigator, Mr. Trent. My name's Sam Spade, and I'm offering to track down that wallet of yours. I get twenty-five dollars a day plus expenses, but here's what I'll do. I'll find your wallet for you, Mr. Trent, for thirty-five percent of whatever you had in it."

Trent smiled. "I had about eleven dollars in that wallet, Mr. Spade."

The detective rubbed his long chin and grinned. "You're good," he said. "You're *very* good. I'll take the twenty-five and expenses."

"*If* you return the wallet and the purse," said Trent.

"Naturally, Mr. Trent. Now, look here: maybe I'll find your wallet and maybe I won't; I won't tell you that every case I've ever had has been a success. But I earn my twenty-five dollars and I stand a better chance of getting your property back than the police. Let's just say I have my own methods. So what I need to know, Mr. Trent, is if I can bunk in here until we find out which way this matter is going to go."

"You want to stay here?"

"I'm from California, Mr. Trent," said Spade. "I came because I thought I might be able to help you."

"Sure," said Trent. "You can have the couch."

Spade nodded. "That's fine."

Well, thought Trent, I have the Lone Ranger in the extra bedroom and Sam Spade on the couch. What a swell breakfast it was going to be.

It didn't take long to find out what would happen next. The doorbell rang again and Trent sighed as he answered it. There was another man, this one unmasked and unrumpled. He wore a jacket with an emblem—a jet plane and the letters SQ. Trent's

eyes opened wide and he fell back a step. "Oh, my God. It's Captain Midnight."

"That's right. I've come to offer my assistance."

"This is wonderful," said Trent, allowing Captain Midnight to pass by into the living room. "I was telling my wife last night that all sense of law and order seems to have vanished, and now I have y'all to help me. But, uh, Captain, there's someone in the spare room already and someone else on the couch."

"That's all right," said the leader of the Secret Squadron, "I can just curl up on the floor tonight. That is, of course, if we haven't found your wallet by then." Both men smiled.

About eight o'clock there was another caller. Trent wondered who it would be this time. His imagination was beginning to run away with him. He peered through the peephole and saw a well-dressed young man. Trent didn't recognize him at all. "Yes?" he called. "Who is it?"

"My name is Lamont Cranston, Mr. Trent."

Trent opened the door. "Why, you're The Shadow!" he said.

The young man looked unhappy. "You don't know that, Mr. Trent," said the wealthy man-about-town. "Nobody knows that."

"Uh huh, Mr. Cranston, you're right. I must have had you confused with someone else. Please come in." Cranston entered the house, clouded Trent's mind, and nobody ever saw The Shadow in New Orleans again.

It was a nice, clear Saturday morning, and Trent introduced his wife to their three—no, four—guests. Mrs. Trent made toast and coffee for the Lone Ranger, Sam Spade, and Captain Midnight. There was no sign of Lamont Cranston except for some sardonic laughter far away. While they were eating, the doorbell sounded another time. They all looked at each other and shrugged. Nobody was expecting more company; they'd all left their sidekicks at camp, outside of town. Trent and his wife went quickly to the front door. There was a tall, good-looking man with a neat mustache, a red uniform, a flat-brimmed hat, and a big dog. "I was wishing I could get a dog like that," said Trent.

"There isn't another dog in the world like Yukon King," said the man in the Mountie uniform.

"And you would be—?"

"Sergeant Preston," said the man.

"Of course, forgive me, I should have known. This is my lovely wife, Audrey."

"How do you do, ma'am?" said Sergeant Preston.

"Just fine," said Mrs. Trent. She was excited.

"Well," said Trent, "the landlord has this thing about pets."

Sergeant Preston looked offended. "Yukon King is *not* a pet," he said firmly.

Trent shook his head sadly. "He's a dog. He's a pet."

"He's a trusty companion," said the Mountie. "What about that horse in your driveway?"

Mrs. Trent shook her head. "The horse is transportation. The dog is a pet. We're sorry, our landlord has been very clear about this. If we could get permission, we'd buy a dog of our own. Then your lovely animal could stay here. But, as my husband said, we're sorry."

"So am I, Mrs. Trent. I was hoping that we could be of service. We've come a long way."

"I understand that," said Trent, "and we're grateful, Sergeant. Give our regards to Canada."

"I'll do that," said Sergeant Preston, who saluted smartly and went off with his malamute into the golden haze of the morning. The decision about dogs had to stand, and it was regrettable. Because of it, later in the day Trent had to turn away Corporal Rusty and his dog, Nick and Nora Charles and theirs, and a kid named Jeff with his collie. Trent was sorry to see them all go.

As it was, Trent thought, he could not ask for a better team of defenders than that assembled under his roof. Even still, the stream of heroic visitors did not end. After breakfast, the first to ring the doorbell was a darkly tanned man wearing a safari outfit. Trent didn't need to go to the door; Sam Spade did it for him. "Yeah?" asked Spade.

"Are you Mr. Trent?" asked the man in the safari outfit.

"No, Mr. Trent's my employer, but you can tell me what you're after."

"I'd heard that he had some difficulty last night, and I thought there was something I could do."

Spade wore a dubious look. "Do you have a name?" he asked.

"Dr. Thomas Reynolds."

Spade squinted his eyes for a moment. "You rest it here for a minute while I check." Spade closed the door and went up to Trent. "He says he's a doctor named Thomas Reynolds. I've never heard of him."

Trent shook his head. "I don't know him, either," he said.

"Ramar of the Jungle," said Captain Midnight.

"Oh, gee," said Trent. He hurried to the door. "I'm sorry, Dr. Reynolds, please make yourself at home. Let me take your pith helmet." Ramar shook hands with him and took a seat on the

couch next to Mrs. Trent, who was watching television and crocheting.

"Say, Mr. Trent," said Spade, "do you have anything to drink with a little edge to it?"

"There's some beer in the refrigerator," said Trent.

"No, it's gone," came the hollow voice of The Shadow.

"I don't suppose any of y'all would run out to the 7-Eleven?" asked Trent. The heroes looked away in embarrassment.

"It's okay, Arthur," said his wife, "we have to go get groceries later anyway. We'll pick up beer."

"I never touch alcoholic beverages," said the Lone Ranger.

"I do," said Sam Spade, grinning wolfishly.

It seemed time that they begin organizing their efforts. "Perhaps we should divide the city among us," said Ramar.

"Maybe you do that in the jungle, Doc," said Spade, "but that won't get us very far here. First we ought to get every last detail that Mr. and Mrs. Trent can recall. There's bound to be something, some fact, something they've overlooked that can help us track down those stick-up boys."

"We told everything we knew to the police," said Mrs. Trent.

"Mr. Spade is right," said the Lone Ranger. "Mrs. Trent, please stay here in the living room and tell me everything that happened.

Mr. Trent, why don't you go into the kitchen and give your story to Captain Midnight? Then we'll compare notes. If we can get a reliable description of the car or the robbers, we can narrow down the suspects."

"Narrow down the suspects?" said Trent, dismayed. "The suspects right now are the whole Orleans Parish telephone book."

"Surely you can describe them by sex and by race," said Captain Midnight. "That eliminates three-quarters of the population right there."

"That's a hell of a lot of progress for just a couple of minutes," said Sam Spade.

"All right," said Trent doubtfully. He followed Midnight into the kitchen and gave him all the particulars, just as he had given them to the police. He could tell them what kind of car it had been, what color, and maybe two or three numbers from the license plate.

When he finished, Trent returned to the living room. Just then the doorbell rang. "Here we go again," said Mrs. Trent.

Her husband went to the door. There was a man wearing a tan trench coat with a hat pulled down over his eyes. "I'm looking for Velda," said the man.

"Velma?" asked Trent.

"No," said Sam Spade. "Moose Malloy was looking for Velma. That was one of Marlowe's cases. *He's* looking for Velda. His secretary."

"Who is that?" whispered Mrs. Trent.

"That's Mike Hammer," said Spade.

"Nobody here named Velda," said Trent.

Hammer looked into the living room. "What are you pansies up to? Mardi Gras? Or are you getting together a softball team?" He snorted and turned away from the door. "I knew this neighborhood didn't look right," he muttered.

Trent closed the door behind him. "Mike Hammer, huh? I was kind of hoping for Travis McGee."

Mrs. Trent shuddered. "I don't like that Mr. Hammer. He scares me."

Sam Spade smiled in a friendly way. "I know," he said. "He scares me a little, too."

Ramar of the Jungle stood up. "The important thing to decide now—" He was interrupted by a loud squeal of tires. A long, sleek, black automobile flashed by the house; there was no room to park at the curb, so the driver rode it up onto the neutral ground, next to the azaleas. A young man leaped out of the passenger's door,

dodged through the traffic, and ran up the steps to the Trents' front door. The black car waited, its engine throttled down to a throaty growl.

Trent opened the front door. The young man was wearing a hat and coat, a bit much for the Louisiana climate, and a mask over his eyes. "Mr. Trent?" he asked. "I've had word—" He saw something in the living room and brushed right by. "Uncle John!" he cried.

The Lone Ranger looked up, startled, and reached out heartily to grasp the young man's hand. "Britt, how good to see you!" he said.

"I must say, you're looking fit," said the young man.

"Are you really his uncle?" asked Mrs. Trent.

"He's my grand-nephew, really," said the Lone Ranger. "The Green Hornet, and I'm very proud of him."

"Is that Kato out there in the car?" asked Captain Midnight.

"Yes," said the Hornet. "Will there be room—"

"We're running out of room pretty damn fast," said Trent. He was beginning to think that things were getting out of hand. "I don't want to sound ungrateful or anything, but we're not rich people by any means, and—"

The Green Hornet raised a hand. "That's all right, Mr. Trent. I can stay here, I won't take much space, and Kato can get a motel room somewhere."

"I guess that's okay," said Trent sourly.

Mrs. Trent considered, and then gave the Hornet directions so that Kato could find Tulane Avenue. "That will take him by a whole lot of motels," she said. "Only some of them he might not want to stay in, if you know what I mean."

The Hornet laughed. "Nobody'll bother with Kato, don't you worry about him."

The telephone rang. "Hello?" said Trent.

"Mr. Trent? This is Sky King. I received—"

"Sorry," said Trent, "wrong number." And he slammed the receiver down.

It was lunchtime. Mrs. Trent started to make sandwiches, but she ran out of everything. Trent had to call up and order a dozen roast beef poor boys to go. "Mrs. Trent," asked Captain Midnight, "do you have any Ovaltine?"

She sighed. "We'll pick some up at the Piggly Wiggly," she said.

When Trent came back with the sandwiches, he was glad to see that the Black Beauty was gone, and that the heroes—he'd lost track of how many there were now—were seriously discussing

how they should attack the problem. He had no doubt that such an invincible army of guardians would return his property without delay.

Then the doorbell rang again. "Jesus!" cried Trent. He was getting jumpy. There was a tall western gunfighter standing there. He offered Trent a business card. Only one gunfighter, to Trent's knowledge, did that sort of thing: *Have Gun, Will Travel. Wire Paladin, San Francisco.* Trent took a deep breath and just gestured that Paladin should come in. "I always thought Wire was your first name," he said.

The gunfighter stared at him for a few seconds. "It's not," he said. There were a few tense moments when it became evident that the Lone Ranger had no use at all for the gunfighter, but at last they settled down to a cheerless truce; they had, after all, a common purpose.

The Lone Ranger had been tacitly awarded chairmanship of this committee of heroes. "Mr. Spade," he said, "you and Captain Midnight can obtain a list of all automobiles that fit the description given by Mr. Trent, and registered in Orleans Parish."

"That might take a while," said Captain Midnight.

"Remember," said Spade, "it's Saturday."

"The law doesn't sleep or take holidays," said the Lone Ranger. Sam Spade shook his head ruefully, but the Ranger didn't notice. "At the same time, Ramar and the Hornet can get a computer printout of all automobiles having license numbers with the numbers Mr. Trent remembers, also registered in Orleans Parish."

"That still leaves a few thousand cars," said the Green Hornet.

"Yes," said Ramar, "but after we cross-index the two lists, there shouldn't be many likely suspects. And we do have descriptions of the robbers, however slight."

Trent felt hopeful again. For a while, he had begun to think that nothing could be done, even by these great men.

"Maybe I'm just a mug," said Sam Spade, "but I want to say it again. It's Saturday, and getting these lists isn't going to be fun."

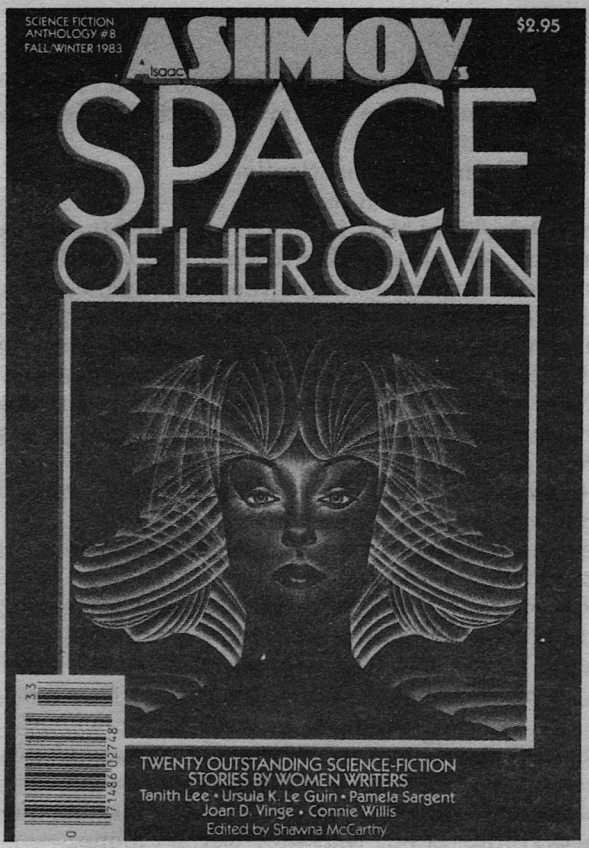
"Living in a land without law and order isn't fun, either," said the Lone Ranger.

"What shall I do?" asked the The Shadow.

Everyone looked around; it was spooky, hearing the voice and yet seeing no source. It was apparent that not only Trent had forgotten that Cranston was still in the room.

"You stay here and handle any new developments," said Captain Midnight. The Shadow laughed mirthlessly.

"Meanwhile," said the Lone Ranger, "Paladin and I will ques-



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tion the police and merchants in the area, to see if robbers matching the descriptions have committed other crimes in this neighborhood recently."

"Great!" said Trent enthusiastically.

"What time is it?" asked Ramar.

"It's almost two," said Mrs. Trent. She changed the channel and began watching *Mr. Moto Takes A Vacation,* with Peter Lorre. Trent was mildly surprised that neither the Japanese sleuth nor Charlie Chan had come to his aid. He started making a mental list of all those champions who hadn't come, who obviously thought it wasn't important enough. Some heroes *they* were, thought Trent. Probably wouldn't stir from their fortresses and secret caves unless the matter involved at least a sultan or a millionaire.

"We'd better get going, then," said the Green Hornet. "A good part of the day is already gone."

"We'll meet back here this evening and go over what we've learned," said Captain Midnight.

They trooped out of the house—Trent counted them, remembering to tally in The Shadow, and there were seven. "Set your minds at ease," the Lone Ranger told him. "Leave everything to us." Trent loved the man even more than when they'd both been younger.

After they left, the Trents sat for a moment on the couch in silence. They didn't know quite what to say to each other; it had been a remarkable day. "Mr. Trent?" came the disembodied voice. With a start, Trent recalled that they weren't alone.

"Who is it?" cried Trent in mock fear. He wanted Cranston to believe that his secret identity was safe. It was a harmless conceit.

"You know very well who I am. There is nothing for me to do here this afternoon. I think I may be of more help elsewhere. I will return later, with the others."

"What shall I tell them, if they ask where you've gone?"

Once more they heard The Shadow's sepulchral laughter. "Tell them I've gone where none of them can follow." Then there was the sound of the front door opening and closing.

"That's nice," said Mrs. Trent. "Now we have the house all to ourselves again. What do you feel like doing?"

Trent chewed his lip for a moment. He was a feeling a strange mixture of emotions, wonder and annoyance at the same time. "I feel like barring the door," he said.

What they did instead was go shopping. They bought a supply of food to feed twelve people—there were seven heroes and the

two of them, of course, but Trents was wise enough to suppose that a few more visitors might show up that evening. They had to spend the money they'd put aside for their utility bill. After that, Trent went to neighbors and friends and relatives, borrowing pillows and blankets. This matter was turning into a practical nightmare; the logistics of the situation might have confounded Eisenhower.

"Just be thankful," his wife told him, crocheting away in front of a rerun of *Three's Company*.

"Believe me, I am. Barely had I gotten the words out of my mouth, about this being a crazy time to be alive, and that justice was gone forever, and all of that, and these magnificent men began pitching in without a thought of reward."

"Well, except for Sam Spade."

"Well," said Trent, "yeah, except for Spade."

"What I meant," said Mrs. Trent, "was be thankful for who *hasn't* come. I mean, like Godzilla, for one."

Trent laughed. "Don't be silly. That's science fiction. I'd hardly put Godzilla in the same—"

The doorbell rang. Trent looked fearfully at his wife. Would Godzilla ring the doorbell? Trent went cautiously to see. He opened the door to a figure wearing a space suit and helmet. Behind the man was a gigantic metal robot with one foot in Mrs. Trent's flowering lantana. The man removed his helmet. "My name is Klaatu," he said.

"I know." Trent looked at the robot. He wondered what the landlord would say about *that*. Gort stood there like an ominous sentinel, which is just what he was.

"May I come in?" asked Klaatu.

"Well, you see—"

Klaatu took that as an invitation. He entered and smiled in greeting to Mrs. Trent. "I have a small device," he said. "It may prove valuable in your quest." He handed a small box to Trent. "I must go now. Would you like me to leave Gort here, in case you need me?"

"Well," said Trent, gulping, "that is, you see—"

"I'll just take him with me, then," said Klaatu.

"Thank you, thank you very much," said Trent. He watched Klaatu speak a few words to Gort, and the two moved off down the avenue. It says something of the temperament of the average Orleanian, who has seen almost everything, that the giant robot caused no disruption to traffic as it lumbered along behind its master.

"So what did he give you?" asked Mrs. Trent.

"I don't know," her husband answered. He looked at the box in his hand. "Damn it, you'd think he'd learned his lesson. That's just how he got shot in the movie, coming out with some otherworldly gimmick and expecting us to understand what it is." There were flaps folded down inside the box, and Trent pulled them open. The box unfolded to a larger size and changed from red to orange. There were more flaps, and Trent unfolded them again, and again it changed color, from orange to yellow. Trent kept unfolding the box, and it got larger and larger, and it changed to green, blue, indigo, and violet. When he went past violet, the box continued to get bigger and changed into colors Trent had never seen before.

"What the hell is it?" cried Mrs. Trent. The thing took up most of the space in the living room, and there was no end in sight.

"I don't know," said Trent miserably.

"You should have asked him. It's your fault. Now, fold it up again and leave it alone."

"I don't know if I *can* fold it up again."

"You damn well better."

Trent tried, but he couldn't see how it could be made smaller again. The flaps only seemed to go in one direction. He was about to start hammering at it when Mandrake the Magician came in through the open door. "Stand back," said the man in the elegant evening clothes; Trent did as he was told. Mandrake gestured hypnotically, made a few other passes with his hands, and the box was restored to its original size. "A clever design," said the magician admiringly.

"It's not of this Earth," said Trent.

"Oh," said Mandrake. Standing behind him was Lothar, huge and powerful.

"Mandrake," said Mrs. Trent, "you're more than welcome to stay, but we're having a problem with accommodations here. The Green Hornet has his companion, Kato, staying at a motel. I'm sure he wouldn't mind sharing the room with Lothar."

Mandrake understood the situation at once and spoke to Lothar. Both agreed to the plan; Trent gave Lothar the proper fare and told him to take the streetcar uptown and transfer to the Tulane Avenue bus. They watched the giant duck his head in the doorway and stride off toward the streetcar stop. "Won't nobody shove ahead of him in line," said Trent.

"Not likely," said Mandrake, smiling. "I suppose I should just wait for the others to return." He joined Mrs. Trent on the couch,

and watched television with her. He seemed like a very gracious man.

The late afternoon passed slowly, and the evening began with a sudden thunderstorm. Rain pattered against the windows and flooded the street, and then it was gone. The air was a little cooler as the sun went down, but the humidity rose. Trent opened the windows, and the air smelled damp and green and heavy. Mandrake the Magician helped Mrs. Trent make stuffed crabs, and she made a bread pudding with whiskey sauce from stale loaves of French bread. Too late she asked herself if the Lone Ranger would object to the sauce on the dessert; if he did, there were strawberries he could have instead.

Sam Spade and Captain Midnight returned first, empty-handed. "They said there wasn't anything they could do until Monday," said Midnight.

"I told you," said Spade, chewing on a matchstick. "There isn't even anybody in the office today."

Trent took the news hard. "You mean y'all are going to have to wait?"

"Looks like it, pal," said Spade.

Mrs. Trent put a hand on her husband's shoulder. "Take it easy, Arthur," she said.

"But—"

"We have to follow the proper procedures," said Captain Midnight. "You're right, though, it wasn't like this in the old days."

"Sure, it was," said Spade. "It's always been like this."

Ramar of the Jungle and the Green Hornet came home with the same story. "Monday," said the Hornet, shrugging. There was nothing else to be said.

The Lone Ranger was disappointed. "Some of the local merchants have been robbed recently," he said. "We can't be absolutely certain that it's the same men. And the incidence of purse-snatching is higher than I imagined. This delay won't make it more difficult to find the outlaws, Mr. Trent, but I can understand your frustration." Paladin, meanwhile, sat down in one corner and said nothing. There was no sign of The Shadow, but all the heroes were pleased to see Mandrake.

Mrs. Trent busied herself with dinner, and Mr. Trent sat quietly and tried to master his emotions. He had already spent much more for food and other expenses than he had had in the wallet. He was losing money on this whole proposition, but he couldn't say anything because now there were important principles involved. He wished more than anything that he had a clue as to

what those principles were.

It was a very nice meal (the Lone Ranger ate the strawberries); afterward there was nothing to do but watch television. Sam Spade said he wanted to go down to the French Quarter, and that he'd be home early. Both the Ranger and the Green Hornet rinsed out their masks in the bathroom sink. The Hornet didn't seem to mind sitting around the living room unmasked, but the Lone Ranger disguised himself as an old prospector. The two masks hung from the shower-curtain rod like limp bats. Trent prayed for control. At bedtime he passed out blankets and pillows, and left a key under the welcome mat for Spade and The Shadow. He realized that he'd rather be at the motel, watching closed-circuit movies with Kato and Lothar.

The next morning a few of the great men went to church, and later they organized a hearts tournament to wile away the idle hours. Trent watched and felt a peculiar coldness. He retired to his bedroom and read a few chapters of a popular novel. Mrs. Trent boiled crawfish for a big lunch, and Mandrake and Sam Spade helped her in the kitchen. None of them realized how near to nervous collapse their host was getting.

Sunday afternoon televised sports took them into the evening. The Shadow excused himself again, but Spade stayed in, saying that he'd seen enough of Bourbon Street in one night. Trent wished that he had a vial of Valium in the medicine chest.

The crisis came at eight o'clock. When the doorbell rang, Trent almost leaped out of his chair. He crossed the living room and peered through the peephole. It was Captain Gallant of the French Foreign Legion. All Trent said was, "Hungry?"

"Why, yes, sir, I am," said Captain Gallant.

"Figures," said Trent. He just jerked his thumb to indicate where Gallant's colleagues were gathered; then Trent went into the kitchen and leaned his head against the wall beside the refrigerator. He heard the doorbell ring again. He didn't move; someone else answered the door. At last Trent looked out of the kitchen. Sam Spade was coming toward him. "Who is it?" asked Trent.

"Believe me, Mr. Trent," said Spade, "you don't want me to tell you."

Trent just blinked. "What?"

"You don't want to know who's at the door. I never thought I'd see it, myself."

Trent pushed by the detective and went to the door. He wished he hadn't; Spade had been right. There was a boy standing there

with a funnel on his head and a big dog. The dog wasn't the problem; the problem was that neither the boy nor the dog was real. They were animated. Trent found himself shivering uncontrollably. He turned around and faced all of his boyhood idols in the living room. "Out!" he screamed.

"But, Mr. Trent—"

"OUT!"

They looked sheepishly at each other, then stood up and moved slowly to the door. Mrs. Trent seemed embarrassed. "Arthur," she said.

"I want every one of them out of here before I count ten!"

"We're sorry," said the Green Hornet, "we're sorry if we did anything to upset you."

Trent's face was flushed. He was unable to say anything more; he just stared at the Hornet. One by one, the men left the house. Trent watched, with the feeling that he was irrevocably separating himself from everything he had ever believed in. Mandrake paused to ask Mrs. Trent a question. "Would your first name happen to be Helen?"

"No," she said sadly, "why do you ask?" He just shook his head and smiled. He followed Paladin out the door.

When they had all left, Trent sank down on the couch and covered his face with his hands. He took a few deep breaths, and then he felt a lot better. His life, his home, everything was now back to normal, he told himself. He didn't really know if that was the truth.

The next two hours passed as peacefully as they did every Sunday night. Then just before the evening news, the doorbell rang one last time. Trent let out a sigh and went to the door; he was surprised to see the Lone Ranger there again. "This is yours, Mr. Trent," said the masked man. He gave Trent the wallet and the purse.

"How—"

"You have Lamont Cranston to thank for this," said the Ranger. "He visited the scene of the crime. He traced your route home from the restaurant. You walked by a bank with a twenty-four hour computer teller, didn't you?"

"Yes," said Trent, "we stopped there to get money before we went to the restaurant."

"The robbers have been mugging innocent people as they left the computer teller. The Shadow caught them in the act of holding up another couple tonight, and they confessed to robbing you the other night. They told him where they had thrown your property.

I'm afraid the money is missing, but your identification and other papers are all here. The guilty parties are right now in custody at the Second District police station, and the authorities will be getting in contact with you."

"Ranger," said Trent, "I owe you an apology. I owe y'all an apology. I—"

The Lone Ranger smiled. "That's all right, Mr. Trent. We're all needed elsewhere, in any event. I have to be going, too. Here. When you look at this, remember that there *is* law and order and justice, wherever citizens are interested enough to preserve them." He saluted Mrs. Trent, then turned and strode away through the darkness. "Hi-yo Silver! Away!" The Lone Ranger swung into the saddle. Silver reared and pawed the fresh, flower-scented air, and galloped off down the avenue, westward, forever out of Arthur Trent's life.

"Say," said his wife, "who *was* that masked man?"

"Don't you know?"

"Sure, I know. That was Clayton Moore."

Trent looked at the silver bullet in his hand, and his wallet. "Audrey," he said sadly, "you weren't paying attention." He always knew that he was the romantic one in the family. He and his wife went back inside, and he shut the door. They had a lot of straightening-up to do. ●

WIDOW'S WALK

Tigleas was born in deep space,
burst from the belly of a refugee.
Tigleas was but a minor event
in the collapse of a star.
And what is he to me,
This foul-mouthed bastard bred
of off-world genes,
this man who has plundered bedrooms
for hearts and cherries?

Heartless Tigleas, there is no widow's walk for me;
no time or space for me to perceive you,
to weigh my feelings and adjust
while you slowly metamorphose
from scudd of white to
towering, many-masted ship.

Tonight my bed,
tomorrow a well warmed tangle of arms and legs
on Sullivan's World,
and back again,
barely before the wet spot dries

Cold was my great-grandmother's bed,
and cold her heart.
Yet I envy her long vigil
and her right of choice.
Given time enough, just once,
and I might yet, like her,
yield my man a home
where only shadows wait.

—John De Camp

VIEWPOINT

LIGHT YEARS AND DARK: SCIENCE FICTION SINCE 1960

by Michael Bishop

The author last appeared in our pages in the November 1983 issue with his controversial novella "The Gospel According to Gamaliel Crucis." He has just edited an anthology, *Light Years and Dark, the Berkley Book of Modern Speculative Fiction,* which mainly features authors who came into their prominence in the SF field after 1960. This essay is an independent examination of those years.

art: Robert Walters

VIEWPOINT

INTRODUCTION

"Light Years and Dark: Science Fiction Since 1960" was written for The Third Annual Emory Science Fiction and Fantasy Symposium sponsored by the University Center Board and the on-campus science fiction club Psi Phi at Emory University in Atlanta. It was delivered on Saturday, February 12, 1983, the second day of the three-day symposium, in one of the main autioria of White Hall on the Emory Campus. Along with Robert Bloch, David Gerrold, Gerald W. Page, and Hank Reinhardt, Michael Bishop was a featured guest at the symposium.

I have taken as my topic "science fiction since 1960" because through most of that otherwise unmemorable year—excepting, of course, the election of John F. Kennedy to the presidency—I was fourteen years old; and fourteen, as every dedicated fantasy and SF reader well knows, is the Golden Age of Science Fiction. Further, I knew that I would be ill-advised to try to entertain you for thirty or forty minutes with either my uncanny impersonation of a dying Ewok (the gratuitous slaughter of teddy bears has always affected me sentimentally) or my profoundly insightful thoughts on the mythic substructure of the Gor novels by John Norman.

All right, then, my topic is "science fiction since 1960," twenty-three years that are both light and dark. Is it possible, some of you are asking yourselves, to cover twenty-three years of genre literary activity in the space of a single half hour? A few of you are already heading for the exits, while still others are putting to good use that sanity-saving student trick of sleeping with your eyes open. Fortunately, the glazed-over, gape-mouthed expressions on your faces disturb me not a whit. You see, I practiced my delivery of this paper in the walk-in aquarium of the Federal Fish Hatchery in

Photo: Jay Kay Klein

Warm Springs, Georgia, where it was extraordinarily well received by several spotted gar and a small school of learning-disabled brim.

Here are the major headings of my talk, in the order in which I intend to discuss them: 1) The New Wave, those trail-blazing writers of the mid-1960s to the early 1970s, many of them British, whose major concern, according to Donald A. Wollheim, was—and I quote—"The overthrow of all standards and morals." 2) The rise of the original anthology series, including *Orbit, New Dimensions, Universe,* and, of course, *Dangerous Visions*. 3) The resuscitation, dominance, burn-out, and subsequent "retirement" of Robert Silverberg. 4) The multiple stigmata of Roger Elwood. 5) The curious case of the Labor Day Group: does it, or does it not, exist? 6) The disconcerting triumph of the trilogy as the preeminent SF and fantasy publishing package. And 7), is there hope for tomorrow, and why not?

Let me begin by pointing out, altogether apocryphally,

that in December of 1959 Robert A. Heinlein, Arthur C. Clarke, and Lester del Rey met secretly in the editorial offices of *Astounding Science Fiction* with John W. Campbell. The purpose of their meeting was to chart the course of both the magazine itself and SF in general in the decade just about to begin. Their first decision was to change the name of *Astounding* to *Analog*, primarily to save printer's ink and to boost the magazine's reputation among the hundreds of computer scientists on its subscription lists. Campbell, Clarke, Heinlein, and del Rey also determined that the United States should put a man on the moon before the end of the coming decade.

Looking around, they settled on Harlan Ellison.

Ellison, I should add, so resented his selection for this dubious honor that, behind the scenes, he began actively promoting a variety of science fiction that Campbell, Clarke, Heinlein, and del Rey would find deeply abhorrent. Very slowly, then, across the

"Many of the New Wave stories produced in the mid to late 1960s have an instrospective—indeed, a *claustrophobic*—quality that sometimes seems little more than an embracing of existential despair. The best New Wave stories, however, are both challenging and unpredictable—in the same way that an intelligent human mind is both challenging and unpredictable."

Atlantic Ocean in the England of Chaucer, Shakespeare, H.G. Wells, and Ringo Starr, the New Wave began to evolve. It's a good thing, too, because dating its beginning from May, 1964, with Michael Moorcock's assumption of the editorship of the British magazine *New Worlds,* I can skip right over 1960, 1961, 1962, and 1963.

Those of you in the audience who associate the term New Wave with Elvis Costello, Devo, the B-52s, and Debby Boone may be wondering what its significance is to the science fiction world. What did it mean? What was its program? Who were its—please pardon the expression—superstars? And what was its most pressing and controversial issue during its relatively brief heyday, say, from mid-1964 to the spectacular landing of the lunar module Eagle?

Let me take the last question first. Perhaps the most perplexing puzzle confronting American readers of New Wave SF was the correct pronunciation of the surname of the important British writer J. G. (for James Graham) Ballard. Is it *BAL'lard* or *Bal-LARD'*? We Americans tended to favor an emphasis on the first, or more westerly, syllable, while residents of the British Isles invariably favored an emphasis on the second, or more easterly, syllable. Lester del Rey, on the other hand, wanted to solve the problem by pretending that J.G. Ballard—however you choose to pronounce the surname—did not exist.

James Graham Bal*lard* does exist, however, and along with Brian Aldiss, Michael Moorcock, and Thomas M. Disch, he is one of the few, uh, superstars of the New Wave to survive its so-called Glory Years. Having said this, I now must try to tell you something concrete and useful about the nature of New Wave science fiction.

Do you remember Frederic Brown's story "Knock"? It begins,

There is a sweet little horror story that is only two sentences long:

VIEWPOINT

"The last man on Earth sat alone in a room. There was a knock on the door . . . "

A traditional SF writer would conclude this story by opening that door to reveal 1) the last woman on Earth, or 2) a time traveler from the past, or 3) a colonist just returned from Far Andromeda, or 4) a visitor from an adjacent continuum, or 5) an invading alien. A New Wave writer like Ballard or Moorcock or Disch, on the other hand, would either identify the knocking at that door as a singularly realistic hallucination or else have the demoralized last man on Earth call aloud, "Go away! I'm trying to determine the statistical probability of suffering a mental breakdown during a protracted period of enforced isolation, and you're upsetting my calculations!"

As a consequence of this narrative strategy, many of the New Wave stories produced in the mid to late 1960s have an introspective—indeed, a *claustrophobic*—quality that sometimes seems little more than an embracing of existential despair. The best New Wave stories, however, are both challenging and unpredictable—in the same way that an intelligent human mind is both challenging and unpredictable. The invading alien at the door may turn out to be a projection of the anguished alter-ego of the last man on Earth, i.e., a surreal but tremendously meaningful encounter with himself. Thomas M. Disch's stories "The Number You Have Reached" and "Moondust, the Smell of Hay, and Dialectical Materialism" are two very good examples of this technique.

And what about Ballard? Well, always a better short story writer than a novelist, in 1966 he made himself a wholly successful novelist by publishing a short story entitled "You and Me and the Continuum" and cleverly referring to it as a "condensed novel." He had his reasons, and I admire his chutzpah as well as his sense of innovation. "You and Me and the Continuum" consists of

twenty-six chapters (one for each letter of the alphabet) of only one or two paragraphs each, and it inaugurated an entire series of such "condensed novels" that, in 1970, Ballard collected in a volume of stunning originality and impact entitled *The Atrocity Exhibition*. That, at any rate, is the British title. In this country it appeared from New Directions as *Love and Napalm: Exports U.S.A.*—but only after the owner of the Doubleday Publishing Company, the house originally scheduled to release it, read Ballard's condensed novels in his company's finished book and was so outraged and offended by them that he ordered almost every copy pulped. You see, Chapter 14 of *The Atrocity Exhibition* is entitled "Why I Want to Make Love to Ronald Reagan," although Ballard has indelicately substituted a brusque Anglo-Saxon verb for the smarmy expression *make love to*. Further, Chapter 15, the concluding section, is entitled "The Assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy Considered as a Downhill Motor Race."

Those of you unfamiliar with the work of J.G. Ballard or somewhat confused by the tone of this presentation—is ol' Bishop on the level, or is he pulling our legs?—may think that I am making this up. I am not. *The Atrocity Exhibition,* a.k.a. *Love and Napalm: Exports U.S.A.,* embodies in a highly successful, literate, and deliberately disorienting, perspective-altering way the most worthwhile goals of the New Wave program. It was *not* wildly popular in this country. Many American readers—I have it on good authority—threw their copies across the room or dropped them on the floor and jumped up and down on them.

"This is not science fiction," these befuddled persons whined. "This is an abstruse kind of pornography, and I am revolted rather than aroused." And, of course, if there is anything worse than irreverent, antitechnological science fiction, it is opaque, anti-erotic pornography. It's like setting off to an art house

to see a European skinflick and arriving in a laundromat to watch pantyhose revolving in a dryer window. Worse, every once in a while, a severed breast or foot tumbles past.

Needless to say, John W. Campbell never published J.G. Ballard's work in *Astounding/Analog,* and Ballard has never won a Hugo or a Nebula Award. Yet I recommend wholeheartedly that you search out copies of *The Atrocity Exhibition* and some of his other collections and novels, including *Low-Flying Aircraft, Vermilion Sands, Crash, High-Rise, The Unlimited Dream Company,* and the very recent *Myths of the Near Future.* Why? What were Ballard and the other New Wave practitioners trying to do?

Two things, I think, the first being to reinvigorate conventional SF, and the second to break down the barriers between SF and mainstream fiction. To accomplish this latter task New Wave writers paid more attention to style, characterization, metaphor, symbol, and psychological verisimilitude than did most of the Old Wave stalwarts. I do not say that in every instance they were *better* writers than the traditionalists, mind you, only that they had extended their concerns beyond mere storytelling—a legitimate and wholly respectable endeavor in its own right—to a broad complex of literary and sociological issues. *The Atrocity Exhibition,* for instance, has a great deal to say in science-fictional terms about contemporary media (radio, television, films, newpapers, etc.), contemporary politics, the bewildering institution of human warfare, and the ambiguous relationship between human beings and their machines, particularly automobiles. Ballard's book may be the most dramatic and insightful sociological study ever written, and I am sure that historians and literary critics two or three centuries from now—if our species survives that long—will find it an infinitely more compelling guide to the

twentieth-century mind set than a dozen learned textbooks on that subject.

Whether your cup of tea or not, the work of J. G. Ballard is going to survive, probably far longer than that of many genre practitioners of the old school, and I have not a single qualm about making this prediction.

In the United States, exemplars of the New Wave approach had their most receptive outlets not in the magazines—*Galaxy, Fantasy & Science Fiction, Analog, Amazing* and *Fantastic*—but in the original anthology series that sprang up hard on the heels of the initial success of Damon Knight's groundbreaking *Orbit* volumes, the first number of which appeared in 1965 from Berkley/Putnam and the final or twenty-first number from Harper & Row in 1980. Harlan Ellison's *Dangerous Visions* appeared in 1968, a controversial volume still in print containing award-winning stories by Philip José Farmer and Samuel R. Delany. In 1970 Delany and Marilyn Hacker's *Quark* series first appeared, along with Harry Harrison's *Nova* and Robert Hoskins's *Infinity,* followed in 1971 by Terry Carr's *Universe* and Robert Silverberg's *New Dimensions.* Ellison's *Again, Dangerous Visions* appeared in 1972, and it is rumored that a final volume, *The Last Dangerous Visions,* to which I myself contributed a story in the spring of 1974, will appear when Ellison has outlived all the contributors and can himself designate the recipients of any ensuing royalty checks. Of all the anthology series I have mentioned, only Carr's *Universe* survives on a regular schedule. Marta Randall took over the editorship of *New Dimensions* from Robert Silverberg, but its ill-fated thirteenth volume—remember the Apollo mission of that number—was scrubbed by Timescape/Pocket Books after bound galleys of the anthology had been sent to several reviewers and writers. This occurred early in 1982.

But it is Damon Knight's *Orbit* series that I want to discuss here. Knight made a

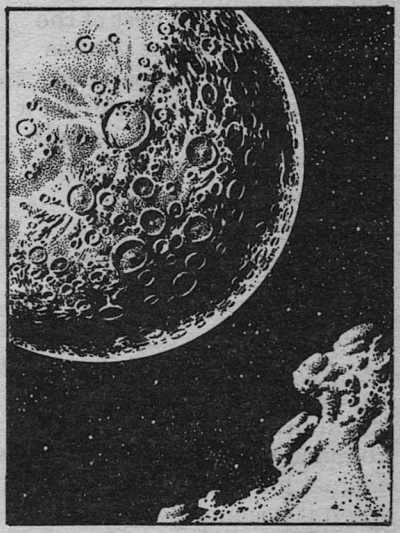
habit of selecting idiosyncratic, highly literary stories with a surprising preponderance of near-future settings, well-sketched characters, and psychological as opposed to physical conflict as the main structuring element. Kate Wilhelm, Gene Wolfe, R.A. Lafferty, and, to a lesser extent, Joanna Russ and Gardner Dozois dominated the contents of these volumes. I myself had selections in the twelfth ("The Windows in Dante's Hell") and fifteenth ("In the Lilliputian Asylum") numbers, but working with Knight, a rigorous editor of considerable learning, finicky tastes, and little inclination to suffer fools gladly, was sometimes a humbling experience. He bounced far more of my submissions than he took, and even Robert Silverberg, an accomplished writer and editor himself, had begun to despair of ever selling Knight anything until he placed the Nebula-Award-winning story "Passengers" in its fourth number. Even in this case, however, Knight made Silverberg do a painstaking rewrite before sending him a contract. And here is what Silverberg wrote to Knight before undertaking the obligatory revision:

> Dear Damon,
> You and your *Orbit* are a great tribulation to me. I suppose I could take "Passengers" and ship it off to Fred Pohl [at *Galaxy* and *If*] and collect my $120 and start all over trying to sell one to you, but I don't want to do that, because this story represents just about the best I have in me, and if I can't get you to take it it's futile to go on submitting others.
> (*The Best of Orbit,* Berkley, 1976, p. 146.)

Damon Knight and his *Orbit* were a tribulation to many of us, but a complete set of the series, Volumes 1 through 21, would represent a fine miniature history of the SF field from 1965 to 1980 and would include many of the most memorable stories published during this period. I ought to add that although Knight's tastes were

persnickety and demanding, sometimes he could come a cropper, too, and that in my opinion the last few books in the series are not as distinctive or as entertaining as the first twelve or fourteen numbers. Furthermore, Knight occasionally rejected a good story that went on to win acclaim in another outlet, for instance, Gardner Dozois's absolutely stunning "A Special Kind of Morning," Gene Wolfe's Nebula-Award-winning "The Island of Doctor Death," Larry Niven's Hugo-Award-winning "Inconstant Moon," and perhaps my own "The House of Compassionate Sharers," which was subsequently anthologized in three different best-of-the-year volumes—although in the case of my story, at least, I confess that I *do* understand why Knight said no and sympathize with his thinking.

All in all, however, I mourn the passing of *Orbit* and regard its decline in popularity and its discontinuance by Harper & Row as demoralizing evidence of the growth of an SF readership impatient with



"... New Wave writers paid more attention to style, characterization, metaphor, symbol, and psychological verisimilitude than did most of the Old Wave stalwarts. I do not say that in every instance they were *better* writers than the traditionalists, mind you, only that they had extended their concerns beyond mere storytelling...."

anything but "strong story values"—as if the best of the *Orbit* stories did not possess this quality in spades—and intolerant of work requiring a degree of intellectual as well as emotional commitment in the reading. Fie on such Philistines, I say. Fie.

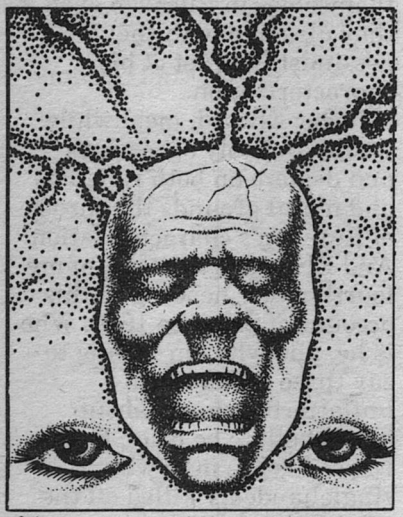
Which brings me again to Robert Silverberg, who between 1968 and 1975 produced no less than fourteen (!) carefully wrought, cleanly written, intellectually stimulating novels, and who abandoned the game in disgust for nearly five years when it became clear that most SF readers would just as soon read adventure-oriented *merde* as heartfelt, true-quill speculations of the sort he was then pouring himself into. Let me be fair, though. Another discouragement was that he could not win either an audience or critical respectability among the mainstream literati who might otherwise be expected to appreciate this kind of serious work. He was caught between Scylla and Charybdis. SF readers ignored his best work because it was deliberately literary, but deliberately literary readers ignored it because it was SF. No wonder the man retired. And when he returned to print in 1980 it was with an immense adventure novel entitled *Lord Valentine's Castle* that sold many, many copies and wound up doing very, very well on the final Hugo ballot. Sad to say, it cannot hold a candle to the serious work produced between 1970 and 1975, titles that include *Downward to the Earth, Tower of Glass, A Time of Changes, Son of Man, The World Inside, The Second Trip, The Book of Skulls* (a tour de force making excellent use of multiple first-person narration), the shatteringly brilliant *Dying Inside, The Stochastic Man,* and *Shadrach in the Furnace.* Looking back on these books and the undeniably humbling artistic legacy they represent, I can do nothing but exhale slowly and shake my head in disbelief and gratitude.

It is impossible to mention Silverberg's self-enforced retirement without adding that Harlan Ellison also

declared in the mid-1970s he would never again permit his work to appear under an SF imprint (besides, as he has pointed out frequently since that time, he is a fantasist rather than an SF writer, a "magic realist" of the Borges/Pynchon/Vonnegut stamp), and that Barry Malzberg also declared in 1976 his intention to depart the field. Malzberg deserves more extended discussion, but in order to keep this essay a manageable length I will say only that he is *not*—as some have accused—a taller and more desperately unhappy clone of Robert Silverberg. He lives in Teaneck, New Jersey, rather than Oakland, California, and not too terribly long ago he published a devastating study of contemporary science fiction called *The Engines of the Night*. This book concludes with a story entitled "Corridors" that I recommend to you as a poignant, thought-provoking account of what it means to make a career writing science fiction. Not every writer ends up like Ruthven in Malzberg's "Corridors," but many do, I fear, and many will certainly recognize aspects of themselves in Ruthven even if they disagree with the pessimistic thrust of his characterization.

Roger Elwood, meanwhile, would probably agree with and deplore on both religious and moral grounds the thrust of Ruthven's characterization. And Elwood is the topic of my fourth major heading in this account of SF since 1960. Who is he, and why am I going to say three or four semi-unflattering things about him? Well, to be brief, Roger Elwood is the man who singlehandedly killed off the original anthology market—with one or two exceptions—for the late 1970s and early 1980s and perhaps for the foreseeable future as well. He came seemingly out of nowhere in 1972—although he had edited several reprint anthologies in the 1960s—and deluged nearly every major publisher in New York and many of the minor ones with proposals for original SF anthologies. By his own estimate he sold eighty such

VIEWPOINT



"I have heard writers say that in today's literary marketplace it is easier to sell a proposal for a trilogy than for a single well-conceived novel with believable characters and a strong original idea. That is not merely sad, it is infuriating. It suggests a readership that would rather stay with an entertaining formula than experiment with self-contained novels that may be more tightly and originally written."

anthologies, and according to Peter Nicholls's *Science Fiction Encyclopedia* at one point in the early to mid-1970s he controlled "a quarter of the total market for SF short stories."

Some of these anthologies had merit, namely, *Future City*, *Saving Worlds* (edited with Virginia Kidd), *Epoch* (edited with Robert Silverberg), and the four volumes of the unusual *Continuum* series. The large majority, however, were—or appeared to be—slapdash efforts, utterly undistinguished in their contents, and their dismal quality did much to turn SF readers and bookbuyers away from the original-anthology package, thus poisoning the well for editors with more discriminating tastes and less provincial standards. Elwood's real home in the publishing world is undoubtedly the religious and inspirational field, where, I believe, he is happily at work today. This bias, however, led him to tell a reporter for one of the Atlanta newspapers that he had left science-fiction editing

because most SF writers are amoral, irreligious, shabbily dressed drug addicts. I was deeply wounded by this characterization because I was afraid I didn't measure up.

After the New Wave, the retirement of Robert Silverberg, and the demise of the original anthology, either through editorial burn-out or the depredations of dozens upon dozens of Elwood anthologies, what happened to the field? Well, as always, new writers came along. In the February, 1981, issue of *Fantasy & Science Fiction,* Thomas M. Disch, once considered a proponent of the New Wave approach and still one of the most iconoclastic writers in the field, lumped a number of us *relatively* recent newcomers together under the label "the Labor Day Group"—because (and I quote) "that is when they are most likely to be found all together," meaning, of course, at the annual World Science Fiction Convention traditionally held over the Labor Day weekend. Those so lumped by Disch include George R.R. Martin, Vonda McIntyre, Jack Dann, Edward Bryant, Tanith Lee, Orson Scott Card, and, by implication if not by outright statement, Joe Haldeman, Gregory Benford, and Gardner Dozois.

Let me say unequivocally that *I* believe there are great chasms of craftsmanship, intent, and outlook separating these writers one from another, and that I, for one, have never—not once—attended a World Science Fiction Convention. Nevertheless, Disch writes,

> "I don't mean to suggest that anything like a cabal is at work, only that a coherent generational grouping exists. . . . Further, I'd suggest that these writers have more in common *as a group* than those (myself among them) who were lumped together under the rubric "New Wave," that they possess something approaching solidarity."

He goes on to say,

> ". . . the work of this latest generation of SF

writers . . . has been unduly and unnecessarily influenced by the clubhouse atmosphere of the SF world and its award systems. A sense of personal vision is rare in their stories, while a sense of writing to please a particular audience, Fandom, is sometimes obtrusively present. . . ."

And he concludes,

". . . Conventions are fun, and trophies decorate the den like nothing else. But for writers (or readers) to frame a standard of excellence based on purely intramural criteria, and to make it their conscious goal to *win an award* is to confuse literature with bowling."

George R.R. Martin mounted a reply to Disch in the December, 1981, issue of *Fantasy & Science Fiction,* and his principal argument was that "this generation of writers, arising in the '70s, represents a fusion of the two warring camps of the '60s," that it has "one foot firmly in the camp of traditional SF, the camp of high technology and high adventure and boundless optimism and tall bright dreams." Yet it is also the generation of Viet Nam, a sociologically committed generation that witnessed the ultimate falure of the New Wave program. As a consequence, what Disch's so-called Labor Day group is about—according to Martin—is "combining the color and verve and unconscious power of the best of traditional SF with the literary concerns of the New Wave. Mating the poet with the rocketeer. Bridging the two cultures." To some extent, at least, I am of Martin's persuasion in this, and I might also note in passing that fairly recently Disch himself wrote an introduction, largely favorable in tone, to my second collection of short stories, *One Winter in Eden,* soon to be published by Arkham House. Meanwhile, I am sending away to George, who lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico, for one of the team bowling shirts that he said he was having made up for last

year's World Con.

Finally—almost finally—I come to the triumph of the trilogy or the series novel. It would be both foolish and downright incorrect to claim that series novels are not a tradition in the science fiction field. Think of E.E. "Doc" Smith's *Lensman* books, or C.S. Lewis's intelligent, theologically grounded space trilogy, or Asimov's *Foundation* novels (to which, this year, he has added a fourth volume), or Delany's *The Fall of the Towers,* or Zelazny's "Amber" quintet, or Frank Herbert's deliberately open-ended "Dune" cycle, which may just be the most popular SF series ever and which undoubtedly represents the principal spur to publishers everywhere to commission, package, and promote trilogies of their own. The "Dune" series began in the 1960s, and unless Frank Herbert suffers cardiac arrest before the decade is over—a fate I do *not,* please believe me, wish upon him—I fully expect it to continue into the 1990s, perhaps concluding in 1996 or so with, say, *Imperial Mortician of Dune.*

In any event, writers who have written or undertaken trilogies or series in recent years include—in no particular order—Ursula K. Le Guin, Frederik Pohl, C.J. Cherryh, Elizabeth A. Lynn, David Gerrold, Joe Haldeman, Brian Aldiss, Robert Silverberg, Paul O. Williams, John Varley, Michael Bishop, M. John Harrison, and Gene Wolfe. The list is by no means exhaustive. The champion trilogy writer of the 1970s, however, has to be Stephen Donaldson, the author of *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant,* who, having completed one popular and therefore lucrative trilogy about his leper hero, permitted Lester del Rey to talk him into doing *another* about the very same thing! Gene Wolfe, a fine writer whom I admire immensely, projected his *The Book of the New Sun* series as a trilogy, but found that he could not contain his structuring concept within three books and so added a fourth volume, a decision that has made for a very untidy trilogy but quite

an impressive artistic achievement. Writers like Wolfe are rare, however, and I would venture to say that *the* most important motivating factor in the planning and execution of trilogies or series novels is not an artistic impulse but a financial one, on the part of the author as well as the publishing house.

Indeed, I have heard writers say that in today's literary marketplace it is easier to sell a proposal for a trilogy than for a single well-conceived novel with believable characters and a strong original idea. That is not merely sad, it is infuriating. It suggests a readership that would rather stay with an entertaining formula than experiment with self-contained novels that may be more tightly and originally written. It also suggests writers who would rather take the safest route, both monetarily and aesthetically, to getting their work in print, writers who apparently regard each new book as an addition to work already written rather than as a new creative enterprise with challenges and rewards all its own.

Is there hope for the SF of tomorrow? That, of course, is an awfully hackneyed question. Its answer is yes and no. The yes and the no both have to do with the writers who have debuted in the field within the last four or five years. At this point, however, I am not qualified to pass judgment on them. I have not read enough of their work, and I do not know in what directions they are likely to set forth. The yes and the no also have to do with the international political situation. If there is to be any hope for tomorrow's SF, or tomorrow's high-fashion designers, or tomorrow's small-business people, or the Future Farmers of America, or tomorrow's anything at all, we will have to survive past today's confrontational politics and foreign-policy machismo to claim that hope and build upon it. Perhaps the literature of SF is one of the tools at our disposal to ensure that we do survive. That, at any rate, is a hope in which I, for one, try very hard to believe. ●

FOR SPACERS SNARLED IN THE HAIR OF COMETS

If you've heard the stellar *vox humana*
the untuned ear takes for static,

if you've kissed the burning eyelids
of god and seized upon the moon's

reflection, disjointed and backwards,
in the choppy ink of some alien sea,

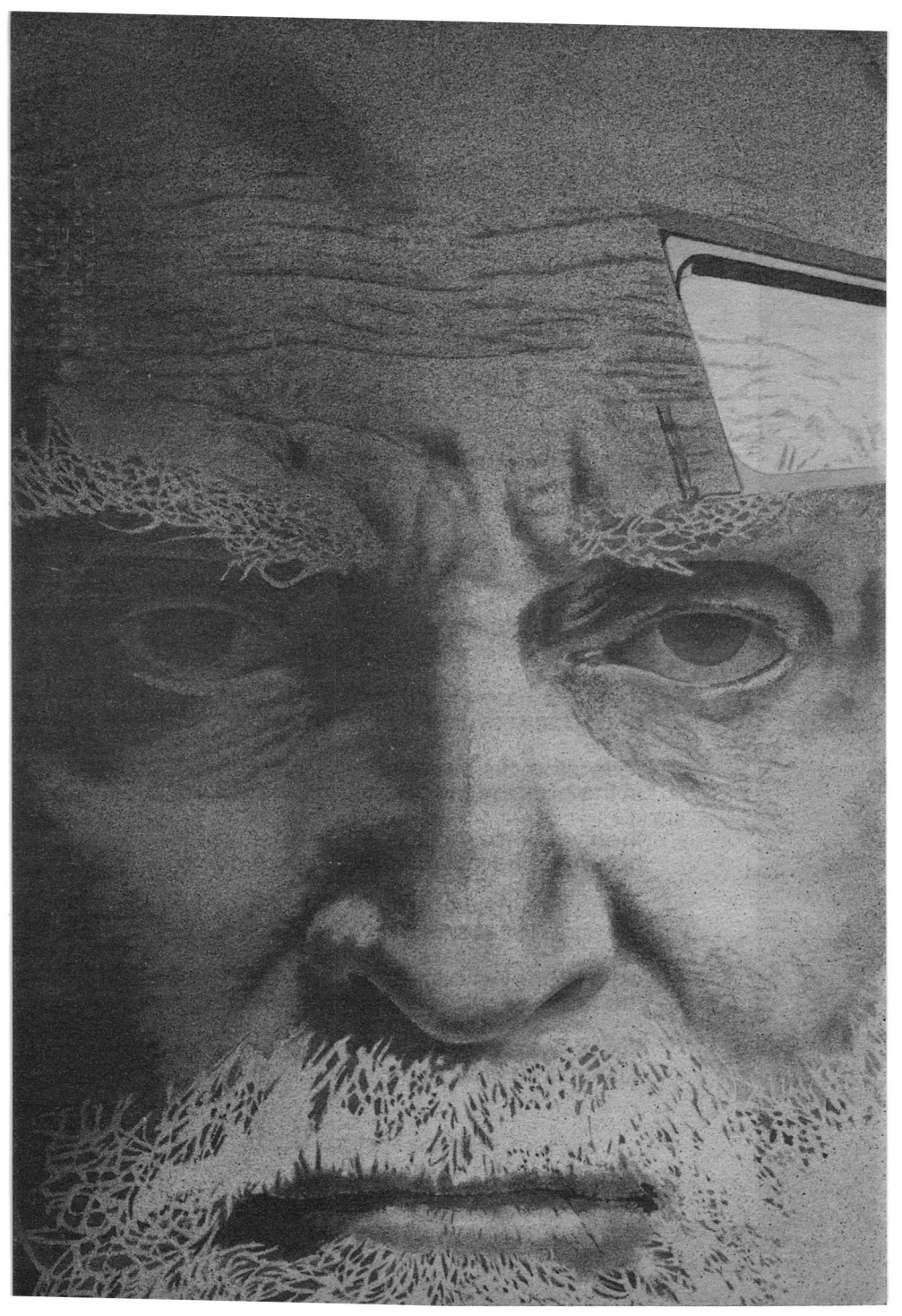
then you know how sleek and fleshy,
how treacherous, the stars can become.

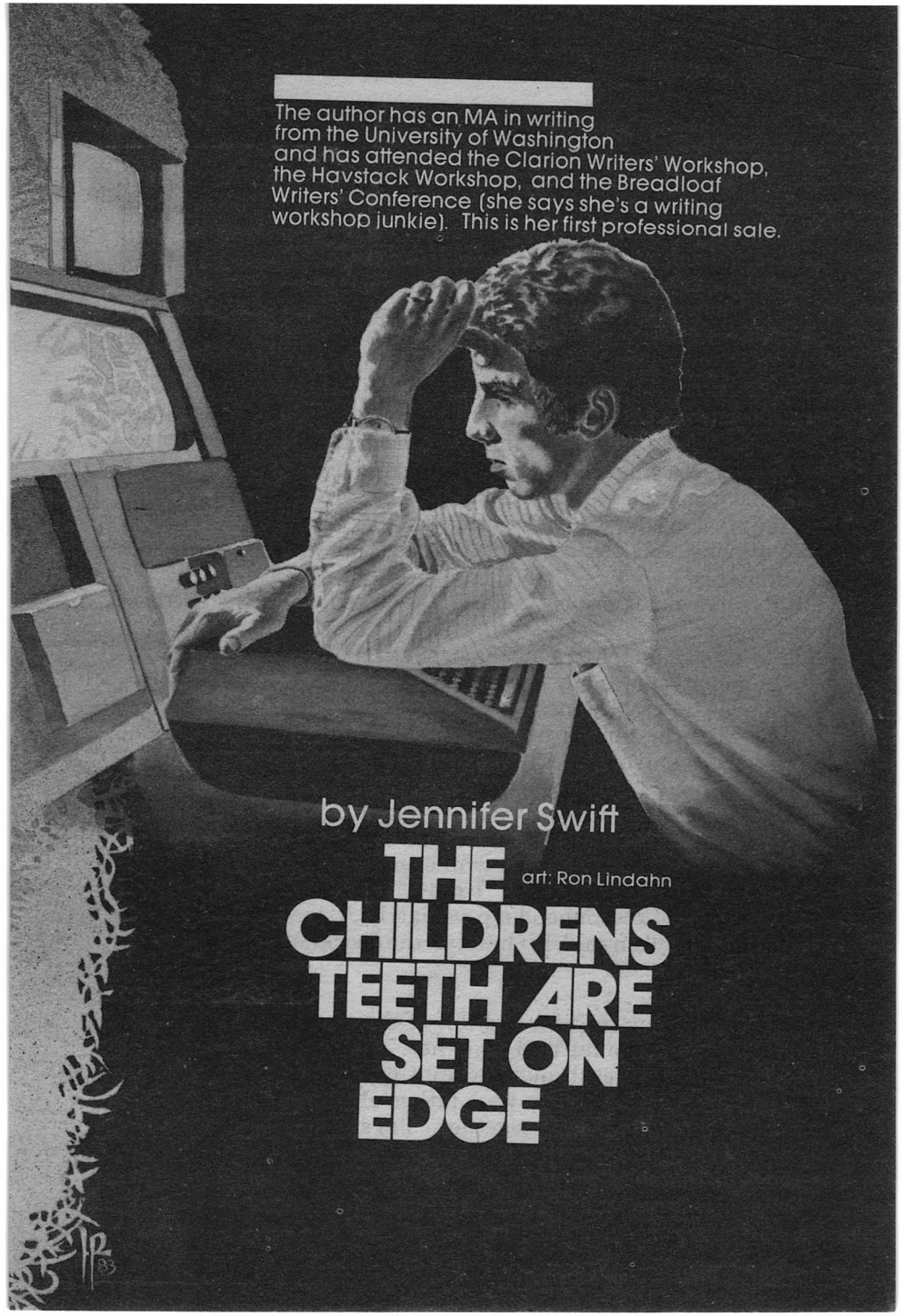
While the universe falls with no boundary,
you and I sit in a café of a port city

on a planet whose name we've forgotten:
the vacuum is behind us and before us,

the spiced ale is cool and hallucinogenic.
Already the candle sparkles in our plates.

—Bruce Boston




The author has an MA in writing from the University of Washington and has attended the Clarion Writers' Workshop, the Havstack Workshop, and the Breadloaf Writers' Conference (she says she's a writing workshop junkie). This is her first professional sale.
by Jennifer Swift
art: Ron Lindahn
THE CHILDRENS TEETH ARE SET ON EDGE

What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge? As I live, saith the Lord God, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel.

Ezekiel 18:2-3

The physician looked at him coolly, brushing a strand of blue-green hair away from her eyes. "I don't know what's causing your symptoms, Dr. Schaffer," she said, "but there's nothing organically wrong with you."

The young man sitting across from her said, "But my father has an ulcer, and I feel pain in my stomach too."

She tapped a fingernail on the screen of her terminal. "NMR is sensitive enough to pick up the slightest erosion in your stomach lining, long before you could feel it." Tom frowned at the three-dimensional picture of his stomach, glowing in lurid reds and greens.

"But what about my backaches?" he asked, "and the stiffness in my joints?"

Dr. Wieringa punched a button beneath the screen. Tom's stomach vanished, replaced by the flickering blue lines of his skeleton. "You have the right genes for arthritis, but there's no evidence your immune system is attacking your joint tissue now." She examined the nail of her little finger, lacquered red and embossed with the silhouette of a twin-bladed axe.

Tom began, "But surely I can't be imagining all this—"

Dr. Wieringa touched the screen and the blue lines of his skeleton shrunk to a tiny dot, then winked out. Like a star collapsing to a singularity, he thought. "I didn't suggest that," she said. "Perhaps I could recommend a psychiatrist."

"Thank you," Tom said, his hand on the doorknob, "but I already have a psychiatrist."

Luz was waiting for him in front of the townhouse he shared with his father. Tom hurried up to her. "Am I late?"

"A little." Her breath made a faint cloud in the evening air. "But I wasn't about to face your father alone." Then she shook her head, pressing her lips together. "I'm sorry, Tom."

"I really can't blame you." He was about to put his thumb on the front door's ID plate, but Luz took his wrist. "You have to break free, Tom," she said.

"You don't understand—"

The door slid open; his father was standing before them, smiling and running a hand through his graying red hair. "Don't freeze out there, children. Dinner's on the table." He led them through the darkened family room to the dining area. "Please pour the wine, Tom. Liz dear, this is your place."

"It's Luz," Tom heard her murmur.

When they had all sat down at the table, his father raised his glass of wine. A bead of red light danced at its center. "Congratulations on reaching twenty-six, Tom. I can hardly believe you've had tenure for over a year now." His father smiled at Luz. "At his age, I'd just gotten my first permanent post—and I only had three publications, not eighteen."

Tom's face turned painfully hot. But Daddy, he thought, people still footnote those three papers.

There was a long silence as they picked over a tray of pale, grainy tomato slices and oily artichoke hearts. Finally Luz said, "Did you hear the human-chimp hybrid died today?"

"No, what happened?" his father asked, his long fingers stripping the leaves from an artichoke heart one at a time.

"It took its own life," Luz said.

"I don't suppose it left a note," his father said.

"Oh yes it did," Luz said. "Just one line: 'not man, not ape, no home, no place, I die.' "

"Rather poetic," his father remarked. "Wouldn't have expected that from a creature of low intelligence."

Luz looked down at her plate. "Creativity doesn't have all that much to do with IQ, you know. Some of the smartest people I've met were also the least original."

Tom caught his lower lip between his teeth. The conversation was going the wrong way, but he was too tired to attempt steering it.

His father was ladling sauce over the pile of spaghetti on Luz's plate. "That smells good, Dr. Schaffer. What's in it?"

"It's the autochef's usual recipe, but I did add something special—real beef."

Tom half-raised his hand. Had Dad forgotten Luz was a vegetarian? She was pulling little bits of meat out of the sauce with the tines of her fork. "I'm sorry," she said, laying down her fork, "but I think we shouldn't eat those few poor animals that are left."

"If we didn't eat them, dear, the only ones left would be in zoos."

"Tom, why don't you take my sauce?" Tom began spooning it onto his plate.

"I'm sorry you had to cancel your dinner party," his father was saying to Luz.

"Since Tom wouldn't come if you couldn't, there didn't seem any point in holding it."

"As Tom no doubt explained, my ulcer doesn't like Indonesian cuisine. After that bad indigestion last week, I didn't want to chance it." He paused, watching Luz cutting her plain spaghetti into little bits with the edge of her fork, a practice Tom knew his father disapproved of.

"Daddy," he said hastily, "one of Luz's paintings just won a prize."

"Only honorable mention," Luz said, but she smiled. "It's a portrait of my mother that I did quite a while ago—I glued lots of crumpled newspaper to the canvas and then slapped about sixteen coats of black and gray paint on it."

"Sounds hideous," his father said, quickly adding, "not that it wouldn't be appropriate, judging from what I've heard."

Luz nodded. "She thought art was a waste of time and that I should work on practical, real things—like math and science." Luz smiled. "Once when she was drunk, she tore up all my sketches and tried to flush them down the toilet, but it backed up. At least I never had the feeling she loved me for my talents instead of myself."

"But how can one's talents be separated from oneself?" Tom's father asked.

"I was thinking of childhood," Luz said, "when your talents are unfulfilled potentials. Suppose parents expected the impossible from their child?"

"That would be a problem," his father said, "and I'm sure Tom is glad we had an expert child psychologist to help him get an accurate knowledge of his potential—"

"Father, I—" Tom faltered.

"Yes, son?"

"Well, once I wanted to take flute lessons—" He felt nauseated.

"Oh yes, I remember. You wanted to play like your mother, but I warned you that you most likely didn't inherit any of her talent so it would be a waste of your time. And then didn't we make some time for them the following year, but by then you'd lost interest?"

"Yeah." He remembered sitting in a eucalyptus tree in the park, trying to play the cheap wooden flute he'd bought after Daddy said there was no time for lessons. But all he could ever get out of it were flat, dry whistles, and one night he threw the flute into

a canyon, leaving it to molder in the dry grass with shattered wine bottles and crumpled cups.

"Tom," Luz said, "didn't you—"

The nausea was moving up his throat and he found himself on his feet, his chair clattering as it fell behind him. "Excuse me—"

He tugged the back door open and stumbled out into the chill spring air. He walked toward the thicket of unpruned lilacs against the back fence, his feet sinking in the withered grass. The cold lessened the urge to vomit, but his stomach still churned with bile. The silver flute, he thought, Mama's silver flute. I have to get rid of that one too. It was still in his room where he'd hidden it after his mother died, in the bottom drawer of his desk, beneath a pile of old printouts. The back door slammed, and Luz came up to him, hesitantly touched his arm. "Tom, are you all right?"

He nodded; he was suddenly short of breath as if he'd run a long way. Then a spasm twisted his neck. A second later spears of pain wedged between all the ribs on his right side and he fell to his knees.

"Tom!" He saw her legs in front of him a moment, then moving rapidly away. Despite the pain, he twisted his body to follow her with his eyes, saw the light shining from the kitchen as she opened the door, saw a man with graying red hair kneeling on the kitchen floor, crumpling forward, his hand gripping his shoulder just as Tom was gripping his.

Tom was thinking over what the doctors had told him when Luz peeped around the screen at the foot of his hospital bed. "Hi. Feeling better?"

"Yeah. Fine."

Luz sat in the rickety plastic chair beside his bed, combing her fingers through her tangled bangs. "I'm so glad you're okay. I was so afraid last night I'd killed you and your father both by being rude to him."

Tom shook his head. "It wasn't your fault, Luz. Didn't the doctors tell you he'd probably already had a heart attack the week before? It was playing squash all afternoon and a heavy meal that brought it on, not you." He looked down at his fingers spread on the sheet, at the mole below his thumb. His father had a mole of the same size in the same place. "They say he'll be able to go home in three or four days."

"But how about you, Tom? The doctors say you're in excellent health, that you fainted just because you saw your father fainting. But your face was so white—"

"It was nothing," he said. There was a crack in the ceiling, running the length of his body and disappearing behind the screen at the foot of his bed.

"Tom, have you thought of seeing a psychiatrist?"

A smaller crack forked off the main one, reminding him of some sort of particle interaction—decay or fusion? Softly he said, "What I have is incurable."

Luz was silent; he turned to look at her and saw that tears had made dark spots on her wrinkled purple blouse. "I don't understand, Tom."

He looked back at the ceiling, noticing now that there was a third crack, angling off the second crack. If it was fission, one of the particles had a short half-life, decaying still further. "You're worried about the wrong thing, Luz," he said. "The problem isn't my health. It's that despite all my advantages, despite everything my father has done for me, I'm a failure."

He heard the bunches of copper discs that hung from her ears jingle as she shook her head. "Why do you have to be a genius?"

"My father is a genius," Tom said, "though he never got to really prove it."

"Yes," said Luz, "I've heard that story often enough, but I've never understood why your life has to make up for your father's."

He hesitated only a moment. "You deserved to know this a long time ago, but I didn't know how to tell you." And with your attitude towards Daddy, I didn't want you to know, he thought. "My father and I have identical genes, you see," he said. "I'm my father's clone." He held up his right hand as if it were a model he was lecturing about. "I'm surprised you didn't guess. There's our hands, for example—"

The chair scraped back. He turned toward her, but she was already gone.

Four years had not aged Dr. Chang in any way Tom could see. She sat behind his father's battered oak desk, hair the same black he had seen as a child, her posture regal, almost stiff.

"It's rather annoying, yes," Tom told her. "But still not that serious a problem." I can't work, he thought, but what does that matter?

Dr. Chang looked at him from behind her darkly-tinted goggles; she was allergic to the smog which penetrated even the Schaffers' well-sealed townhouse. "And how long have you been having these attacks?" she asked, taking an animal cracker from the tray in front of her. There had always been a tray of animal crackers

out during their sessions together for him to nibble as he worked the puzzles and tests Dr. Chang gave him, always the same brand—paper-thin biscuits coated with waxy pink icing. She bit the elephant's head off.

"Well, they started three years ago when Dad's health started to deteriorate. First there was the ulcer, then the arthritis, now this heart problem."

"Do you feel every physical pain your father experiences?"

"No, I guess it has to be pretty considerable pain." He wondered what Luz was doing, if she was thinking of him. She said she wouldn't see him again unless he talked to a psychologist. The cloning business made no difference to her, she insisted, "it's your obsession with failure I can't take." Can she really expect one session to cure me? Or does she think it will be easier on me if I have a psychologist's shoulder to cry on when she breaks up with me?

Dr. Chang bit a crescent out of the back of a rhinoceros. "I haven't really told my father about the symptoms, only that I was depressed," Tom said to her. He looked at the gilt lettering on the spine of a book lying on the desk: Lung-chi Lu, *Principles of Preon Symmetry*. Once his father had said to him, "You'll show Lu a thing or two."

"He told me you're more upset over his heart attack than he is." She paused to lick crumbs off her lips. "But I don't think that is what's depressing you."

"Failure," said Tom. "Dad hasn't realized yet but he will eventually."

Light glanced off the flat surfaces of Dr. Chang's goggles as she bent her head toward him. "The human capacity for self-deception is nearly infinite."

There was a pile of yellowing pamphlets under Lu's book, probably reprints of the editorial his father had written denouncing the Science Security Act of '92. Tom said, "But he almost went to jail once for telling the truth."

Dr. Chang took a sip of her customary unsweetened black tea. "Telling it and hearing it are two different things." Her saucer clattered as she set her teacup down. "I'm not sure what is causing these parallel symptoms, but I do think I know what's behind your depression. I think you are very angry at your father, Thomas."

"That's not true. I love my father." He realized his fingernails were digging into his palms and he forced his hands to relax.

"And he expects you to prove that love by doing something that you're finding impossible, doesn't he?"

Tom's eyes were drawn to the antique lamp on his father's desk. It had been there on his eighteenth birthday, when he'd been summoned to his father's study. His father had made Tom put his hand under the lamp's scalloped glass shade, then placed his own hand beside his son's. What do you see, Tom, he had asked.

"But Dr. Chang," Tom said, "how can I have his genes and not have his creativity?" A young hand and an old hand, he'd told his father, very much alike.

Dr. Chang was silent for a moment, then said, "Remember what we agreed you should do four years ago, after your breakdown? That you should live apart from your father, that you shouldn't talk to him about your work?"

"But living apart was what caused my breakdown," Tom said.

"Was that all that caused it? How was your work in Japan going?"

"Terribly," Tom admitted. "I wanted to work on the nature of charge, but the problem was too big for me—I drowned in the literature. There was always just one more paper I had to read. When I forced myself to write, it was just rehashing wormholes and topological knots, stuff other people had done. So I'd go back and read some more."

"And did you discuss your research with your father?"

"Not in great detail. I wanted it to be my own work, something I could surprise him with." Your mother and I were both sterile, his father had said.

"Is it possible that your previous research had been guided by subtle cues your father unintentionally gave you when you talked to him?"

Tom nodded. He picked up a pink-coated giraffe, broke its hind legs off. Meijersdorf, the man who did the first gorilla cloning, was on a committee with me, his father said.

"I told you this four years ago, Thomas," Dr. Chang said. "Yet you let your father move here, live with you."

"Dad was very lonely by himself. When I invited him here, I told him we mustn't discuss my research." He crushed the head of the giraffe between his thumb and forefinger. "He kept that promise pretty much. He's been busy at his own school; he's already doubled their research budget."

He rubbed the crumbs between his fingers and watched them fall to the floor. "I've tried everything I could think of: working eighteen-hour days, spending the whole day wandering by the

lake—I even studied meditation. Sure I got tenure fast, but I think that was a reward for fitting in so well. I have the right background, went to the right schools, published with the right people—and I guess people find me easy to get along with. But that's hardly genius. Arkady—the guy I used to share an office with—has more good ideas in a week than I've had in my life."

He realized Dr. Chang had aged more than he'd first seen: there were heavy lines in her forehead and a fold of papery skin hung from her chin and throat. "Freud said in order for the son to achieve, the father in the son must be slain."

Tom crushed the giraffe's body in his hand; crumbs stuck in the sweat of his palm. "But what if the father and the son are as alike as we are?" he asked. "I mean what if after the son slays the father in himself there's nothing left of the son?"

"There's more to a human being than genes, Thomas," Dr. Chang said.

Tom felt the chill night air working its way through all the holes in his sweater as he waited for Luz to answer his knock. The lock clicked back, the chain rattled, and Luz looked up at him, her dark eyes solemn. "Tom! So you saw Dr. Chang today?" He nodded.

She sat on the worn couch in her living room, and Tom sat beside her, but not close enough to touch. "I have something more important than my psychologist to tell you about first," he said. His voice sounded harsh in his ears and he tried to soften it. "I've decided to move out on my own."

Luz nodded, not meeting his eyes, and tucked her robe tightly around her knees. "The townhouse is really mine," Tom said, "but I can't ask Dad to move in his present condition, so I'll find a place of my own. I'll start looking tomorrow. In the meantime, I—ah—wondered if you'd let me stay here tonight—just on your couch, I mean."

Luz was toying with the tassel on the sash of her robe. "That's good news, Tom." Her voice was flat. "Have you told your father?"

Tom felt his face warm. "No, not yet—I just left a note saying I'd be over at school. He's used to me spending nights away from home. He doesn't need anyone to look after him, you know—he's going back to work in two days." Tom tilted his head back, resting it on the couch. Hanging from the ceiling above him was a net Luz had made: cords in all the colors of the spectrum, looped and knotted in a lacy crosshatch. Luz had told him that none of the knots were identical. "I was sitting in our kitchen tonight, trying

to mark exams. Dad came in to make a cup of tea. 'Don't let me interrupt you,' he said, but—" Tom saw himself back in the kitchen, his father's shadow crossing and recrossing the table, his slippers making a constant scuffing on the tiles "—he seemed to take the damndest long time making that cup of tea. It was absolutely impossible to concentrate. After he left the kitchen, I left the house."

Tom glanced at Luz; she was braiding the loose threads of her tassel. "I guess I could sum it all up by saying I've been an idiot," he said, then realized the harshness in his voice sounded like a tone he sometimes heard in his father's speech and tried to mollify it. "I mean I realized I don't owe him my entire life, every minute of it."

She nodded slowly but still wouldn't meet his eyes. "So, Tom, do you feel any better?"

He looked back up at the net. "I feel a little freer." He hesitated, then said, "I think I'd really feel better if I knew how you feel about me."

"Tom, I'm not . . . sure. Not just because of what happened last week, but you've been so depressed all winter and the spring hasn't helped—you're nothing like you were last year."

"When Dad was still in California. Or are you afraid the essential weakness of my character is exposing itself?" A tear was running down her cheek. "Luz, I'm sorry; why do I act like it's you I'm angry at instead of my father?"

She sniffed noisily. "I'm really glad you've done what you've done. I hope you keep doing it." Another tear ran down her cheek, ran down his finger as he touched her face. "Tom, to me you're already successful. I think even people in your own field would agree you've gone farther than lots and lots of them."

But not half as far as Father, Tom thought. But he kissed her and said nothing.

One evening two weeks later, Tom and Luz sat on her old couch, picking up the slides she'd spread out on her ancient Formica coffee table.

"Where's your rope woman?" Tom asked. "I really think that's one of your best pieces."

Luz smiled. "I didn't include it because Arden Lovkoff is one of the judges and if she sees it, she'll take credit for the wrapping technique. I happen to think doing it in rope instead of wire and fabric changes things completely, but I know she won't." Luz snapped the slide case shut.

"I know what you mean," Tom said. "This modality thing I'm working on now—I'm sure Dad would take the credit for it if he knew I was using some really old stuff from gauge theories to explain modalities instead of trying to extrapolate from renascence theory like everyone else does."

"So your work is going well?"

"Exceptionally. Better than anything I've tried on my own in years. And you know, I'm beginning to think it's going well because this is really the first thing I've ever done on my own, just to please myself. Parts of it Dad wouldn't like—"

Knocking thudded on the steel door of the apartment. Luz rose, frowning.

"May I come in?" It was Tom's father.

"Sure, I guess—" Luz glanced at Tom; he nodded. His father stepped into the living room, a tweed cap in his hands. "I hope I'm not interrupting anything. I was just at a recital in that little auditorium around the corner and I thought I might find Tom here." His father sat in the armchair near Tom's end of the couch. Tom stared down at the coffee table, as if his father were not in the room.

His father chatted briefly with Luz about the concert, then asked, "Liz, could I ask a favor of you? I'd like to speak to Tom about a private matter for just a few minutes."

Luz touched Tom's shoulder. "Is that all right with you?"

"Yeah."

After the latch of the bedroom door had clicked, his father said, "Tom, I'm afraid I've chased you out of your own home by burdening you with these health worries, and I'm truly sorry."

"Dad, they're really only a nuisance. And I'm happy to be with Luz."

"Of course, of course. She's another matter I feel a bit guilty about. I'm afraid I've been prone to think that your taste and mine should be the same in regard to women." He ran his fingers slowly around the inside of his cap, not looking at Tom. "I'm especially sorry about the way your birthday dinner turned out."

"You could hardly have stopped what happened, Dad." A tiny needle pricked the inside of his stomach. He hoped his father's ulcer was flaring up.

"Still, Tom, I should have kept my mouth shut, and I promise I'll do so in the future." He smiled and leaned toward Tom. "I hear you're working on a new project."

Tom crossed his arms on his chest. "It's just an expansion of that modality thing I started last year."

"Yes, I always thought that was promising. Is it going well?"

Tom glared at the toes of his boots. "Yes, for now."

His father shook a pink pill into his hand. "Ulcer's acting up a bit. Hope it's not causing you discomfort."

Tom shook his head though fifty needles were lancing his stomach.

"I know you don't like talking about your research, but could I hazard a guess about your approach, just as a yes or no question? I'll bet you're interpolating some things from gauge—"

Tom hunched his shoulders. "Dad, I'm sorry, but I can't tell you anything about it."

"I quite understand." His father rose. "But I'm truly delighted to know your work is going well."

"Things have gone sour for me so many times—"

"Ah, but I suspect this is different."

As the door shut after his father, Luz came out of the bedroom. "Dad's sorry about the way he behaved at a certain dinner last month," Tom told her.

She sat next to him on the couch. "That's some improvement."

"He also promised to keep out of our relationship."

"I'll believe that when I see—"

"But he still refuses to keep out of my career. He's taking credit for my theory, just like I said he would."

Luz frowned. "But does that matter as long as you know who deserves proper credit?"

"It doesn't matter to me what the hell he thinks."

Only after the phone in his office had buzzed nine times did Tom finally answer it. Luz's face was tired and anxious. "Sorry I didn't answer right away," he said. "I was afraid it might be Dad again. I've got almost the whole theory blocked out."

"Good. So you'll be home in time to make dinner?"

"Uh, not unless you want to eat at eleven."

"Tom, you've skipped your turns for a whole week now."

"I'll make it up as soon as I finish this."

"Tom," she said in a softer voice, "you look like you haven't slept for days—"

"I caught a few hours on my couch." Tom's chair squealed as he swiveled away from the screen and bent down to thumb through one of the many stacks of tissue photocopies on the floor of his office. "Everything's going just fine," he said.

"Then why aren't you happy?" Tom glanced at the screen; Luz's face had a greenish tinge—the color was malfunctioning again.

"When you and Arkady were finishing that paper last fall, you smiled all the time in this nice absent-minded way—"

"Dad smiles enough. Even though I refuse to I tell him the least bit—"

"To hell with your father!" The screen wavered from green to gray.

Tom looked down at the stain on his pants where he'd spilled coffee. "Didn't you use to want me to stand up to him?"

"But you're still obsessed with him!"

"That's nonsense. If this thing works out, Dad will be even happier than me about it. I'll be home sometime late tonight. Bye." Careful not to look at her face, he punched OFF. The time in the corner of the screen read 4:20. He'd better get that offprint from Arkady.

The elevator was as usual out of order, but that didn't discourage Tom. Like his father he always took the stairs. Luz didn't understand he was finally doing his own work. He knocked on the frosted glass panel of 726.

Arkady answered his door, smiling when he saw Tom, despite the stack of bluebooks on his desk. "Couldn't put them off any longer alas," he said, nodding at the exams. "I've got a surprise for you though." He handed Tom a yellowing journal. "Have you ever seen this old piece by Kostenko?"

"That's the Russian who claimed he detected the graviphoton?"

"The same. This is another of his near misses at a Nobel. He suggests a way of extending quantum field theory to superhigh energies with this thing he calls retrograde symmetry. His math is lumpy, but believe it or not, he predicts modalities."

Tom riffled through the journal. "Must have been twenty years before they were discovered."

"Of course his theory's totally irrelevant today. I'm going to use it as a cautionary tale."

"The problem is he didn't know about renascence?"

"Yeah. I'll tell my students it's like an astronomer who discovers Ptolemy's epicycles nicely explain the perturbation in Pluto's orbit. Does she junk all of modern astronomy? No, she does what modern astronomy tells her—look for a tenth planet. And voila! she finds it. How's your work going, Tom?"

Tom sat on the edge of the table next to Arkady's desk. "Ever—well, I suppose you must have—gotten on a streak, a rush of thought where everything's working itself out in your head and just won't stop?" Arkady nodded and Tom held up his hand, saw that his fingers were trembling and clenched them into a fist.

"That's the way it's gone and it's almost done now. It's going to be very . . . interesting."

"That's great, Tom." Arkady put his feet up on his desk and his pants slid down to reveal a few inches of hairy calf. "Looking forward to seeing it. How's your Dad, by the way?"

"Doing very well." Tom glanced at the table of contents on the cover of the journal. The lead article was "An Application of Universal Supersymmetry" by Vasili Kostenko. "He's speaking at a foundation meeting tonight to pry loose more funding for the lunar observatory. You'd never guess he had a heart attack four weeks ago."

"Yeah, those new drugs are amazing. But Tom, I've always wondered why your father is still pushing himself so hard. I mean someone with his accomplishments shouldn't still be flogging himself—"

"He thinks he's a failure, Arkady."

"What? He's a pioneer of gravitational gauge fields, the hero of scientific freedom of speech—well, you know what I mean." Arkady waved a hand upward, then frowned, "Tom, how can he?"

"Position is always a matter of one's frame of reference, right?" Tom asked. "Contemporary American science is one thing, but universal scientific history is another. Isaac Newton versus the distinguished chair of our department."

Arkady chuckled, then said seriously, "But when he fought the Security Act, that was universal."

"But it wasn't science." Tom skimmed Kostenko's opening paragraphs—"unimodular transformations . . . SU(2) x SU(2) symmetry . . . hidden degrees of freedom . . . " "After his first three papers were published, lots of people thought he was going to be the one to come up with a grand unified field theory, but he worked for years on that without getting anywhere and then—"

"Along came Lu and renascence theory?"

Tom nodded. "Dad thinks it was his late start in science that held him back. Have you heard about his parents being fundamentalists and all?"

"Yes, but you know, Tom—" Arkady paused, his high forehead bright pink "—one of the reasons I really respect your father is that he's gotten so far on not a really great amount of talent. He's got good sense and good taste, and he works very hard. If he were as lazy as I am—" Arkady nodded at the pile of exams "—he'd probably be tucked away in some middling state university."

Tom was astonished. "But his background, Arkady—"

"I think that was to his advantage. It meant everything was really fresh to him and gave him a hell of a lot of motivation."

So where does that leave me, Arkady, Tom thought, but aloud he said, "Can I borrow this Kostenko piece?"

"Sure. Hey, didn't you want my offprint too?"

Back in his office, Tom locked his door and turned off the light to discourage potential callers. Enough light to read by came in through the window, though it was raining—fine cold drops falling from the sheet metal gray sky. He called up the draft of his paper on his desk terminal and placed the old journal beside it. Kostenko's first formula was "$\eta T(R)\text{-}3C_2(G) < 0$," the general condition for asymptotic freedom, which was also at the beginning of his own paper.

Suddenly he realized how weary he was and put the old journal down and looked out the window. The slow rain seemed to have stopped but the campus lawn was still brown under a sky gray-yellow like a bruise. He forced himself to return to the old journal, and soon a hot feather of fear brushed the back of his neck. Kostenko's math was indeed clumsy and his notation peculiar, but once you allowed for those factors and for some background information Kostenko wouldn't have known—Tom glanced from the journal to his paper on the screen, then back again. No, there could be no mistake. They were the same theory.

Someone was knocking on the door, knocking hard, rattling its glass panel. Tom woke. The window was black, the office dark except for the soft glow from his terminal's screen. "Tom, are you there?" His father's voice. Tom sat up on the couch, his muscles stiff, switched on the light and opened the door. His father stood there smiling, his teeth very white against his graying red beard. "Hi, saw the light in your window and wondered if you'd accidentally left your terminal on."

"Oh, I was . . . resting." Tom sat back down on the couch.

His father took the chair at Tom's desk. Over his father's shoulder Tom saw the first page of his paper on the screen. Oh damn.

"So this is what you're working on?"

"Dad, it's not in final form yet." If only his father weren't sitting between him and the ERASE key. "No, Dad—here, read this. The Kostenko piece."

He watched his father scan the article, bent over the journal so Tom could see the pink of his scalp beneath his thinning hair. Tom bent down, picked up a stack of tissue printouts and dropped them in the recycling bin. Now if he could just work over to—

"Tom! It's amazing this has been overlooked. It's—"

"It's a dead theory, Dad."

"Not beyond resurrection, surely. These 'quasi-particles' of his are reminiscent of modalities, aren't they?"

"But his paradigm is out of date, Dad. He can explain modalities, but none of the many, many things renascence can."

His father returned to the journal. Tom reached for the ERASE key. His father's hand shot out and closed on his wrist. "Wrong button, Tom."

"My paper—it has a problem like Kostenko's. It's out of date."

"Surely not entirely."

Tom yanked his hand from his father's grasp. His father's hand flew to cover the ERASE key. "It's not just old-fashioned, Dad. It's wrong."

"Well, perhaps it's wrong in an interesting way."

Tom dropped back down on the couch. He felt as if he'd never slept. "Have you ever duplicated someone else's ideas?"

"I've certainly been anticipated more than once—"

"By twenty years?"

His father's mouth fell open and a strand of saliva glistened between his teeth. "You mean you and Kostenko—"

"Go ahead, look, that's what you came for, right?" His father turned toward the screen. Tom leaned back on the couch and crossed his arms. He could feel his heart beating strongly under his hand, but its rhythm seemed to remain perfectly regular as his father read.

"What a remarkable coincidence," his father finally said.

So to Dad this was just another minor setback. "Maybe I read Kostenko's paper years ago," Tom said, "or maybe I did come up with this on my own, which would mean I have some talent—for thinking in the latest ideas of the nineties."

His father was gently shaking his head. "Tom, you've overworked and exhausted yourself. Let me take you home."

"Dad, would you—could you—for once listen to what I'm saying? I was so desperate to do something important and original I made this idiotic blunder. Doesn't that tell you something about my abilities?"

"Tom, who should know better than I your real abilities?"

"Dad, you were two, three years younger than me when you did your work in gauge, and since the only advantage I have over you is early intensive training—shouldn't I have done something special by now?"

"But Tom, from the moment you started talking, you've im-

pressed everyone who knew you—calculus at eight, a national award at twelve, college entrance at fourteen—"

"So I was a prodigy. That doesn't mean I'm a genius."

"Tom, haven't I reminded you often enough that the majority of Nobel laureates did the work for which they were so highly honored in their thirties and forties, far older than you are now?"

Tom unfolded his arms. "Dad," he said quietly, "maybe you're right. Maybe I do have this potential. But I don't want it anymore. It's not—" he held up his hands "—just because I happen to be very tired now. I feel that if I should succeed, I'd merely be obeying the plans someone else has made for my life."

"But the plans fit you perfectly," his father said. "You haven't had to waste any time or effort pursuing the wrong paths, and you've gotten everything you need to develop your talents to the fullest." He pushed PRINT on Tom's terminal.

"There's just one thing I didn't get," Tom said. His father was not looking at him, but at the steadily growing stack of paper sliding out of the printer. "My own genes," Tom said.

The end sheet dropped from the printer's slot, and his father put the pile of paper through the binder. "Before you were born, Tom, before you were conceived, I tried to imagine how I'd feel in your situation, and I thought I'd be glad to have a father who truly understood me."

"But you don't understand at all how I feel now!"

"But now I realize that I—we—need something to rebel against, something to push us to achieve—" Tom got to his feet, yanked the door open, and ran out in the corridor. Behind him, his father said, "Yes, I ran away too—"

The night's rain left a fine cold mist suspended in the air at the beach, and the lake was calm under gray clouds. Tom crouched down and dipped his fingers in the water. It smelled faintly of tar, but it was not as cold as he'd thought it would be. He pulled off his boots and let a wave wash over his bare feet. The deep water would be cold. He waded out until the water was halfway up his calves.

If I killed myself would he get the point? He pictured his father in front of the phone screen, crumpled on the floor. But he'd be sure to rasp as he died, "You could have made it, Tom." He stuffed his hands in his pockets and stood looking out over the lake at the eastern horizon as it rapidly brightened with the coming dawn.

"Thomas!" He looked back. Dr. Chang was stumbling down the high sandy bank, coming toward him. "Just what are you doing?"

"I'm watching the sun come up."

"Drowning is an unpleasant way to die." Her goggles were red in the dawn's light.

Tom began wading back to shore, balancing carefully on his numb feet. As he stepped out of the water, he realized he was shivering. "In the tram on the way here, I thought it would be nice to go down in the dark, to be out of his reach forever. But as soon as I got here I realized that killing myself to get back at him wouldn't make me any freer." He squatted down to pull on his boots. "I guess I'll never be free."

Dr. Chang bent down beside him. "Thomas, do you know what a Xerox is?"

"An old-fashioned photocopy process?"

She nodded. "People who opposed cloning used to say it would create Xeroxes of human beings. That's what your father thought he was doing. Making a few improvements, yes, but essentially all he was doing was having himself copied. But a human being can't be duplicated."

"Yes, but our minds—" Tom scooped up a handful of sand and watched it sift out between his fingers. "When he started teaching me physics, gauge theories were king and I absorbed them thoroughly. Now everybody's doing renascence but it's always seemed somehow unnatural to me—I can't really think in it."

"Yes, I tried to tell your father more than once it's not just raw intelligence, but having the right sort of mind at the right time in history."

Tom pulled on his other boot and stood up. "But if you knew, Dr. Chang, why didn't you stop Dad?"

"For a long time, I was foolish enough to believe it might work. Then when I saw his mistake, there was nothing I could do to stop him. Your mother had died and he wasn't abusing you in any way understood by the law."

The sun had half-risen now and a red path blazed on the quiet waters of the lake. Tom frowned in the new light. "Is that why Dad wouldn't let you see me after I was fourteen?"

She nodded. "I'm sorry, Thomas." They both stood frozen a moment, and then Dr. Chang pointed up the bank. "Let's fetch that poor anxious friend of yours. She brought me over here to search for you. . . ." Tom hobbled on his stiff feet behind the doctor as she scaled the sandy bank. "She's down at the other end of the beach." The doctor unlocked the passenger door of her little elec-

tric. Tom climbed in beside her, but turned his face from the sun, which had lost its redness and was now a blazing gold.

The shouts and cries of children let out for play came through the half-open window and Tom knew it must be eleven thirty. In one hour he was scheduled to give his first lecture in Physics History C.

By now his father would have been putting the finishing touches on the lecture, jotting marginal notes to remind himself where to pause, where to tell a joke about someone he knew at CERN, what to diagram on the board. Tom's sketchpad lay beside him on the bed, empty. But he told himself he wasn't worried. He was going to deliver his lecture intuitively—as a spontaneous thinking aloud, the way Arkady taught.

He felt around the pad, found his mother's old flute, almost dropped it because his fingers were slippery with sweat. It was going to be nothing like the first lecture he'd ever given. He'd done that as a graduate teaching assistant, younger than most of the undergraduates in the room. His lecture—on Newtonian mechanics—had covered six pages of printout, the margins festooned with stage directions, jokes, and diagrams. His first marginal note reminded him to mention Newton's fear that the ladies of London wanted him to father geniuses on them. But no one had laughed or even smiled, and after that Tom found he couldn't decipher his marginalia any longer. He finished the lecture in twenty-five minutes, half an hour early. His class had been quiet all through the lecture, and when he'd asked for questions, their silence grew even more profound. He'd turned to the board to write next week's reading assignment, but the chalk slipped from his sweaty fingers, shattered at his feet into what seemed a million fragments. The students broke their silence with explosive laughter.

He put the flute to his lips and played a rudimentary scale. If he'd been brave enough to laugh with them it might have been all right. But he hadn't and ever since he'd been a clumsy, mumbling lecturer, who hid behind his notes and watched the clock almost as urgently as his students. Tom didn't see how he could do any worse going in completely unprepared. Had his father ever done anything in his life which he hadn't planned out carefully in advance? Oh yes, he'd been born to the wrong parents.

When the children's voices ceased, it was time to leave. The sun was warm on his back in the short walk from Luz's apartment to the campus. Waiting at a corner for the light to change, he

heard a familiar voice, "Hey, Tom, didn't you get my messages?" Arkady was smiling, wiping mustard off his chin.

"Yes," Tom said.

"Then why didn't you call me back right away?" Arkady demanded. "I've got a million more ideas on how to work this thing."

"I can't see any theoretical reason why it shouldn't work." Tom hunched his shoulders, walking so fast that shorter-legged Arkady had to scurry to keep up with him. "So why do you want my help?"

"I don't know squat about accelerator mechanics, reactors, all that practical stuff you've got down cold."

"So do plenty of other people."

"But Tom, you're the only person I know crazy enough to take my idea seriously and sane enough to persuade other people it isn't crazy." Arkady almost dropped behind, but then was beside him again. "Tom, don't you want to be the hero who rids the world of nuclear waste?"

The hero's sidekick, Tom thought, then felt ashamed. "I realize you're offering me an enormous opportunity, but I just can't accept it now."

Arkady shook his head, then brightened. "Oh, is it that thing you were working on a couple of weeks ago?"

Tom shook his head. "That was a flop." They were standing in the corridor of the physics building by then, students pressing by them. Tom stepped closer to Arkady. "Look, the real reason I can't help you is my father would take credit for the whole thing."

"He's already published on radioactive waste?"

"No, nothing like that. If we investigate this and it works, he'll be vindicated, claim he was absolutely right about my upbringing—" He turned to go into his classroom, but Arkady caught his elbow.

"Tom, I think you owe me more explanation."

Tom pulled away from Arkady's hand. "Tell you what, I'll think some more about your offer." He went into his classroom.

Ten or so graduate students, some of whom he'd taught in earlier classes, clustered in the chairs at the back of the room, chatting with each other. "History C?" he asked.

A girl in a red blouse nodded, but the conversation continued unabated. He dropped his pad on the podium, but instead of standing behind it, he pulled out a chair directly in front of them, put his right foot on the chair's seat and leaned forward. He did not remember that this was one of his father's favorite lecture postures. "I suppose most of you think the first half of this class is

a waste of time," he said. "Why does the department think you should study so many outdated theories in such detail?" One of the students giggled; the rest fell silent.

Afraid his hands might tremble, he crossed his arms on his chest. That plump Nigerian—what was his name? Sam—was actually taking notes. No, he was handwriting a letter to someone. Tom remained silent and the students were still for what seemed like ten minutes until finally Sam raised his hand. "Sir, is it because they believe it's good for our moral characters?"

Tom held up a hand to quiet the laughter. "Yes, humility is indispensable for a working scientist." Damn, the last words of his father's graduation address at Columbia. But he had their attention and was determined to keep it. "Sam," he said, "I bet you can't prove to me now that renascence is superior to gauge theory."

Dr. Chang's office was quiet and dim except for the ticking of her grandfather clock. "What worries me," Tom said to her, "is that things are going so well. My life is reorganizing itself so neatly, with so little pain—sometimes I suspect Dad arranged all of this in advance, just like he arranged my childhood and adolescence."

She shook her head. "If that were so, there wouldn't be any Luz. He told me last week he expected you to break with her any day."

"Yeah, he'll be surprised when he gets the invitation. But you know, Doctor, that when I first met Luz, before Dad had moved here, I was afraid he'd fall just as deeply in love with her as I was and win her away from me." Dr. Chang nodded. "Instead he disliked her from the moment he saw her. Part of it's jealousy, of course, but I think he also disapproves of the fact she won't sacrifice her career for me like my mother did for him. 'Genius has prerogatives.'

"But my real problem now, Doctor, is that every professional success I have—like my history class or this nuclear waste eradication project I'm helping Arkady with—doesn't seem like it really belongs to me. I feel like my father's genes and my father's training are doing it, not me. And I'm afraid someday I'll force myself to fail, like maybe I did last month, just so I no longer fit into his neat little plan."

For a long moment there was only the sound of the grandfather clock ticking. Finally Dr. Chang said, "I had another patient once in a situation similar to yours. She'd learned she was conceived

in the course of a rape. She felt this was the act that created her, but in fact it was merely a path through which she came into the world. If there is a design to our lives at all, it lies deeper than human purposes."

"That's sort of like broken symmetry," Tom said. He took out the gold pen his father had given him as an eighteenth birthday present and balanced its point on the armrest of his chair. "For the half a second this pen stands by itself, it's symmetrical with respect to the directions it might fall. As soon as it falls the symmetry is broken. But it was originally there all the same."

An hour into the reception, Tom slipped away from Luz to refill his wine glass. It took a moment for his eyes to adjust to the darkness in the refreshment pavilion, so he didn't recognize the man and woman standing with their backs to him until he heard their voices. "There's no doubt about it," Luz's mother was saying, "we both have talent, but Luz had the advantages." She sipped from the paper cup in her hand.

Tom's father stopped poking at the flower on top of the petit four on his plate. "Advantages?"

"Sure I had a drinking problem," said Luz's mother, "just like my father, but I never hit her like he hit me and my brothers." She sipped again from her cup. "I fought her art tooth and nail, but I think that gave her the drive she needed to succeed. My parents were really easy to get along with—when sober—because they didn't give a damn what I did. So I coasted through school, wasted my college scholarship on drama, and now I'm working for a woman who's only half as smart as I am—but she has a master's in sociology, so she's the boss." She raised her eyebrows, dark and exquisite like her daughter's. "How about your son—he's a sharp one too, isn't he? Was he difficult to raise?" Tom, who'd been about to come forward, froze.

His father shook his head. "No, he was an ideal child—always eager to learn, almost always cheerful, charming manners—" He paused to nibble on his petit four.

"So did he remain the angel in the house as a teenager?" Luz's mother asked.

Tom's father chewed slowly, swallowed. "Yes."

The elegant eyebrows rose higher. "And you've never had any problems at all?"

Tom's father dropped the cake and its plate in the waste container beside him. "Gifted people, such as my son, are easily depressed and often excessively sensitive."

"Depression is a sign of genius, eh? At that rate I should be challenging Einstein." Luz's mother crushed the paper cup in her hand. "Not every child lives up to potential, you know." She tossed the cup on the grass.

"I am aware of that," Tom's father said.

Luz's mother spotted Tom. "Little pitchers have big ears. No, don't be shy. Come here and let your new mother-in-law give you a kiss." As Tom bent his cheek down to her, she whispered, "You have my sympathy, kid." She drew back, bobbed her head. "Guess I'll go give my daughter some maternal advice. Be seeing you, gentlemen."

As she moved out into the sunshine, Tom's father said, "What an appalling woman."

"I've met worse."

"You should have heard what she said to me!"

"I did." While Luz's cousin Herman, manning the punchbowl, filled his glass with lemonade, Tom said, "If I'm too sensitive, Dad, it's because you won't stop pushing me."

"If you're honest, Tom, you'll admit I've only guided you, never pushed you. I didn't have to."

It was an old-fashioned metal mailbox, the kind with a curved top, and someone had long ago painted on its side in crooked letters "SCHAFFER." Like the mailbox, the yellow stucco farmhouse at the end of the driveway was old-fashioned and shabby. The white-haired man sitting on the porch silently watched Tom walk up the driveway.

Tom paused at the foot of the porch steps, wondering how to introduce himself. Years of working under the sun had burnt the old man's skin the color and texture of brick, but his square chin was familiar. He didn't smile at Tom, but the network of lines on his face, set in a pattern of endurance, softened. My genetic father, Tom thought. "You've been away a long time," the old man said.

Tom blushed. "No, sir, I'm Tom Junior, your son's son."

The screen door squeaked open. "Jim, who is that?" A stout little gray-haired woman came out onto the porch.

"It's Tom's son Tom."

"Praise the Lord, what a surprise!" She held the old man's rocking chair steady as he slowly rose out of it. "I'm your grandma Sheila, Tom, not that I'd expect you to recognize me. Last time you saw me you were only a year old." Keeping a hand on her husband's arm, she led them into the house. "You'll have to excuse your grandpa Jim—he had a stroke this spring and his mind

wanders a little." They went through a darkened living room crowded with sagging furniture and an enormous old console TV, and into a large, brightly-lit kitchen. There was no autochef, not even a microwave, but his grandmother took an enameled teakettle from the battered gas range.

Tom sat next to his grandfather at the round kitchen table. "I'm sorry I didn't let you know I was coming," Tom said, "but I was at a conference near here this weekend, and I just suddenly got the idea to visit." That was not quite the truth—Luz had suggested he see his grandparents as soon as she learned where the conference was taking place.

"And how's your new wife?" His grandmother smiled at him as she filled the kettle with water.

It had also been Luz's idea to send them a wedding invitation. "We couldn't afford plane fare for both of us to come to California, but she said to say hello to you both." Actually she'd said to give them both a kiss but Tom had no idea how to say that, much less do it—these people were total strangers.

"Did your father ever tell you," the old man asked, stroking his chin in a very familiar way, "that when he was barely three he could read the Bible aloud better than a lot of grownups?" Without giving Tom a chance to reply, the old man continued, "When he was seven he beat out a college kid in Scripture memorization. We were sure he was going to be a famous preacher, and so was he." The old man spread his empty hands. "Wanted to be a preacher myself, but that wasn't the Lord's will. Halfway through my first semester at Bible college, my daddy broke his leg bad. I had to go back and help him on the farm."

The old man shook his head. "Of course I could have tried again after I got back from the war, but the farm was in a bad way, a very bad way. It looked like we were going to lose it, and my daddy took his own life."

The old woman put down a cup of hot water with a tea bag in it before Tom. "The Lord forgive that poor man," she said.

"I went to the banker and persuaded him to give me one more year so Daddy's life wouldn't be a total loss. I got it and the Lord blessed me with a very small profit." The old man's sharp eyes glanced at Tom. "Have you read the Bible, boy?"

"Well, I read parts of it for a world literature class—"

"In the eighteenth chapter of his book, the prophet Ezekiel says: 'The fathers have eaten a sour grape and the children's teeth are set on edge.' " The old man pursed his lips as if he could taste the grape. "Even if I were an atheist like your father, I'd have to

admit the truth of that. My father ate that sour grape, and God set my teeth on edge by taking away my son."

Tom nodded, embarrassed. "You see," his grandfather said, "your father had to take a science class in high school and he chose biology. 'Daddy,' he said to me, 'I know that man teaches nothing but evolution, and someone ought to witness to the other students about the truth of God's word.' Well, Smith—the biology teacher—soon wanted Tom expelled from the class, but there was nothing in the discipline code against asking polite questions." The old man frowned. "But I should've paid more attention when Tom took to staying after school every day so Smith could answer his questions.

"Tom was talking to me less and less, spending his time in his room—reading books Smith gave him, I later found out. But he was always a truthful, direct boy, and finally he started telling me about sea bottoms and fossils and uranium. I couldn't follow the half of it, and I didn't bother. Even if all that's true, I said, it just means God made the world that way to test our faith in His Word.

"Tom said he couldn't believe God would give us intelligence and then command us to deny it. I told Tom that my daddy's death had taught me whatever we esteem most highly, God takes it away to test our faith. I told Tom God was asking him to sacrifice his mind to Him, and that's what he must do if he wanted to keep me as his father. I warned Tom I wasn't going to overlook God's Word because he was my son and that he wasn't going to get a cent of the money I'd been saving since he was born to send him to college, unless he agreed to go to a Bible college," the old man said proudly. "Tom refused, but Smith finally finagled him a scholarship to a state school. My money's still waiting for him." His grandfather's fingers beat a silent tattoo on the table. "That university made him a complete atheist."

"Jim, it's time for your medicine." Tom's grandmother handed the old man a pill and a glass of water. He swallowed the pill and said to Tom, "So you see, boy, how the Bible always tells the truth."

"Jim, you know how the doctor told you that you need your sleep," Tom's grandmother said.

His grandfather rose slowly. "Sorry to be leaving you so early, but nowadays I fall asleep at nine o'clock whether I'm in my bed or not. If you're here in the morning, I'll show you the farm." He smiled at Tom and followed his wife through the doorway.

Tom slumped in his chair, tracing a finger through the sugar

he'd spilled on the vinyl tablecloth. Too much symmetry, he thought.

His grandmother returned and sat beside Tom. "I hope Jim didn't hurt your feelings," she said. "After that stroke he's lived more in the past than the present." She looked down, perhaps at the worn gold wedding band on her finger.

Tom wondered what he and his father had inherited from her—it wasn't her deep brown eyes or her round face or her stocky frame. She said, "I still write your father now and then, and he calls me back—at a friend's house. Jim wouldn't approve if he knew. Your father's sent us quite a bit of money over the years too, but I haven't told Jim about that either."

"My father never told me about any of that," Tom said. "I'm afraid I have to catch a plane soon—I'm sorry I can't stay any longer."

His grandmother smiled. "You'll want to be getting back to your bride."

Tom nodded, then summoned all his courage. "Grandmother, there is one thing I did want to ask. Do you—do you find me very different from my father?"

She looked closely at Tom. "I haven't seen him, except on the phone, in so long . . . but you do look just like I remember him. You seem quieter though. I mean your father only listens to people with half his mind—the other half is busy thinking up a reply."

Tom pulled on one sleeve of his jacket. "Jim—Grandpa was very interesting to listen to." He put his arm in the other sleeve. "His life, though—it seems really sad. Did he, ah, always talk a lot about guilt being inherited?"

"It really started when your father left us," his grandmother said, "but it has gotten worse since his stroke. He doesn't even remember the Bible right anymore." She put Tom's teacup in the sink.

"That stuff about the sour grape isn't in there?" Tom asked.

"It is, but your grandpa didn't remember the whole passage: 'In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape and the children's teeth are set on edge. But everyone shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge.' " She smiled. "I used to win prizes for Scripture memorization too."

His father's paper was pretty much what Tom expected it would be: yet another attempt to bring down renascence theory, this time by presenting a gauge interpretation of the omicron-upsilon

interaction. The posters announcing his father's presentation had been up since Tom's return from California three weeks ago, but the lecture room was barely half full and only a sprinkling of polite applause followed the reading. Tom did not clap at all.

At first it seemed no one had any questions, but then Dr. Huddle heaved his bulk up from a chair a few rows in front of Tom, his bald head blocking Tom's view of his father. "Thanks for your views on the omicron-upsilon, Schaffer." Huddle could aford to be rude to his father because he was twice a Nobel laureate. "Got a few questions though." The first rustle of genuine interest passed through the audience—just the words "few questions," repeated in Huddle's wheezy drawl, were known to make junior faculty blanch and graduate students totally mute.

"Actually, just two questions," Huddle said. "One, I don't see that you've successfully closed off that supersymmetry generator of yours. I see an infinite number of states coming out of it, not just two." Huddle began squeezing his way down the aisle toward the speaker's platform.

Tom's father said, "As I explained, the Marasakoff transformations close it off—"

"Not in this case." Huddle pressed past Tom's father to the blackboard. Tom felt a sharp twinge in his stomach. He put his hand in front of his mouth: he didn't want anyone to see he was smiling.

Huddle was rubbing out offending variables with one hand and writing in new ones with his other hand. "What you really needed was another one of those symmetry-breaking fields—then you close it off neatly." Another needle pierced Tom.

"It's superficially simpler, I admit—" his father began.

"But what's *really* simpler is just to accept renascence for once and for all. With decking and quasifields, you can throw half this trash out—" Huddle waved a hand at the formulas, which completely covered two blackboards.

"That's partly a matter of philosophical orientation," his father said. The pain in Tom's stomach now burned continuously.

"But simplicity is always to be preferred, isn't it, Schaffer?"

"Yes, I suppose so." His father was nodding slowly. "Well, I see my time here is up." The audience was utterly silent as his father snapped open his briefcase, dropped in the sheaf of papers from the podium, clicked the case shut.

As the others began rising, Tom leapt to his feet and sprinted through the doors. Bent almost double in pain, he ducked into the men's room and hid in one of the stalls, waiting for the pain to

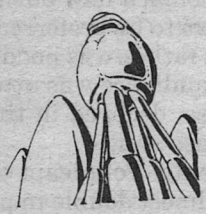
stop. The stall had a rail for the handicapped next to the toilet; Tom gripped it with both hands and rested his forehead against its cold metal.

The door creaked open and someone walked in, in short crisp steps. Tom punched the flush button and pulled himself up, hoping it wasn't someone who knew him, who would attempt to commiserate with him about his father's paper. But it was his father himself, standing alone at the row of sinks on the opposite wall, taking a pillbox from his jacket. He saw Tom's reflection in the mirror before him, and nodded to his son. Tom froze at the sight of the old man and the young man imprisoned together in the mirror. A stranger, he thought, might take them for father and son, yes, but never identicals. It wasn't just his father's wiry beard versus Tom's clean-shaven face, nor the older man's silver-rimmed glasses and Tom's surgically corrected corneas. It was the tense concentration with which his father always held himself, tauter than ever now, so different from Tom's ambivalent posture, one hand stretched toward the outer door but the rest of his body drawn toward his father.

Tom at last turned away, stepped to the door. His father still said nothing, but placed two small pills on the sink and shook open the telescoping drinking cup he always carried with him. Tom paused, one hand on the door's smooth chrome handle. "Dad, how did you like having your own teeth set—" he stopped, seeing only an old man hunched over a sink, pushing the cold water lever with trembling fingers. Not a god or a monster unless Tom chose to make him such. "I mean I'm sorry," he heard himself say to his father.

The old man nodded stiffly. "Huddle's always resented the public attention I've gotten." Clenching the pills in his fist, he held his cup under the stream of cold water. "Ulcer's bad, as you probably know—like a hellfire, isn't it?"

Tom's hand moved toward his own body, touched it. Only then did he realize his pain had already ceased. ●



art: Nicholas Jainschigg

ON CANNON BEACH

by Marta Randall

The author, who is currently president of SFWA, has five novels in print. She lives in Oakland, CA in the Mountain Boulevard Menagerie with one husband, one son, two dogs, and two cats. She has deep and abiding hopes of adding a cornsnake to the collection, if the humans don't mind and the animals won't eat it. At last notice, the humans *did* mind and the animals were hungry. She suspects this to be typical of life in general.

Toleman found me slumped near my equipment, said he couldn't afford to lose me, too, and gave me a week's leave. Typical of him; a week was not long enough to catch a transport out of the Rainier Ice Station and back again, and certainly not long enough to go anywhere on foot—he wanted me close by, where his generosity could be easily interrupted by the unfortunate press of work. So sorry, my dear. Unavoidable. Here's your cryometer—go.

Of the original fourteen on the crew, only seven of us remained and we knew Toleman well enough to anticipate his acts of generosity and work around them. That night Marti accidentally misplaced the keys to Toleman's LandCat, Jerry accidentally forgot to lock the transport pool door, and Gretch accidentally left two full cans of gas strapped in place. I took off well before dawn. A week of being short-handed would cool Toleman's anger at the theft—it always did.

The drive south was depressing. Small, sad towns littered the sides of the collapsing highway, their empty buildings and icy streets interrupting blasted brown fields or the skeletons of forests. Neither roads nor habitations had been built to withstand great cold, and the ice had come quickly; increasing cloudiness had given us progressively colder summers, until one hard winter laid down the first ice, and the next cool summer had not melted the pack. A second hard winter deflected more of the sun's heat; the next summer the nascent glaciers bounced even more sunlight back to space. The pattern established itself: a colder winter, a colder summer, and now glaciers marched down the sides of mountains, linking one to the other and freezing the northern latitudes. For all our observing and metering and evacuating, this sudden, speedy ice age was upon us and no one, least of all the beleaguered scientists, could tell when, or if, it would end. Hard winters were now a foregone conclusion; cold destroyed the work of hands and by next January this land, too, would be under the ice.

I slept that night in a schoolhouse amid the detritus of evacuation. "MY GREAT-GRANDFATHER BUILT THIS TOWN" read a spray-painted message on the wooden door. I put my fingertips to the words. Salvage crews had been through the area already, taking whatever they found necessary and important and removing it to the increasingly crowded south. But who would save the real memories, the important, mundane trivia of the world before the ice? Not me. My job was to monitor the glaciers,

measure the progress of the hungry ice, observe the rubble of broken homes and broken lives swept tidily before the glaciers' skirts. I touched the faded words again, wriggled into my down bag, and tried to sleep.

I crossed into Oregon the next day, on highways pitted and buckled by the cold, and on impulse skirted the dead city of Portland and drove west. Glaciers surrounded the state, the Cascades were impassable, but the ocean's warmth should keep the coast bearable; pines still survived where oak and manzanita once flourished. Evacuation had been more recent and more hasty here, but I expected no other people, and met none.

Glacial streams had washed out the last three miles of road. I switched tires for treads and bumped down the sides of the coast range. The sky was high and white with fog, the road north blocked by fallen trees and bridges. I turned south, looking for a place to stay.

The sign said "Cannon Beach" and two bedraggled, stubborn manzanita grew beside it. I drove toward the sea.

Sagging homes lined the road, roofs caved in by last year's snow or the fall of dead trees. Wind gusted through broken windows along the main street; a door creaked and slammed and creaked again. Cold had killed the ferns, hollyhocks, azaleas, and rhododendrons. Like much of the animal life, these plants would not be replaced by their colder-climate counterparts; the speed of glaciation prevented it. Road and town ended together where a concrete culvert had succumbed to the cold and the torrents of the spring melt, taking the pavement with it. I backed the LandCat, found a side street to the beach, and drove along the tide line. A huge, beehive-shaped rock loomed over the surf. The town looked better from here, less obviously dead. Waves fell against the sand, gray and white beneath a gray sky; I skirted piles of driftwood and the wrack of storms.

Toward evening I selected a house beside one of the clear, nonglacial streams feeding into the ocean; the top story had collapsed but the beach level seemed wind-tight and secure. A huge iron stove stood inside the door, but I didn't know if the flue and chimney were intact and was too tired to check it out. I built a driftwood fire on the beach, ate of the supplies Joshua had accidentally left in the LandCat, staggered back inside and into my sleeping bag, and fell asleep to the noise of surf.

I woke to the smell of frying fish and a high, cracked voice saying, "About time you wake up. Only breakfast I serve, nothing

else, just bed and breakfast and breakfast is at dawn. I have too much to do to wait on my people. That your car?"

Without moving, I opened my eyes. A small, gaunt figure bent to chuck more driftwood into the iron stove's firebox. It slammed the door closed and turned to look at me, hands on hips. I blinked, unable to make out the face.

"Been a long time," the figure said. "But I still know what to do. I rent houses here for fifty year, sixty, all types. You don't have dog, do you? I don't mind dogs, but some of my people don't like them, I try to make everybody happy, but . . ." The figure turned back to the stove and I sat up slowly.

"You're not supposed to be here," I said stupidly. The smell of fish made my mouth water.

"Sixty year, seventy, *I'm* not going to leave. Ice Age, humph." The figure pushed a skillet off the burner, flapped most of the sand from a rickety table, and, using both hands, hoisted the skillet from stove to table. "There. No napkin, too busy to all the time wash napkin. I'm Mrs. Vrach, you know that. Who are you?"

"Sandra," I said, pulling my sweater over my head. "Sandra Price."

"Sit," Mrs. Vrach said. "Eat. I clean table soon. You say you have dog?"

We sat on uneven chairs across the table from each other, while Mrs. Vrach ate and talked, and I ate and stared. The fish came from a pool upstream, she had caught them herself. She'd hidden in the woods when the Evac crews came through, she said proudly. Her children and grandchildren had long since gone south. She showed me snapshots indecipherable with age; she said she had two great-grandchildren but she'd never seen photographs of them. She had reached that androgynous age where the sexes begin to merge: whiskers peppered her chin, and her yellow-white hair was sparse, for all that her eyes and voice were sharp. When the fish had been reduced to bones I licked my fingers clean while Mrs. Vrach hefted the skillet. Her arms shook, but she wouldn't let me near it.

"Part of service," she said. "I treat my people okay." But she didn't object when I insisted on washing the dishes, although she watched me carefully and swooped down once to flick a sliver of fish from the skillet.

I spent that day, and the next, following Mrs. Vrach around the deserted ruins of Cannon Beach, trying to determine just how crazy she was and expostulating on the benefits of moving south. She ignored my arguments; she had been here for sixty years, she

said firmly, and wasn't going to leave. "Wars," she told me, shaking her head. "Famine. Political craziness. I, Mrs. Vrach, I live through all. Now to leave my home, and for what? A little cold? Humph." I couldn't convince her that in a year or two her home would be under a glacier, and eventually I gave up.

She knew all the houses, all the stores, and precisely what each one contained. We shopped together through the ruins of the village; Mrs. Vrach carefully counted out shells and agates in payment and I carried her purchases, adding them to the rag-tag pile she kept near the stove. That evening we went to check her fish traps, Mrs. Vrach scurrying before me. As we returned along the broken road, she called greetings to empty doorways, held animated conversations with broken windows, reprimanded a nonexistent dog in the collapse of what had been a garden. I was used to the logic of the ice and this old woman confused me, until I floundered between the reality of my world and the reality of hers. That evening I talked again of the life to the south, the warm weather, the food; she stopped in the midst of a conversation with her favorite grandson and stared at me.

"No," she said flatly. "Here I have come, after long time, many trials. Here I stay." She gathered her dilapidated quilt about her shoulders and went outside. I lay in my sleeping bag, thinking about abduction, while tears ran down my nose.

I woke well past dawn. The room was empty and no fish sizzled on the stove; the iron barely retained the heat of last night's fire. I dressed hastily and ran onto the beach, still zipping my parka, shouting her name. A figure stood far down the beach near the great triangular rock. I ran toward her, cursing the sand underfoot.

When I reached her, she had settled again in the lee of a driftwood pile. I stopped, gasping for air, while she gestured toward the sea.

"That," she said. "It is what?"

I squinted through the fog, barely making out a darker mass looming off the northern point, beyond the rock with the ruined lighthouse. I rubbed my eyes and looked again. Mrs. Vrach was uncharacteristically silent.

"An iceberg," I said finally. "It's an iceberg."

"Ah." She put her hands on her knees. "I watch it get bigger, it comes close. It is far away, yes?"

"Yes."

"It come closer?"

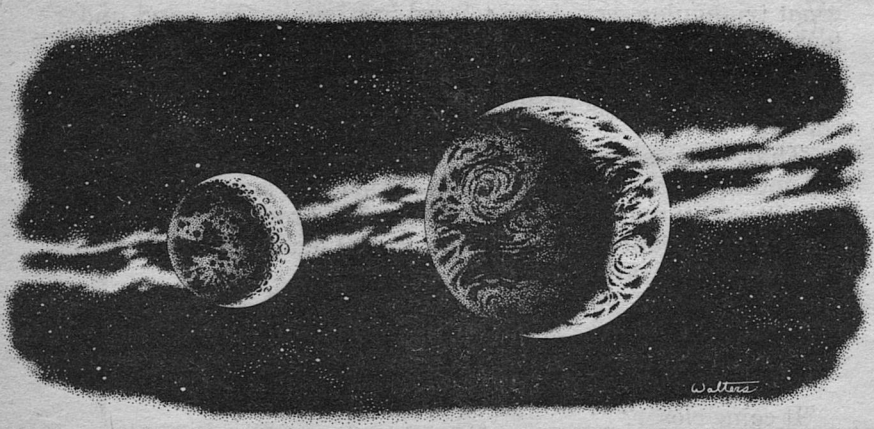
"No. The ice will come down from the mountains."

She nodded. "Then it is time to go."

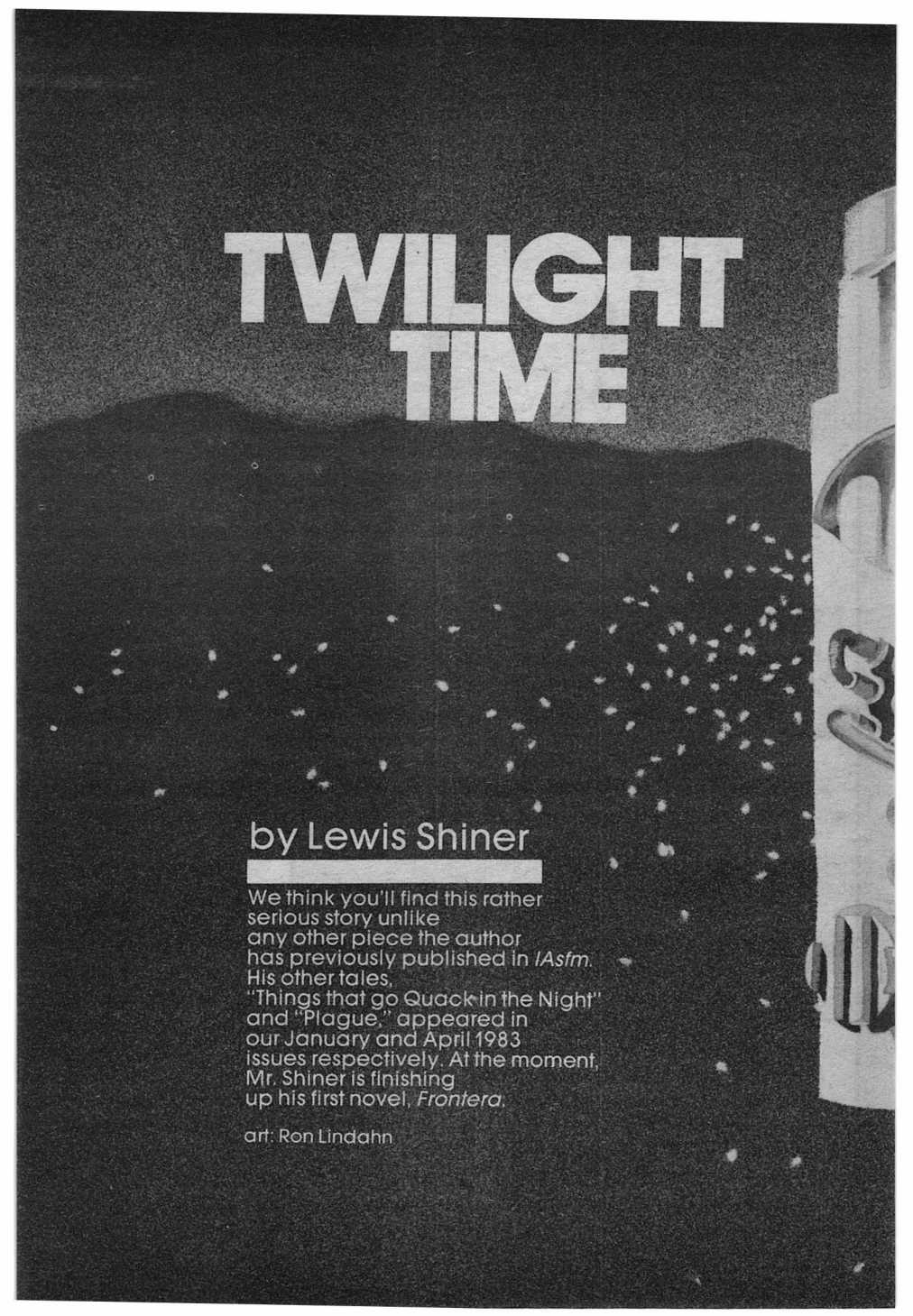
But she made no gesture toward leaving, even after I had run back to the house, thrown her possessions and mine into the LandCat, and driven it down the beach to her. I pleaded, argued, cajoled, shouted, and threatened until, exhausted, I sat at her feet. She took my hand and pressed it between her twisted fingers. She started to talk, then: to me, her grandchildren, her husband, her friends. She told folk stories and personal stories, she sang in a language I didn't know. Toward dusk I built a fire and the talking lessened, then stopped. I looked at her, but she patted my hair and pulled my head against her knee. Eventually I slept.

I woke a few hours later. The fire was a bed of sullen embers and Mrs. Vrach, relaxed in the arms of the driftwood, faced the ocean with her eyes open and a tiny, wrinkled smile on her lips. I wanted to close her eyes, I wanted to carry her back to her house, I wanted to bury her far from the threat of the ice, but in the end I did none of these things. Instead I took her possessions from the LandCat and arranged them around her: the skillets and pans, the empty fish traps, the ancient photographs, the tattered quilt tucked about her shoulders. I took my thick woolen muffler and wrapped it around her neck, and I got into the LandCat and left her there, staring toward the coming ice. I was crying so hard I almost missed the road.

On the way back north, I took an axe and chopped free the plank that said "MY GREAT-GRANDFATHER BUILT THIS TOWN." It hung outside my hut, facing the ice, until the day we had to leave. ●



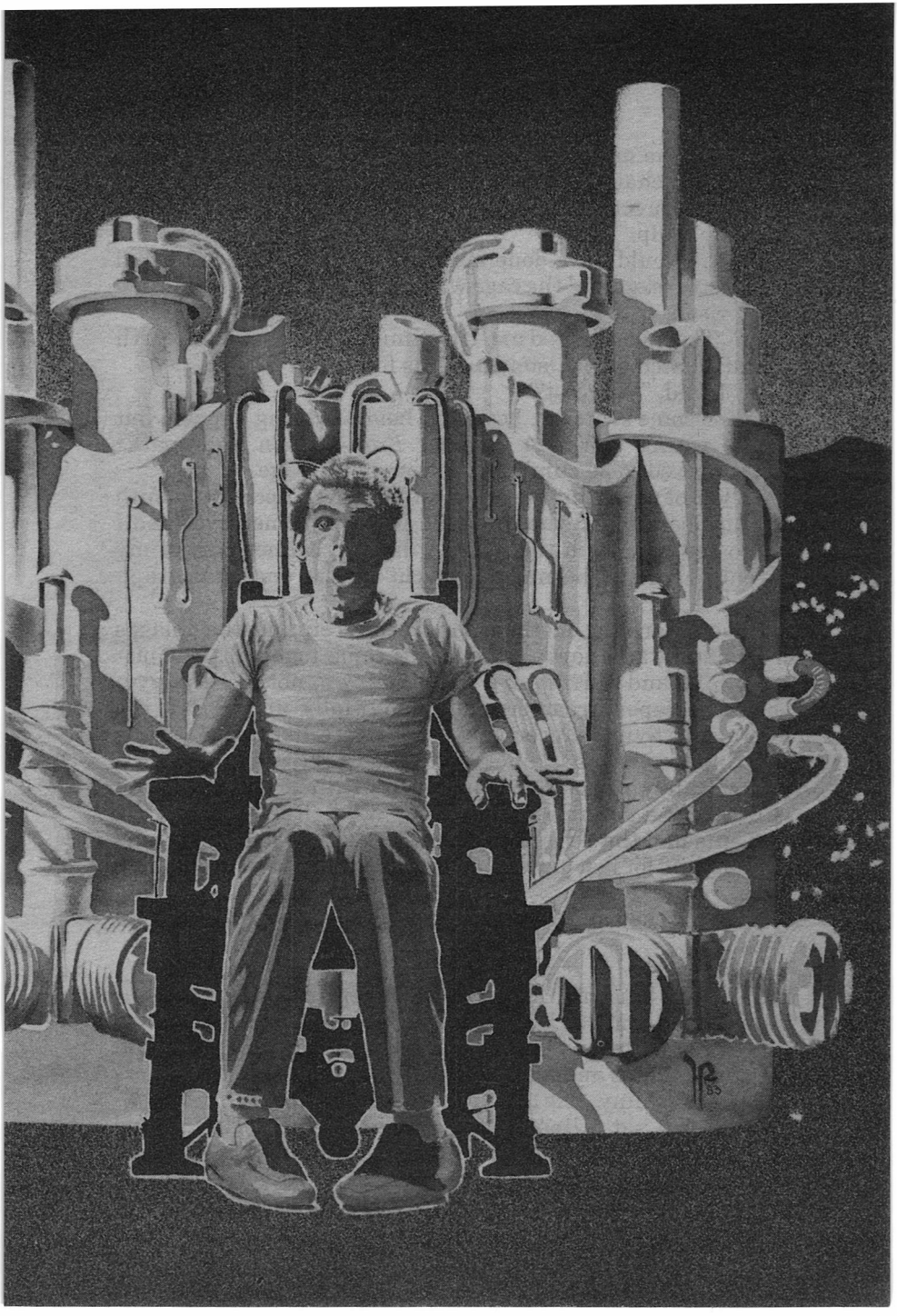
"It's a forest out there, Cameron!"



by Lewis Shiner

We think you'll find this rather serious story unlike any other piece the author has previously published in *IAsfm*. His other tales, "Things that go Quack in the Night" and "Plague," appeared in our January and April 1983 issues respectively. At the moment, Mr. Shiner is finishing up his first novel, *Frontera*.

art: Ron Lindahn



I

The part of the machine they strapped me to looked too much like an electric chair. A sudden, violent urge to resist came over me as the two proctors buckled me down and fastened the electrodes to my scalp.

Not that it would have done me much good. The machine and I were in a steel cage and the cage was in the middle of a maximum security prison.

"Okay?" Thornberg asked me. His thinning hair was damp with sweat and a patch of it glistened on his forehead.

"Sure," I said, "Why not?"

He turned some switches. I couldn't hear anything happen, but then, this wasn't *I Was A Teenage Frankenstein* and sparks weren't supposed to be climbing the bars of the cage.

Then a jolt of power hit me and I couldn't even open my mouth to tell Thornberg to cut the thing off. My eyes filmed over and I started to see images in the mist. A distant, calmer part of my brain realized that Thornberg had cut in the encephalograph tapes.

We'd been working on them for weeks, refining the images detail by detail, and now all the pieces came together. Not just the steep hills and narrow streets of the town, not just the gym and the crepe-paper streamers and Buddy Holly singing, but the whole era, the flying saucer movies, the cars like rocket ships, rolled up blue jeans and flannel shirts and PF Flyer tennis shoes, yo-yos, the candy wagon at noon recess, William Lundigan and Tom Corbett and Johnny Horton. They all melted together, the world events and the TV shows, the facts and the fiction and the imaginings, and for just one second they made a coherent, tangible universe.

And then I kicked and threw out my arms because I was falling.

II

I fell the way I did in dreams, trying to jerk myself awake, but the fall went on and on. I opened my eyes and saw a quiet blue, as if the sky had turned to water and I was drifting down through it. I hit on my hands and knees and felt the dirt under my fingers turn hard and grainy, felt the sun burn into my back.

Off to the left sat a line of low, gray-green hills. The ground where I crouched was covered with tough bull-head weeds and the sky overhead was the clear, hot blue of an Arizona summer.

The San Carlos Mountains, I thought. He did it. I'm back.

From the angle of the sun it looked to be late afternoon. I'd

landed outside the city, as planned, to avoid materializing inside a crowd or a solid wall.

I sucked the good clean air into my lungs and danced a couple of steps across the sand. All I wanted was to get into town and make sure the rest of it was there, that it was all really happening.

I found the highway a few hundred yards to the south. LeeAnn was a tight feeling in my chest as I headed for town at a fast walk.

My eyes were so full of the mountains and the open sky that I didn't notice the thing in the road until I was almost on top of it.

The pavement was not just broken, but scarred, cut by a huge, melted trench, Something had boiled the asphalt up in two knee-high waves and left it frozen in mid-air. The sand around it looked like a giant tire track in icy mud, a jagged surface of glassy whites and browns.

The strangest part was that for a couple of seconds I didn't realize that anything was wrong. My memories had become such a hash that the San Carlos Reservation had turned into a desert from a Sunday afternoon *Science Fiction Theater* and any minute I expected to see Caltiki or a giant scorpion come over the nearest rise.

I knelt to touch the asphalt ridge. Nothing in the real 1961, the one in the history books, could do this to a road.

A distant rumbling made me look up. A truck was coming out of the east, and it was swollen with all the outlandish bumps and curves of the middle fifties. I jogged toward it, waving one arm, and it pulled up beside me.

The driver was an aging Apache in faded jeans and a T-shirt. "*Ya-ta-hey,* friend," he said. "Goin' in to Globe?"

"Yeah," I said, out of breath. "But I need to tell you. The road's . . . torn up, just ahead."

"Got the road again, did they? Damn gover'ment. Always got to do their tests on Indian land. You want a lift?"

"Yeah," I said, "Yeah, I do. Thanks."

I got in and he threw the truck in gear with a sound like a bag of cans rolling downhill. I tried to remember the last time I'd seen a gearshift on the steering column.

"My name's Big Charlie," he said,

"Travis," I said. The cab of the truck smelled like Wildroot Creme Oil, and a magazine photo of Marilyn Monroe stared at me from the open glove compartment. A rabbit's foot hung off the keys in the ignition and I had to remind myself that life was

cheap in the sixties, even the lives of seals and leopards and rabbits.

A hysterical DJ on the radio was shouting, "K-Z-O-W, kay-ZOW! Rockin' and rollin' Gila County with Ozzie and Harriet's favorite son . . . " The voice drowned in an ocean of reverb and out of it swam the sweet tenor of Ricky Nelson, singing "Travelin' Man."

Somehow the music made it all real and I had to look into the wind to keep the water out of my eyes. Up ahead of us in Globe was a 15-year-old kid who was listening to the same song, starting to get ready for his end-of-the-school-year dance. At that dance he was going to meet a girl named LeeAnn Patterson and fall in love with her. And he was never going to get over her.

Never.

Big Charlie eased the pickup off the road and found a place to cross the strip of melted glass. When the song finished the radio erupted in a flare of tumpets. "This is Saturday, May the 27th, and this is Kay-Zowzowzow NEWS!" Big Charlie turned the volume down with an automatic flip of the wrist, but I didn't care. The date was right, and I could have rattled off the headlines as well as the DJ could. Thornberg had made me do my homework.

Krushchev and Kennedy were headed for test-ban talks in Vienna. Freedom Riders were being jailed in Mississippi, and the Communists were stepping up their assault on Laos. Eichmann was on trial in Jerusalem, and Alan Shepard was still being honored for his space flight of three weeks before.

On the local scene, six teenagers were dead over in Stafford, part of the rising Memorial Day Death Toll. Rumors were going around about a strike against Kennicot Copper, whose strip mines employed about half of Globe's work force.

Eddie Sachs was going to be in the pole position when they ran the 500 on Tuesday. The Angels had taken the Tigers, and the Giants had edged the Cubs in 13.

A decade of peace and quiet and short hair was winding down; a time when people knew their place and stayed in it. For ten years nobody had wanted anything but a new car and a bigger TV set, but now all that was about to change. In a little over a year the Cuban missle crisis would send thousands of people into their back yards to dig bomb shelters, and the "advisors" would start pouring into Southeast Asia. In another year the president would be dead.

All that I knew. What I didn't know was why there was a huge melted scar across the desert.

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Suddenly the truck's brakes squealed and I jerked back to attention. My eyes focused on the road ahead and saw a little boy straddling the white line, waving frantically.

The truck slewed to the left and stopped dead. A girl of 12 or 13 stood up from a patch of mesquite and stared at us like she wanted to run away. She had a good six years on the boy, but when he ran back to her it seemed to calm her down.

"Hey," Big Charlie shouted, leaning out his window. "What do you kids think you're doing?"

The boy was tugging on the girl's arm, saying, "It's *okay!* They're both *okay,* I'm sure, I'm really sure!"

The boy pulled her gently toward the driver's window of the truck. "Can you help us, mister?"

"What's wrong? What's the big idea of standing out there in the middle of the road like that? You could have got killed."

The boy backed away from Charlie's anger and the girl stepped in. "We . . . we were running away from home." She looked down at the boy as if she need confirmation, and if I hadn't known before that she was lying, I knew it then. "We . . . changed our minds. Can you take us back, mister? Just as far as town? Please?"

Charlie thought it over for a minute and seemed to come up with the same answer I did. Whatever they'd done probably wasn't that serious, and they were bound to be better off in town than hitchhiking in the middle of the desert.

"In the back," he said. "And watch what you're doing!"

They scrambled over the side of the pickup, their sneakers banging on the side walls. I turned to look at them as we pulled away and they were huddled by the tailgate, arms around each other, their eyes squeezed shut.

What were they running from? I wondered, They looked like they hadn't eaten in a couple of days, and their clothes were torn and dirty.

And what in God's name had the boy meant when he said we were "okay?"

Don't worry about it, I told myself. Don't get involved. You haven't got time to get mixed up in somebody else's problems. You're not going to be here that long.

We passed Glen's Market at the foot of Skyline Drive, the one with the heavy wooden screen door that said "Rainbo is *good* bread" and the rich smells of doughnuts and bubble gum and citrus fruit.

"Where do you want off?" Big Charlie asked me.

"Downtown, anywhere." The highway had curved past Globe's

three motels and now the grade school was coming up on the right. The Toastmaster Cafe, and its big Wurlitzer juke box with the colored tube of bubbles around the side, was just across the street. Overhead was the concrete walkway used to get from one to the other. It seemed a lot closer to the ground than it used to, even though I'd tried to prepare myself for things being smaller than I remembered.

Number 207 on the Toastmaster's Wurlitzer was "True Love Ways" by Buddy Holly.

I could almost hear those thick, syrupy violins, and the hollow moan of King Curtis' saxaphone as we turned the corner and pulled up in front of Upton's.

"This okay?" Big Charlie asked.

"Fine." I was thinking about the smell of pencil shavings and the one piece of gum that was always stuck in the drain of the water fountain at the high school across the street. I got out of the truck. "I really appreciate it."

"Not to worry," Big Charlie said, and the pickup rattled away down Main Street.

The counter inside Upton's swung out in a wide U, dotted with red plastic-covered stools. The chrome and the white linoleum made it look more like an operating room than a place to eat, but it passed for atmosphere at the time.

"Help you?" said the kid behind the counter.

His name was Curtis and he lived up the street from my parents' house. He was a lot younger than I remembered him and he could have done with a shampoo. It was all I could do not to call him by name and order a Suicide. The Suicide was Curtis' own invention, and he made it by playing the chrome spiggots behind the counter like they were piano keys.

"Just coffee," I said.

Five of the tables along the south wall were occupied, two of them by clean-cut families at dinner. Dinner tonight was a hamburger or the 89¢ Daily Special: fried chicken, three vegetables, tea or coffee. The women's dresses hung to mid-calf and most of the male children had flat-top haircuts that showed a strip of close-shaven skull in the middle. Everybody seemed to be smoking.

A woman around the corner from me had bought the Jackie Kennedy look all the way, down to the red pill-box hat and the upswept hair. Two seats away from her a kid in a T-shirt and a leather jacket was flipping noisily through the metal-edged pages in the juke box console.

I paid a nickel for a copy of the *Arizona Record* out of a wooden box by the door. There was nothing in it about melted scars in the desert, just weddings and graduations and church announcements.

When I looked up, the two kids from the highway were sitting next to me. The girl was getting some stares. Her face was streaked with dirt and her shirt was thin enough to make it obvious that she should have been wearing a training bra or something under it.

"My name's Carolyn," she said. "This is Jeremy." She put her arm around the boy, who smiled and picked at his fingernails.

"I'm Travis. Is he your brother?"

"Yes," the girl said, at the same time that the boy said, "No."

I shook my head. "This isn't going to get us anywhere."

"What do you want to know for, anyway?" the girl asked.

"I don't really care. You're following me, remember?"

Curtis was standing by the brand-new Seeburg box in the corner. He must have gotten tired of waiting for the kid in the motorcycle jacket to make up his mind. He pushed some buttons, a record dropped, and the room filled with violins. The bass thumped, a stick touched a cymbal, and Ray Charles started singing "Georgia."

"Why do you keep doing that?"

"Doing what?"

"Rubbing your hair that way. Like it feels funny."

I jerked my hand away from my ragged prison haircut. Ray was singing about his dreams. *"The road,"* he sang, *"leads back to you . . . "*

I knew he was talking to me. My road had brought me back here, to see Curtis standing in front of the juke box, to the music hanging changeless in the air, to LeeAnn. Even if Brother Ray and Hogey Carmichael had never imagined a road made of Thornberg's anti-particles.

"Stop that," the girl said, and for a second I thought she was talking to me. Then I saw that Jeremy was chewing on the ridge of flesh between his thumb and forefinger, staring down at the countertop. Blood was starting to trickle out of the front of his mouth. The sight of it put the music out of my head and left me scared and confused.

I hadn't looked at him closely before, but now that I did I saw scabs all over his arms and spots of dried, chocolate-colored blood on his T-shirt. His eyes were rolling back in his head and he looked like he was going to go backwards off the stool.

Carolyn slapped him across the mouth, knocking his hand away. He started to moan, louder than the juke box, loud enough to turn heads across the room.

"I have to get him out of here," the girl said, pulling him to his feet.

"He needs a doctor," I said. "Let me . . . "

"No," she hissed. "Stay out of it."

I flinched from the anger in her voice and she ran for the door, tugging Jeremy after her. They were halfway across the floor when the door swung open.

A man in loose slacks and a sport shirt stood in the doorway, staring at them. The little boy looked like he'd just seen the giant wasp in *Monster From Green Hell*. His jaw dropped open and started to shake. I could see the scream building from all the way across the room.

Before he could cut loose with it, Carolyn dragged him past the man and out onto the street. The man stood there for a second with a puzzled half-smile on his face, then shrugged and looked around for a seat.

When my stomach started jumping I thought at first that I was just reacting to all the confusion. Then I remembered what Thornberg had said about phase-shifting, and I knew I only had about a minute before the charge that had sent me back wore off.

I left a quarter on the counter and went to the men's room in back. The smell of the deodorant cake in the urinal almost made me sick as I leaned against the wall. I felt drunk and dizzy and there seemed to be two of everything. Then the floor went out from under me and I was falling again.

I sailed back up toward the future like a fish on the end of a line.

III

I spent two days in debriefing. Thornberg got to ask the questions, but there was always a proctor or two around, taping every sound, every gesture I made.

From Thornberg's end everything had looked fine. One second I'd been there, the next I'd just winked out. I was gone a little over an hour, then I popped back in, dizzy but conscious, and all my signs had been good.

Thornberg's excitement showed me for the first time how personally he was involved. He seemed frankly envious, and I suddenly realized that he didn't just want the experiment to work, he wanted to be able to go back himself.

I was too caught up in my own questions to worry very long about Thornberg. My common sense told me everything that had happened to me had been real, but my rational mind was still having trouble. Who were those two kids, and what were they running from? What could have torn up the highway that way?

The proctors liked it a lot less than I did. "We've been through the government files," one of them said on the second day. "No experiments on the San Carlos Reservation. Nothing even in development that could have caused it."

"So how do you explain it?" Thornberg asked.

"Hallucination," the proctor said. "The whole experience was completely subjective and internal."

"No," Thornberg said. "Out of the question. We saw his body disappear."

The proctor stood up. "I think we'd better suspend this whole thing until this is cleared up."

"No!" Thornberg got between the proctor and the door. "We've got to have more data. We have to send him back again."

The proctor shook his head. The gesture didn't put the slightest wrinkle in his maroon double-knit uniform.

"You can't stop me, you know," Thornberg said. "You'll have to get an executive order."

"I'll get it," the proctor said, and stepped around him.

When the door was closed Thornberg turned to me. "Then we send you back first. Now."

IV

I landed in the same place I'd been, leaning against the dingy walls of the rest room for support. My head cleared, and the last two days could have been no more than a fever dream caused by bad coffee on an empty stomach.

I started back into the restaurant. The juke box was playing "Sink the Bismark" by Johnny Horton. Horton was a big local favorite and he'd died just a few months before, in a car crash in Texas.

The man in the sport shirt, the one that had scared Jeremy so badly, was sitting in a booth with a cheeseburger. I stood for a second in the shadows of the hallway and watched him. He looked ordinary to me—short, curly hair, no sideburns, no facial hair. His shirt was one of those short-sleeved African prints in muted oranges and blues that wanted to be loud but couldn't quite bring it off. Sunglasses peeked out of the shirt pocket.

He looked like a tourist. But why would there be any tourists in Globe, Arizona, in 1961?

And then I saw his fingers.

His right hand was tucked under his left elbow and the fingers were moving in short, precise gestures against his side. I'd seen hands move like that before, keying data into a computer by touch.

Cut it out, I told myself. So the guy's got a nervous habit. It's none of your business.

I picked up my copy of the newspaper from the counter and tore off the masthead, including the date. If the proctors wanted some proof, I'd try and oblige. I folded the strip of newsprint and put it in my back pocket, dropping the rest of the paper in the trash.

Once on the street I saw men all around me in short-sleeved shirts buttoned to the neck. Long, rectangular cars covered with chrome and sharp angles cruised the streets like patient sharks. TV sets blinked at me from the window of the furniture store, their screens cramped and nearly circular. I stopped and watched a toothpaste ad with an invisible shield in it and remembered the craze for secret ingredients.

That 15-year-old kid across town had a theory about secret ingredients. He believed they were codes, and that aliens from space were using them to take over the Earth. GL70: Town Secure. AT-7: Send More Saucers. He dreamed at night about great domed ships gliding over the desert.

I thought about the scar in the highway and the man in the restaurant and got another chill. This one turned my whole body cold, as if my heart had started pumping ice water.

My feet carried me down the street and stopped in front of the National News Stand. The door was locked, but through the window I could see the lines of comics: *Sea Devils* and *Showcase* and *Rip Hunter, Time Master*. My father had made me stop buying *Rip Hunter* because it was ruining my sense of reality; every time Rip and his crew went back in time they found aliens there, tampering with human history.

Aliens.

A spin rack by the door was full of science-fiction paperbacks. The short, fat Ace doubles were crammed in next to the taller Ballantines with the weird, abstract covers. Right at the top, in a pocket all to itself, was Ruppelt's *Report on Unidentified Flying Objects*.

Flying Saucers.

Further back, where I could barely see it in the dimness of the

store, was the rack of men's magazines. When the old man with the cigar that ran the place wasn't paying attention I used to go back and thumb through them, but I never found quite what I was looking for.

The store was like an unassembled Revell model kit of my childhood. All the pieces were there, the superheroes and the aliens and the unobtainable women, and if I could just fit them together the right way I might be able to make sense of it. In a lifetime I might have done it, but I only had another hour.

I felt too much like an aging delinquent in the T-shirt I was wearing, so I bought a fresh shirt at the dime store across the street and changed in their rest room. I thought for a second about time paradoxes as I threw the old one away, then decided to hell with it.

The dime store clock said seven-thirty and the dance should have started at seven. Enough of a crowd should have accumulated for me to become another faceless parent in the background. I started uphill toward the high school and was sweating by the time I got there. But that was okay. You could still sweat in 1961, and your clothes could still wrinkle.

All the doors to the gym were open and Japanese lanterns hung over the doors. From across the asphalt playground I could hear the heavy, thumping bass of "Little Darlin' " by the Diamonds.

I went inside. A banner across the far end of the gym read "Look for a Star" in crude, glittering letters. Across thirty years I remembered the sappy lyrics to the song that had been forced on us as our theme. Four-pointed stars, sprayed with gold paint, dangled from the girders, and the lanterns over the punch bowls had Saturn rings stapled to them.

Most of the teachers were standing in a clump. I recognized Mrs. Smith's hooked nose and long jaw; she'd cried when she found the drawing of her as a witch. Mr. Miller, next to her, was still wearing the goatee that he would be forced to shave off the next fall because it made him look "like a beatnik."

About half the kids in my class were already there. Bobby Arias, class president, and Myron Cessarini, track star and sex symbol, were quietly breaking hearts at their own end of the gym. Over by the opposite wall was Marsha Something-or-other, the one that threw up all over the floor in sixth grade, with the wings on her glasses and waxen skin.

But no sign of LeeAnn or the 15-year-old Travis. I went outside to get away from the heat and the close, sweat-sock smell of the place. Coals of cigarettes glowed where a few of the adults were

taking advantage of the growing darkness. I sniffed the clean air and tried to think of reasons why I didn't want to stay right where I was for the rest of my life.

Lots of reasons. Racism. Sexism. People throwing trash on highways and dumping sewage in the creeks and not even knowing it was wrong. No sex. Not on TV, not in the movies, especially not in real life. Nice girls didn't. Curfews. Dress codes. Gas guzzling cars.

Still, I thought. Still . . .

Somebody was tugging at my sleeve.

"Hey, mister," said a little boy's voice. "Hey."

I winced at the sound of it. "What are you following me for? What do you want from me?"

"We need help," Carolyn said. "If they catch us they'll kill us."

"Who will?"

"Them," Jeremy said.

He wasn't pointing at anybody. Giant ants? I wondered. "I don't understand. What is it you want me to do?"

The girl shrugged and turned her face away from me. I could see the tears glistening in her eyes. Jeremy sat crosslegged on the asphalt in front of me and reached out to hold onto one of Carolyn's ankles. With my back to the wall of the gym I felt hemmed in by them, emotionally and physically.

Some obscure sense of guilt kept me asking questions. "What's wrong with Jeremy? What happened in that restaurant?"

"My father says he has some kind of eppa . . . eppa . . . "

"Epilepsy?"

"Yeah, And he gets it whenever he gets too close to *them.*"

"Was that one of them in the restaurant?"

"Yes."

Fingers moving against his side, empty-eyed, sunglasses. Reporting on me? "Who are they?"

The girl shook her head. For a second I saw past her hollow eyes and dirty brown hair, had just a glimpse of the woman she might be if she hung on long enough. "You won't believe me," she said. "You'll think I'm crazy,"

"I'm starting to think that anyway."

"What if I said they were from space? What would you say then?" In the last of the light her eyes had a hard gray sheen.

Oh God, I thought. *Invaders From Mars.* What's happening to my past?

"See?" she said. "I warned you."

"What about your parents? Can't they help you?"

"My father . . . " She stopped, swallowed, started again. "My father was all I had. They killed him. Jeremy's parents too. He's from California and they had him in one of their ships but he got away. That's where he got the . . . epilepsy. From what they did to him. My father . . . my father and me found him wandering around San Carlos and brought him back to the store."

That told me where I'd seen her before. Her father ran a rock shop out on the edge of the Apache reservation. My folks had taken me out there once to see the peridots, the green crystals that only turned up in extinct volcanic craters around San Carlos and somewhere in South America. I'd noticed her because I'd just gotten to the age where I was noticing girls, but we had shied away from actually speaking to each other.

She was wearing a big peridot ring, probably her father's, on the index finger of her right hand. "If they killed your father," I said, "why didn't you call the police?"

"I did. But when the policeman came, he was . . . one of them. Jeremy ran off into the desert and I ran after him. Now they're looking for both of us."

No matter how uncomfortable I felt, I had to believe that her story was just a fantasy. I had to make myself believe it. But even if I'd been sure she was hallucinating, what could I do for her? She needed a family and a psychiatrist and I couldn't be either one in the time I had left. I took some money out of my wallet.

"Look," I said, "Here's twenty bucks. Go take a bus to Phoenix or somewhere. Call an aunt or a grandfather or somebody you know you can trust and get them to help you out. Okay?"

She knew she'd lost me. I could see it in her eyes. She wadded up the bill and held it in her fist. "They know who you are," she said.

"What?"

"They saw us with you. They'll be looking for you, now, too."

My heart slowed back to something like normal. "That's okay. I'll risk it."

I watched them until they faded into the darkness. "In the Still of the Night" by the Five Satins was playing in the gym and I wanted to go in and listen to it. I wanted to forget what the girl had told me and see what I'd come to see and get out of there.

I took about two steps before my stomach cramped, driving me back against the wall of the gym.

"No," I whispered, "Not yet. Not now. Please."

I was wasting my breath. In less than a minute the dizziness came over me and everything fell away.

V

The proctors weren't too happy about my coming back in a different shirt. They didn't much care for the newspaper masthead either, but they had their executive order and they decided it was all acdemic anyhow.

They threw me in my cell and refused to let me talk to Thornberg. This time the proctors debriefed me, and I told them as little as I thought I could get away with. One of them might have been the one that had threatened me after the last trip, but I couldn't be sure. Between the uniforms and the dark glasses they had an unnerving similarity.

Dark glasses, I thought. Sun glasses. I remembered fingers moving against a bright sport shirt.

Cut it out, I thought. You're letting your imagination go crazy. Don't get sucked into somebody else's fantasy.

Finally they left me alone and I wondered if the experiment was really over. Thornberg would probably not live through the disappointment. To have worked so hard and then lose it all, to never get to use his own machine . . .

And what about me? I thought. To have gotten so close to seeing LeeAnn only to miss her by a few seconds?

Memories came rushing back, out of control. The first time we'd made love, in the back of my parents' Chevy II station wagon with the seat folded down. Our first winter at Arizona State, LeeAnn in a miniskirt and rag coat that hung to her ankles, wrapped in yards of fake fur. Politics and marches, graduation and marriage, the underground newspaper in Phoenix in the late sixties. Our first house, LeeAnn's thirtieth birthday, the flowers and the cheap red wine . . .

And then the day the Proctor's Amendment passed the House. Politics and marches again, me reluctant at first, but LeeAnn outraged and dedicated, young again in the space of a few days. The first victories, Colorado voting against ratification, Texas leaning our way. People starting to wonder if the proctors really would be better than their local police, even in Houston.

And then one by one we were getting killed or crippled or lost in the basements of jails. They told me the day they arrested me that LeeAnn had died trying to construct a bomb, a bomb, for God's sake, when she had never even touched any kind of weapon . . .

I never got a trial, because the Proctors were now the Law. No charges, no lawyers, just a cell and a lot of memories.

Time moved on.

As much as I hated the proctors, I knew better than to blame them. They hadn't elected themselves; the citizens of the United States had listened to their televisions and voted them in, so it was their fault too. But mostly it was time's fault. Time had passed. Times had changed. So I sat in a jail cell and thought about what it had been like to be 15 years old, before I had any idea of what time could do.

That was where Thornberg found me. He needed somebody with a memory of a specific time and place that was so strong that his machines could focus on it and follow the time lines back to it. Because it was dangerous, his funding agency had sent him to the prisons to look for volunteers, and when he saw how I tested out he wanted me. I don't think the proctors had taken him seriously until the first test had worked, and once it did they seemed to panic.

What were they afraid of? What did they have to lose? Were they afraid I was going to escape through a hole in time?

Or were they afraid I was going to learn something they didn't want anybody to know?

I was still thinking about it late that night when I heard my cell door open. It was Thornberg.

"How did you get in here?" I whispered.

"Never mind. The question is, do you want to go again? Tonight? Right now?"

We headed straight for the lab and I changed into my traveling clothes. Thornberg was nervous, talking the whole time he was strapping me in.

"What I don't understand," he said, "is how you can have a past that's not the same as *my* past. Why does yours have tracks in the desert and flying saucers?"

"How should I know?" I said. "Maybe everybody's past is different. People never remember things the same way as anybody else. Maybe they *are* different. What are those waves your machine uses?"

"Retrograde probability waves."

"Retrograde because they move backwards in time, right? But couldn't they branch off, just like regular probability waves? Your machine uses my brain waves to sort through all those probabilities, so it would have to take me to whatever *I thought* the past was, right?"

Thornberg was interested. He'd gone back to his console, but he wasn't reaching for the controls. "If that's true, why is there no record of your melted track in the desert?"

"The different pasts all lead to the same place, the present. I guess there could be other pasts that lead to other presents, that 'Many Worlds' theory you were telling me about. In my past the proctors don't want any record of the mess their spaceships made, so they just covered it up. In yours, you never knew of any space ships. But they lead to the same thing, with the proctors in power."

"You have a lot of imagination."

"Yeah. I do. Imagine this, then. Suppose I changed something? Made it so my past hooked on to a different future? Just like switching a train onto another track. You said every decision we make creates a whole new uuniverse."

"No," Thornberg said, "Out of the question! Do you have any idea of the risk? At the end of the hour you'd be pulled back here anyway."

Or into another future, I thought, but I didn't say it. "All right. Calm down. If we're going to do this we'd better get started."

Thornberg just stared at me for a few seconds, and I could see how frightened he was. My only question was whether he was afraid for me or afraid I'd go off into some other future and leave him stuck in this one.

I never got the answer because his hand snaked out and started pushing the buttons.

VI

Seeing myself walk into the gym was as immediate as a glance in the mirror and as distant as looking at an old photograph. I wanted to go over to myself and say, straighten up for God's sake, and turn your collar down. But even so I could see myself through my 15-year-old eyes and know that the slouch and the clothes and the haircut were the only ways I could say the things I didn't have words for then.

The kid had three-inch cuffs in his blue jeans, and the light jacket he wore over his T-shirt wasn't red, like James Dean's jacket in *Rebel Without A Cause,* but only because a red jacket would have been somebody else's uniform and not his own. His hair was too long for a flat top and not long enough for a DA, but five minutes didn't go by without him running a comb through it at least a couple of times.

Somebody put "Twilight Time" by the Platters on the record player. The overhead lights went out and two deep blue spots swept over the dancers. Martin and Dickie, the kid's best friends, were off to his left, talking behind their hands and bumping each other with their shoulders. The kid just stood there and stared

into the crowd around the bleachers, and at the few daring couples out on the gym floor, intently, like he was trying to find somebody.

So was I.

Tony Williams sang, about falling in love all over again, *"as I did then."*

And she walked in.

For thirty years I'd been haunted by this memory. Strongly enough to get me out of prison, to send me back in Thornberg's machine, and now I was standing just across a high school gym from her, and she was just a girl. Just a 15-year-old girl. Skinny and shy and awkward, her first night in a new town, talked into coming to this dance by her mother and the principal of the school, both of them afraid she would go all summer without making any friends.

And then her mother said something to her that made her laugh and her head dropped down and the long red hair fell over her face and it wasn't just a girl anymore, it was LeeAnn, and I felt like somebody had just put a fist into my throat.

I turned my back on her and stood in the doorway, letting the hot night air work on my eyes until I could see again.

Something moved, just out of the range of the lanterns. Carolyn and the boy again, I thought. I didn't want to see them, didn't even want to think about them anymore. Hadn't I done enough? What more did they want from me?

I was turning back to look at LeeAnn when a flash of color across the gym distracted me. The man from Upton's, the one in the sport shirt, darted through the crowd, fingers working against his left side.

A voice behind me said, "Come outside and we'll talk." The delivery was as deep and smooth as a TV announcer's.

I turned. Two of them filled the doorway, tall, non-descript, their eyes and mouths so hard it looked like their facial nerves had been cut. They would have made terrific proctors.

Admit it, I told myself. You want to believe it. If the proctors come from *out there* somewhere, that lets you off the hook. It lets everybody off. Sure TV rots people's brains and fast food makes people fat and gives them heart attacks, but it's not our fault. We're just being manipulated by creatures of vastly superior technology.

"Outside," one of them said. "Let's go."

But suppose you really did want to take over the world. Where would you start? Level Washington with your laser cannons? Why not just take over a few ad agencies? Tell people they want to buy

lots of polyester, throw your weight behind mindless situation comedies. In a few years people don't care what they watch, or what they eat, or what they wear, and after a while they don't care about anything else either. You've got everything, without having to fire a shot.

Except maybe a few in the desert, just to keep in practice.

"What do you want from me?" I asked, letting them maneuver me out onto the playground. "What's going on?"

The one in the lead showed me a pistol. It looked a lot like a squirt gun I used to have except that the end of the barrel was hollow and the thing had a heavy, chromed sense of menace about it. "The Others want to talk to you."

"Others? What Others?"

"They're waiting in the ship. Outside town."

Either this is real, I thought, or it isn't. If I could bring back a shirt and a piece of newspaper then it was probably real, or at least real enough to get me killed.

I decided to be scared.

"Fine," I said. "Let's talk. What do you want to talk about?"

"Over there," said the one with the gun.

I was just looking to see where he was pointing when a wailing noise came out of the darkness. It sounded like it had been building up inside something that wasn't strong enough to hold it and it had just blown its way free.

Jeremy.

"What's that?" hissed the one with the pistol.

"It's that kid, I think," said the other one.

"Well, shut him up, for God's sake."

The second alien disappeared into the shadows just as Jeremy screamed. The one with the gun looked around involuntarily and I went for him.

We hit the asphalt and rolled. I felt one knee tear out of my pants, just like in the old days. The alien was bigger and stronger than I was and he came out on top. He was pounding at me with his left hand, trying to get the gun around to use it on me. I grabbed his right wrist with both hands and yanked his elbow down into the pavement. The gun rattled in his grip and I slammed the elbow again. This time the gun came loose and skittered away into the darkness.

With both hands free he really opened up on me. I tried to cover up, but I didn't have enough hands, and he got a good one into my ribs. I whited out for a second and he started on my face and head.

I started to think I should have let him keep the gun. That way it would at least have been quick. In a few more seconds he was going to kill me with his bare hands anyway.

Just like they'd killed LeeAnn.

I went a little berserk, but all it got me was a knee in the gut. I was finished.

A sound whipped through the air above me. I saw a flash of pink light and then the alien fell off of me.

I rolled onto my side and pulled my knees up to my chest. I was still fighting for breath when my eyes cleared enough to see Carolyn a few feet away, still holding the gun straight out in front of her, a stunned look on her face. Jeremy sounded like pieces of his throat were coming loose, and a shadow flashed in the corner of my vision.

"Carolyn," I said, and she came unstuck, firing the pistol again. I saw the second alien fall as Jeremy's scream cut off in mid-air.

I got onto my hands and knees. In the distance, like some kind of cosmic soundtrack, I could hear Brenda Lee singing "I'm Sorry" in the gym. The music echoed flatly off the asphalt.

"You okay, mister?" Carolyn asked.

"Yeah," I said, "Okay." For once I was glad to see her.

A hand laser, I thought. A junior version of something on their ship that had cut that line through the desert. Like it or not, the aliens were as real as anything else in this version of 1961. Whether this was really my past or just some kind of metaphor, the aliens were a part of it.

Jeremy staggered over and threw his arms around Carolyn's waist. Even in the dimness of the playground I could see that her eyes were dry and clear. She looked at the gun in her hand. "This changes things," she said. "This changes everything."

The words echoed in my mind. I thought of Thornberg and his Many Worlds. The smallest thing, he'd said, can change the entire universe. In time.

"Back at the dance," I said. "There's more of . . . *them.*" I couldn't bring myself to say "aliens."

"That's okay," she said, "We'll take care of it."

"Take care of it? But you're just . . . " I tried to stand up and didn't make it.

Gently she pushed Jeremy aside and knelt down next to me. "You're hurt," she said. "There's nothing you can do to help anyway." She took the peridot ring off her index finger and slipped it onto the little finger of my left hand. "Here," she said. "This is for the twenty dollars you gave me. We'll use it to find some

people to help us. To fight. To change things. They're just getting started and it's not too late. We *can* change things."

She stood up, started to walk away, and then looked back over her shoulder.

"You'll see," she said.

She was gone.

I lay there a while and looked at the stars. I hadn't seen that many stars in a night sky in a long time. When I tried to stand up again I made it, and got to the drinking fountain behind the baseball diamond.

The same piece of gum was in the drain. I smiled and cleaned myself up as best I could.

I stayed in the shadows just outside the door of the gym and watched for a while. I couldn't see the third alien.

She did it, I thought. She did it and she's going to keep on doing it. And if she's very lucky and very strong, maybe . . .

No, I told myself. Don't even think about it. Don't get your hopes up. She's just a girl and this may still turn out to be only a dream.

LeeAnn was standing at the punchbowl, talking to a kid in rolled-up jeans and a tan jacket. The record player hissed and then Buddy Holly started "True Love Ways" and the strings answered him, high and rich infinitely sad.

The kid shuffled his feet and jerked his head at the dance floor. LeeAnn nodded and they walked into the crowd. He took her awkwardly in his arms and they slowly moved away until I couldn't see them anymore.

VII

I came back to some kind of deserted warehouse. The cage was gone. So was the jail and so were the proctors.

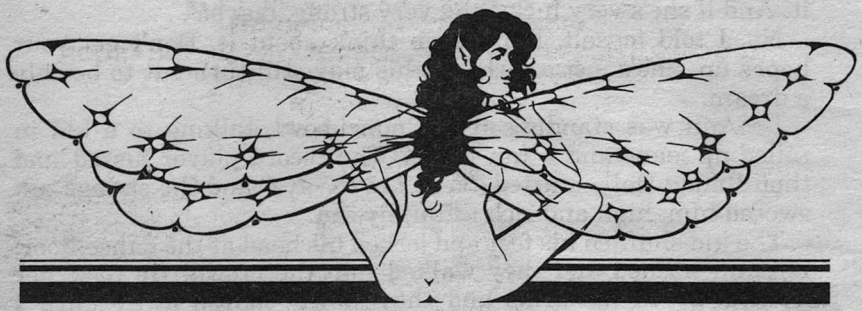
After the first couple of days I didn't have much trouble finding my way around. Most of my friends were still the same, and they told me they were used to my being a little quiet and disoriented. They told me I'd been that way off and on since my wife LeeAnn died in a car wreck two years before.

Thirty years were missing out of my new life, and I spent a lot of time at my computer, calling up history texts and old magazines and doing a little detective work on the side. I learned about a scientist named Thornberg at NASA, but he never answered the letter I wrote him.

The past and the future invent each other; Thornberg taught me that, and the past I invented has given me a future without

LeeAnn. But somewhere in this new future of mine there should be a woman named Carolyn, born in Arizona in the late forties, maybe a year or two younger than me. I don't know exactly what I'm going to say to her when I find her, or whether she'll even believe me, but I think she'll recognize her ring.

LeeAnn is dead and Buddy Holly is dead, but people are walking the streets, free to make their own mistakes again. The sky overhead is filled with ships building a strange and wonderful future, and, in time, anything seems possible. ●



NEXT ISSUE

Our block-busting May issue leads off with a beautiful cover by Japanese artist, Hisaki Yasuda. The cover story, "PRESS ENTER■," is a novella by John Varley and represents his exciting return to short fiction. We expect you'll be at the edge of your seat throughout this tale. We'll also have a short story by Isaac Asimov, and another by Jane Yolen.

You won't want to miss our May Viewpoint, "The Nuclear Winter," either. In it, Carl Sagan explores the possible consequences of a nuclear war. It's a pertinent article for just about everyone. We'll also have a lot of other fine fiction and departments, so be sure to get your copy. On sale April 10, 1984.

art: Robert Walters

by Michael Ward

WEDNESDAY NIGHT GROUP

Mr. Ward was born
in Minneapolis in 1952,
and he says he shares his birthday
with such literary luminaries
as Dashiel Hammett, John Cheever, and Harlan Ellison.
He lives in Baton Rouge, LA,
where he works for
the advertising industry.

Frank stood abruptly, his lower lip trembling. "I want some coffee," he mumbled, and stepped out of the circle of folding chairs. He stood before the folding table where the coffee urn had been set up, his back to the room.

"Cop out!" sang Vicky without looking up from the toes of her Adidases. She sat with arms folded and outstretched legs crossed at the ankle.

"It is not," Frank said, his voice breaking on *not*. He cleared his throat. "You always say that. A person can want some coffee, can't he? Anyway, you're the one who's always copping out. You cop out with your accusing behavior." He carried a styrofoam cup back to his seat.

"You know," Margie said, "I think Frank's right." She tapped a non-existent ash from her cigarette. "I think he's . . . well, right, you know? I mean, I'd like to share that a lot of times . . ."

Vicky snorted at her toes.

Margie's hand, returning to the ashtray, hesitated in mid-air. When she tapped the cigarette, it broke.

Bob, who was combing his bushy, salt-and-pepper beard with his fingers, said, "I feel that Frank had a good idea, too. I suggest we all take a few minutes to share in break-oriented activities. Oh, and for those who haven't noticed, Whitney brought organic fruit juice and whole wheat cookies to share with . . ." Bob's words were drowned by the scraping of chair legs and scuffle of shoes on linoleum, and the rising tide of voices.

". . . absolutely—sorry—the most incredible experience of my life . . ."

". . . lungs, but *I* care about *mine*. Only I didn't say it . . ."

". . . are reminding me of a delicacy of my home, derived from the native desert *pitspipple* . . ."

". . . my Gestaltist. I mean far be it from me to assign guilt labels, you know? I mean . . ."

". . . sixth birthday. I made him a granola cake and he pushed it off the table. *I* don't know. It's *so* hard to have a really meaningful . . ."

". . . absolutely—whoops!—incredible. Here, let me . . ."

". . . Satir. And I said, 'Virginia, this has just been the most profoundly nourishing . . .' "

". . . this? *Cabbage* juice? . . ."

". . . sliding fee scale, or what? . . ."

". . . translate as '*pitspipple* chips' . . ."

". . . I mean, you know me, I'm just not behind that kind of negative energy, I mean . . ."

". . . .with Perls. And Fritz shared with me the most—yes, thank you—the most profoundly . . ."

". . . out Dylan had dumped his cabbage juice in my macrame basket. *I* don't know. I'm thinking of signing him up for the Est for Tots . . ."

". . . humanistic therapists does it take to screw in a . . ."

". . . was Carl Rogers. I remember I experienced in him the most profoundly . . ."

". . . working out. I mean, I hadn't *cried* in therapy for *weeks,* you know? I mean . . ."

". . . and three to share the experience . . ."

". . . hoping the opportunity finds me to speak of a matter utterly . . ."

". . . suggest we bring some closure to the break experience . . ."

". . . out a loan, right, so I can participate in this Weekend Bioenergetics Retreat in . . ."

". . . *really* feel that it's time to get back to therapy-oriented . . ."

". . . completely changed the way I relate to my therapist. Absolutely—*excuse* me—incredible . . ."

". . . be willing to help me collect everybody, Vicky? So we could get back to a therapeutic space."

"Sure," Vicky said. And shouted, "Hey! Let's get back to it!"

Everybody fell silent except Richard, who said into the suddenly clear air, ". . . damn stuff tastes like pressed pine mulch."

They all looked at him. He was holding most of one of Whitney's cookies.

Richard looked from face to face, penultimately Whitney's. Ultimately Bob's. And then he sighed, carefully laid the cookie down, turned and went to his seat. The others followed.

When everyone was seated, Bob said, "And what's going on with you, now, Whitney?"

Looking at her hands in her lap, Whitney took a deep breath and said, "I feel attacked." Then she looked up at Richard, her lips thin, nostrils pinched, eyes narrowed.

Bob leaned forward in his seat. "And what about you, Richard?" He spoke quickly, the pitch of his voice up at least a major third. He gave a little bounce in his chair and said, "What are *you* feeling now?"

Richard stroked his pale mustache between thumb and forefinger. One corner of his mouth was tight. "Guilty, I suppose," he said in a totally flat voice.

Ten minutes later, Richard and Whitney were taking turns screaming at one another. Bob would give a little bounce and say,

"Now you," and the turn would change. Richard—as per instructions—was calling Whitney "Mommy." Whitney was calling Richard "Daddy."

Five minutes after that, they were crying and hugging one another. Richard was saying that his reactions to her cookies had nothing to do with his reactions to her as a person, that he felt she was a very special and very unique human being, that she was not only unique, she was one of a kind. Bob stood between the two of them, a hand on each of their backs. He was smiling. There were tears in his eyes.

When Richard returned to his chair, Whitney sat back, wiping her face with her palms, and said, "Well, I know *some*body liked them." Still wiping with one hand, she pointed at the cookie plate. It was nearly empty.

Everybody laughed.

"Oh, yes, that was me," Oogogoo said when the laughter subsided. "I found them utterly delicious."

And everybody laughed again.

When this laughter subsided, Bob spoke. "What's been going on with you, tonight, Oogogoo?" He combed his beard with his fingers. "What unfinished business do you bring? As Fritz used to say. Have you gotten your food stamps yet?"

"Sadly, no," Oogogoo said. "I have been utterly denied to them. This is resulting from the most recent decision that I fit within the category of 'illegal alien.' And for the same reason have also been denied to the green card. But I am glad the opportunity has found me now to speak, because there is an important—"

"That's tough," Frank said. "I remember when my wife and I—"

"And how do you feel?" Bob said to Oogogoo. "Being labeled like that?"

"Please?"

"Don't you feel discounted as a person? That the validity of your essential self has not been . . ." Bob's fingers paused in mid-beard; his eyebrows rose. ". . . validated?"

"I am not certain I understand. I would of course have utterly enjoyed the opportunity to vary my diet with these food stamps, which must be a large delicacy, so carefully are they distributed. But to return to the more important matter which—"

"Yeah," Frank said. "Like my wife and I have this absolutely incredible—"

"Wait a second," Vicky said to Oogogoo. "Are you still eating dogs and cats, or what?"

"Oh, no," said Oogogoo. "Since last week, when you so clearly

explained how they were non-appropriate type nourishment, I have altered my food source. I now eat the small flighted animal, brown and gray, who hops about the parking lot and picks at the butt of the cigarette. A taste treat but not so easy to catch. But this other matter is far—"

Frank, who had been nodding while Oogogoo spoke, at this point opened his mouth.

"What about your ship?" Margie said, tapping the ash from a cigarette that hadn't been lit yet. "I mean any, you know, luck fixing it?"

"Sadly, in this too I must report no good fortune. However the residents of the neighborhood have been most thoughtful in attempting to make me feel at home. They have decorated my ship with many various sprayings of attractive slogans in red and black, such as 'slam dance jerk' and 'one chord city' and 'corporate corksuckers broadcast brain death.' But the problem of my ship, which has been trying me to say, the power source, not so unequal to a small sun, is—"

"Yeah," Frank said and gave a small laugh. "My wife—"

"Okay," Bob said. "Fine. But what I'm wondering about is your support system. Have you been reaching out? After all, that's why you're here, to learn how to relate to *people*. In a meaningful way. Have you been able to make *contact* with people?"

"Oh, yes. I have been contacting your president. And already he sends me in reply a picture with his autograph. Also I have found a new friend. His name is Gila and he is most generously turning me on to easy money. He gives me to a paper bag, and I have only to deliver this bag to an office on 122nd street and say, 'Gila sent me,' and ask no questions. It is utterly simple. But . . ."

Frank had suddenly reached out and placed one hand on Margie's shoulder, to his left, and one hand on Oogogoo's carapace, to his right. A tear overflowed Frank's eyelid and spilled down a cheek. His head bowed, and he hunched forward by degrees, while the corners of his mouth twitched again and again toward a smile.

Everybody looked at him, here with cigarette hovering over ashtray, here with fingers stroking mustache, with fingers buried in beard, with tissue poised midway between lap and smeared mascara, with folded arms, with pinkening gills.

"I just wanted to share," Frank said and gasped for breath, unhunching as a by-product. Then hunched again, a bit more with

each word, as he spoke: "How much I val-hal—" and gasped again. "*Value* your friend. Shi-hip." At which point he began to sob.

Margie put her hand on Frank's. Oogogoo followed her example with a pseudopod. Frank cried even harder.

The sobs grew milder and farther apart until finally Frank got out: "It's just I feel so warm when I remember I have—" he cleared his throat "—have friends like you. Thank you." He accepted a tissue from Bob via Richard and Margie. "Especially right now, because my wife and I haven't exactly been relating in a positive way lately." He blew his nose and swallowed.

"Have the two of you tried therapy?" Vicky said, picking at something on the denim over one knee, then refolding her arms.

Frank nodded and swallowed again. "Yeah, we went to a family counselor. Conjoint. Sylvia had an affair with the therapist. Now we're dealing with it in the sessions."

"How is that going?" Whitney said.

"Pretty well, I guess," he said, watching his hands uncrumple and crumple the tissue. "I've really been getting in touch with my feelings. The last session the therapist asked how I felt and I told him—I was incredibly in touch—I told him I was in a hostile space." Frank looked around his chair, then tucked the tissue into his shirt pocket. "He gave me a pillow to strangle."

Bob cleared his throat and said, "You know, Frank, I'm really glad you brought this up, here, in this context. And you know how I treasure all feelings shared here . . . But . . ." He looked at his watch.

"Oh," Frank said. "Is it? . . ." He looked at his own watch. He nodded. "It sure is." He took a deep breath and said, "Well," then nodded some more.

"Well," Bob said. "By way of achieving some closure I'd like to share that I feel we've had a good session tonight. A very good session. Very beautiful." There was a chorus of nods and mumbles. "I look forward to seeing all of you next week."

People began to stir, then paused when Oogogoo spoke up. "I, too, wish to make a sharing. I would first share my utter gratitude for your generosity in allowing me to witness, even as one of you, these most open of human-type experiences."

People stood and scuffled.

"I'm glad you were here to share them, Oogogoo."

"I've been, you know, nourished by your input . . ."

". . . feel you've been . . ."

". . . have most recently learned of an utterly important . . ."

Bob was loudly straightening already straight chairs.

". . . next week, okay? Have a . . ."

". . . very warm . . ."

". . . excuse me . . ."

Vicky and Oogogoo were the last, save Bob, to go. She held the door. Together, they stepped out into the night. Above them, through the haze, framed by buildings, a single star dimly twinkled.

Vicky sniffed the air. "Is this great weather, or what?"

"Utterly," said Oogogoo. "But perhaps you will hear—"

"Look, if I'm going to catch my bus, I've got to hurry. Night."

"Night."

Walking away, she waved and said, "Need my sleep, right? Tomorrow's another day."

"Oh, no,"Oogogoo said to her receding back. ●

MARTIN GARDNER (from page 24)

SOLUTION TO TWO ODD COUPLES

If the tall youth lied with the statement "I'm the male," then she is female, and the short male lied when he said "I'm the female." By similar reasoning, if the short youth lied, then the tall youth must also have lied. In brief, both lied. Therefore the tall one is the female and the short one is the male.

A squealing seagull flapped right through my astral body as I continued my stroll along the wet sand. I paused to talk to another couple, both fully dressed, who were sitting on a bench, munching sandwiches. They were clean shaven, but I could tell from their codpieces that one was male and the other female. Their names, they informed me, were Clyde and Ann.

If I tell you that Clyde is twice as old as Ann, and her age in years is an even number, and the sum of their ages is 51, can you answer this simple question? How old is Ann?

The surprising answer is on page 168.

THE STILL POINT

**". . . at the still point, there
the dance is . . ."**

—Eliot, *Burnt Norton*

—by David Lunde

"The lights in the sky are stars,"
but what do you care, you
who may at worst
mistake their drifting image
in a girl's eyes for interest,
a spark you wish to kindle
into self-consuming flame,

as I myself consume
the last few hours of air to burn
the carbohydrate fuel within my cells
and broadcast into almost empty space
these more than empty words
this whistle in the graveyard dark.

Oh, I remember nights
and days, days and nights and days
that turned the self-bound world,
the world-bound self, in silly circles
about their rigid, nonexistent axes
to create, then strive to cope
with crisis after crisis

but who am I to mock?
now more adrift and forced to spin
about my own dull axis than you,
although it seems as if it is myself
about which all the stars and planets spin
while I remain unmoving

though not unmoved,
not unmoved by such conundrums
of the human condition: how could I?
inextricably stuck here
amid the excremental stink of fear
that binds and will and has
each person who has forced himself
to face the unknown terrors of the dark
that mires the tiny spark of self
and star alike in the vacuum
of indifference

—hell yes, I'm scared!
and so would you be, damn you—
guess that's why I cling this way
to all that I have left,
this singular perspective
that strips away the fretful fabric
of everyday exigencies

(somehow
this empty stage demands I fill
as best I can its plankless board
with verbal viands rich enough to kill:
I'd rather nauseate than be ignored!)

Do you hear me?
Do you hear
this singular soliloquy
more sole and single and solitary
than ever any was afore delivered
save to that oft-addressed Eternal Ear
more silent than my step in space
less potent than my lifted hand
that makes the very heavens whirl
at my command, for now I ride
the scarab of the dark that rolls
the fertile sun across your sky

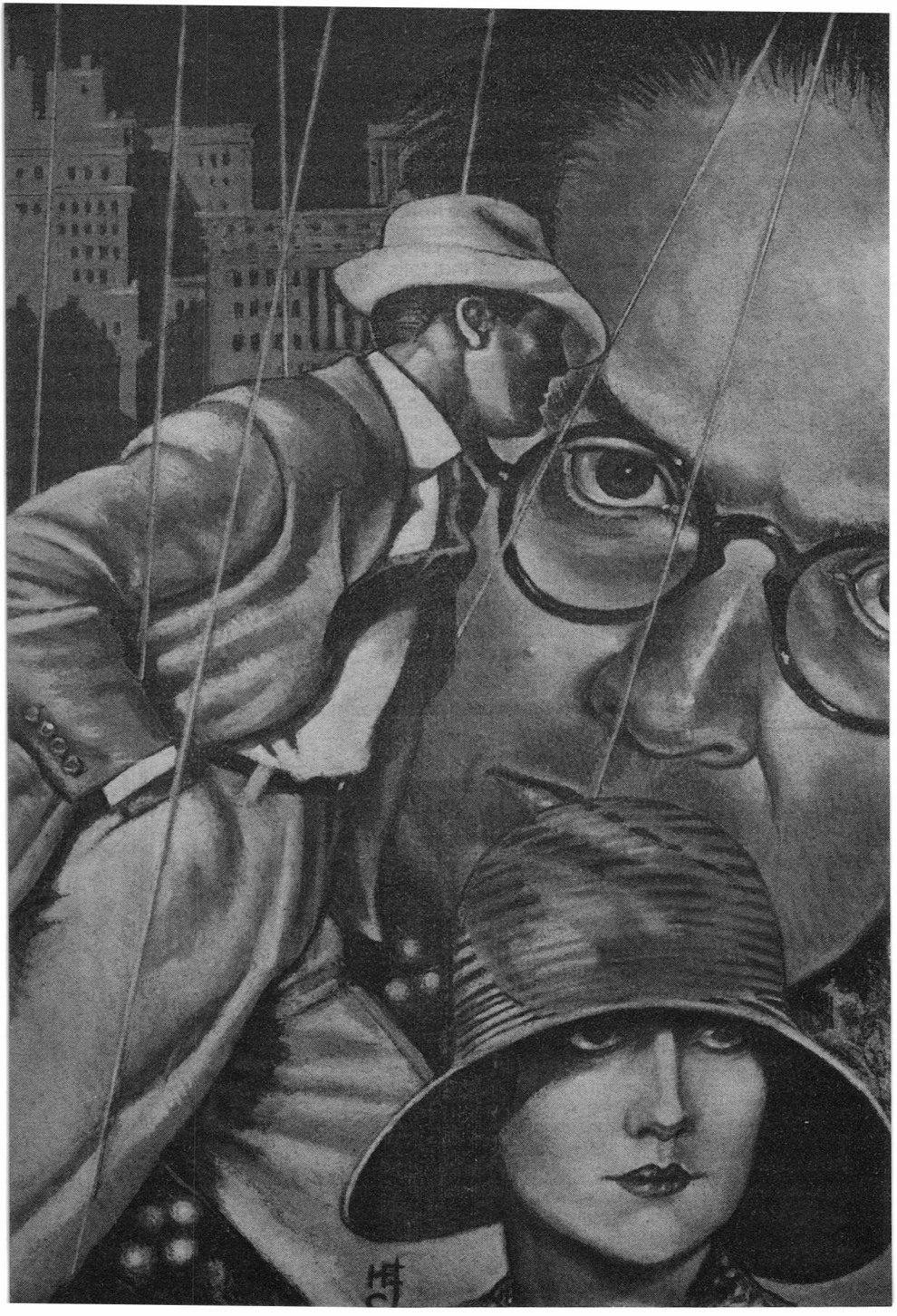
—such illusions
lit the torch that drove away
the children-eating leopards of the night,
such illusions raised us from our knees
to walk, to recognize the worlds
that spin within the eyes of others
as independent of our own desire
like this universe through which you drift
rudderless as I.

And I may drift
in incandescent black until
the dust piles on me of itself
and I become in fact the world
that now I dream, the word made flesh,
both energy and matter. (What does matter
matter to any but itself
unless it gives off light?) Against
the torchlit sprawl of space
the worlds and I float infinitely small,
but only such small lumps of stuff exist
to shape the formless All
and banish night:

"More Light!"
cried Goethe with his dying breath
as I will soon, but I don't regret
the loss of elbow-rubbing fellow-feeling,
warm miasma of ancestral echoes
that permeates the bone-rich soil
in which you root and bloom and die:
spaceship Earth that recycles every waste
which soon this suit will fail to do
though I will cycle on,
another cometary body flaring off
putrescent gases,

but I would spin
in the eyes of that girl
forever, a mote that drifts
across her vision of the world
and makes her pause before
she acquiesces to the earth:

I tell her this:
I tell you this:
there's no one here but me. You must
believe. You must have faith. You must
come out upon this beach
and learn to breathe.



by John Kessel

art: Hank Jankus

THE BIG DREAM

Since winning his Nebula last year for "Another Orphan," John Kessel has not been resting on his laurels. In addition to this piece, which he says is meant to be both an *hommage* to the works of Raymond Chandler and a criticism of them, he is working on a "fictional destruction" of Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*. After that, he promises, he will leave dead writers alone. A collaborative novel, *Freedom Beach*, is also underway, with James Patrick Kelly.

The lights of the car Davin was tailing suddenly swerved right and dropped out of sight: it had run off the road and down the embankment. Davin jerked his Chevy to a stop on the shoulder. A splintered gap in the white wooden retaining fence showed in his headlights, and beyond them the lights of Los Angeles lay spread across the valley.

He slid down the slope, kicking up dust and catching his jacket on the brush. The 1928 Chrysler roadster lay overturned at the bottom, its lights still on. He smelled gasoline as he drew near. The driver had been thrown from the wreck but was already trying to get up; he crouched a few yards away, touching a hand to his head. Davin got his arm around the man's shoulders and helped him stand.

"You all right?" he asked.

The man's voice was thick with booze. "Sure I'm all right. I always take this shortcut."

Davin smiled in the darkness. "Me, I couldn't take the wear and tear."

"You get used to it."

The man was able to walk and together they managed to get back to Davin's car. They climbed in and Davin started down the mountain again.

"The cops will spot that break in the fence within a couple of hours," he said. "You want to see a doctor?"

"No. Just take me home. 2950 Leeward. I'll call the police from there." Davin kept his eyes on the winding road; the Chevy needed its brakes tightened. His passenger seemed to sober remarkably quickly. He sat straighter in the seat and brushed his hair back with his hands like a college kid before a date. Maybe the fact that he'd almost killed himself had actually made an impression on him. "I'm lucky you happened along," the man said. "What's your name?"

"Michael Davin."

"Irish, huh?" There was a casual contempt in his voice.

"On my father's side."

"My father was a swine. Mother was Irish. Not Catholic, though." The contempt flashed again.

"Maybe you ought to go a little easier," Davin said.

The man tensed as if about to take a poke at Davin, then relaxed. He seemed completely sober now. "Perhaps you're right," he said.

Davin recognized the accent: British, faded from long residence in the U.S. The wife hadn't told him that. They rode in silence

until they hit the outskirts of the city. Town, really. Despite what the Chamber of Commerce and the Planning Commission and the Police Department could do about it, the neighborhoods still had some of the sleepy feel of Hutchinson, Kansas. Davin sometimes felt right at home helping a businessman keep track of his partner—they would do that in Kansas, too; that would just be good town sense. And that reminded him that no matter how sick he got of L.A., he couldn't stand to go back to the midwest.

Davin knew that the address the man gave him was not his home. It was a Spanish-style bungalow court apartment in a middle-class neighborhood; Davin had begun trailing him at his real home on West 12th Street earlier that evening. He pulled over against the curb. The man hesitated before getting out.

"I'm sorry about that remark. The Irish, I mean. My grandmother was a terrible snob."

"Don't worry about it. You better have someone take a look at that bump on your head."

"I'll have my wife look at it." The man stood holding the door open, leaning in. His fine features were thrown into relief by the streetlight ahead of them. "Thank you," he said. "You might have saved my life."

Davin suddenly felt dizzy. He seemed to be outside himself, floating two feet above his own shoulder, listening to himself talk and think.

"All in a day's work," I said, and watched as the philanderer turned and strode up the walk to the door of bungalow number seven. He let himself in with his own key. An attractive young woman—his mistress—embraced him on the doorstep. They call L.A. the City of the Angels, but a private dick knows better.

It had started very quietly the day before, Friday. Before the knock on his door, there had been no dizziness, no feeling of doing things he did not want to say or do. Davin had been sitting in his office in the late afternoon, legs up on the scarred desk top and tie loosened against the stifling heat. Dust motes swirled in the sunlight slicing through the window over his shoulder. In the harsh light, the cheap sofa against the wall opposite him seemed to be radiating dust into the room. The blinds cut the light into parallel lances that slashed across the room like the tines of a fork.

It was the second week of the heatwave. The days seemed endless and thinking was more effort than his mind wanted to make. He had remembered waking one morning that week and imag-

ining himself back in Wichita on one of those days that dawn warm and moist in early August and you know that by three o'clock there'll be reports of at least four old people dropping dead in airless apartments. That was how hot it had been in L.A. during the last two weeks.

He had the bottle of bootleg bourbon out and the glass beside it was half empty. Then the knock sounded on the door.

Davin drained the glass and stashed it and the bottle in the bottom desk drawer. "Come in," he said. "It's not locked."

A young woman entered.

Davin was tugging his tie straight when he realized the woman wasn't young after all. She sat in the chair opposite him and crossed her legs coquettishly, but worn hands and the tired line of her jaw gave her away. She wore a cloche hat and sunglasses—probably to mask crows feet around her eyes—and a white silk dress cut just above the knee. The hair curling out from under the hat was bleached blonde. Maybe it didn't work anymore, but Davin could tell that she was a woman who had become used to men's attention at an early age.

"How may I help you, ma'am?"

She fluttered for about five seconds, then answered in a voice so alluring it made him shiver. He wanted to close his eyes and simply listen to the voice.

"I need to speak to you about my husband, Mr. Davin. I'm terribly worried about him. He's been behaving in a way I can only describe as destructive. He's threatening our marriage, and I am afraid that he may eventually hurt himself."

"What would you like me to do, Mrs. . . ."

"Chandler. Mrs. Raymond Chandler." She smiled, and more lines showed around her mouth. "You may call me Cecily."

"Keeping people's husbands from hurting themselves is not normally in my line of business, Mrs. Chandler."

"That's not exactly what I want you to do." She hesitated. "I want you to follow him and find out where he's going. Sometimes he disappears and I don't know where he is. I call his office and they say he isn't there. They say they don't know where he is."

So far it was something short of self destruction. "How often does this happen, and how long is he gone?"

Cecily Chandler bit her lip. "It's been more and more frequent. Two or three times a month—in addition to the times he comes home late. Sometimes he's gone for days."

Davin reacted to her story as if she had handed him a script and told him to start reading.

I could have told her the problem was probably blonde. "Where does he work?" I asked.

"The South Basin Oil Company. The office is on South Olive Street. He's the vice president."

I told myself to bump the fee to $25 a day. "Okay," I said. "I'll keep tabs on your husband for a week, Mrs. Chandler, but I'll be blunt with you. It's a common thing in this town for husbands to stray. There's too much bad money and too many eager starlets out for a percentage of the gross. One way or the other, no matter what I find out, you're going to have to work this problem out with him yourself."

Instead of taking offense, the woman smiled. "You don't need to treat me like an ingenue, Mr. Davin . . ."

McKinley had been president when she was an ingenue.

"Wives stray, too," she continued, her voice like sunlight on silk. "I won't be surprised if you come to me with that kind of news. I only want Raymond to be happy."

Sure, I thought. Me too. Then I thought about my bank account. This smelled like divorce, but a couple of hundred dollars would go a long way toward sweetening my outlook on life. We talked terms and I asked a few more questions.

Somewhere in the middle of this conversation the script got lost, and bemused, Davin fell back into his own person.

"How long have you been married?"

"Five years."

"What kind of car does your husband drive?"

"He has two. A Hupmobile for business and a Chrysler roadster for his own."

"Do you have a picture of him?"

Cecily Chandler opened her tiny purse and pulled out a two-by-three kodak. It showed a dark-haired man with a strong chin, lips slightly pursed, penetrating dark eyes. A good-looking man, maybe in his late thirties—at least fifteen years younger than the woman in Davin's office.

Davin sat in his car outside the Leeward bungalow and waited. He had driven off after Chandler went inside, cruised around the neighborhood for five minutes and come back to park down the street, in the dark between two streetlights, where he could watch the door to number seven and not be spotted easily.

It seemed that he spent a great deal of time watching things—people's houses, men at Santa Anita, an orange grove so far out Main Street you couldn't smell City Hall, people's cars,

waitresses in restaurants, the light fixture over his bed, young men and women at the botanical gardens—and almost as much time making sure he wasn't spotted. That was how you found out things. You watched and waited and sometimes they came to you. Davin wondered why the hell he'd started acting wise to the Chandler woman. He didn't do that. He'd always been the type of man who became inconspicuous when the trouble started. Maybe all the watching was getting to him.

It hadn't taken long after Cecily Chandler had hired him for Davin to find out about the mistress in number seven. He had followed Chandler after he left work at the Bank of Italy building that afternoon. The woman had met him at a restaurant not far away and they had gone right to her bungalow.

So it was a simple case of infidelity, as he had known the minute the wife had talked about her husband's disappearances. Davin hated the smell of marriages going bad: tell her and let her get some other sucker to follow it up. That was the logical next step. But something kept Davin from writing it off at that. First, Chandler's wife had clearly known he was seeing some other woman before she came to see Davin. She had not hired him for that information.

A Ford with the top down and a couple of sailors in it drove by slowly, and Davin slid lower in his seat as the headlights flashed over the front seat of his car. The sailors seemed to be looking for an address. Maybe Chandler's girlfriend—M. Peterson according to the name on her mailbox—took in boarders.

Second, there was the question of why Chandler had married a woman old enough to be his mother. Money was the usual answer. But South Basin was one of the strongest companies to come out of the Signal Hill strikes, and a vice president had to have a lot of scratch in his own name. He could have married her for love. But there was another possibility: Cecily Chandler had something she could use against her husband, and that was how they got married. And that was why he wasn't faithful, and that led to the third thing that kept Davin from ending his investigation there.

Chandler *was* acting as if he wanted to kill himself. Davin had started following him again Saturday morning, had stuck with Chandler as he opened the day with lunch at a cheap restaurant and had gone home to Cecily in the afternoon. Davin ate a sandwich in his car. He'd picked Chandler up again as he'd headed to an airfield with another man of about his age and they went for an airplane ride. Someone in the family had to have money.

Davin had loitered around the hangar until they returned. A kid working on the oilpan of a Pierce Arrow told him that Chandler and his friend, Philleo, came out to go flying every month or so. When the plane landed the pilot jumped out, cussing Chandler, and stalked toward the office; Philleo was helping Chandler walk and Chandler was laughing. A mechanic asked what was going on, and the pilot told him loudly that Chandler had unbuckled himself when they were doing a series of barrel rolls and stood up in his seat.

Chandler got a bottle of gin out of the back seat of his roadster. Philleo tried to stop him but soon they were pals again. After that they'd driven up into the hills to a roadhouse speakeasy outside the city limits. When Chandler left in his white Chrysler, Davin had followed him down the winding road until he'd run through the fence.

The Ford with the sailors in it passed him going the other way, now. Other than that there was little traffic in the neighborhood. Chandler was sure to stay put for the night. Davin thought about getting something to eat. He though about getting some sleep in a real bed. He was getting stiff from all the time he had spent sitting in his car. The heat made his shirt stick to his back. Worst of all, this kind of work got you in the kidneys. He tried to remember why he'd gotten into it.

After the war, being with the Pinkertons had been easy. At least until he'd gotten his fill of busting the heads of union organizers during the Red Scare. The city had to keep its good business reputation and Davin had done his part until one night when he caught a man in a railyard and realized that he liked using a club on an unconscious man. If one of the other cops had not pulled Davin off, he would have beaten the man to death. He'd woken up feeling great the next day and only began to tremble when he remembered why he felt so good. It scared him. He didn't want to kill anybody but after that night he realized that he could do it easily, and enjoy it. So he quit the Pinkertons, but he couldn't quite quit the work. He was his own agent now. He sat and watched and waited for that violence to happen again, and in the meantime stirred up other people's dirt at twenty bucks a day.

Davin had enough dirt for two days' work. As he was about to start the car, he noticed, in the rear-view mirror, the flare of light as someone lit a cigarette in a parked car some distance behind him on the other side of the street. The car had been there some time and he had neither heard nor seen anyone come or go.

Davin got out, crossed the street and walked down the sidewalk toward the car. A woman sat inside, leaning sideways against the door, smoking. She was watching the apartments where Chandler had met his girlfriend. She glanced briefly at Davin as he approached but made no effort to hide. As he came abreast of the car he pulled out a cigarette and fumbled in his jacket as if looking for a match.

"Say, miss, do you have a light?"

She looked up at him and without a word handed him a book of matches. He lit up.

"Thanks." Her hair looked black in the faint light of the street. It was cut very short; her lips were full and her nose straight. She looked serious.

"Are you waiting for someone?" Davin asked.

"Not you."

Davin took a guess. "Chandler's not going to be out again tonight, you know."

Bulls-eye. The girl looked from the bungalow toward him, upset. She ground out her cigarette.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Chandler and the Peterson woman are having a party right now. Too bad we weren't invited, though I bet you'd like to be. Maybe we ought to get a cup of coffee and figure out why."

The girl reached for the ignition and Davin put a hand through the open window to stop her. She tensed, then relaxed.

"All right," she said. "Get in."

She drove to an all-night diner on Wilshire. In the bright light Davin saw that she was small and very tired. Slender, well-dressed, she did not look like a woman who was used to following married men around. Davin wondered if he looked like the kind of man who was.

"My name is Michael Davin, Miss . . . ?"

"Estelle Lloyd." She looked worried.

"Miss Lloyd. I have some business with Mr. Chandler and that makes me want to know why you're watching him."

"Cissy hired you." It was not a question.

Davin was momentarily surprised. "Who's Cissy?"

"Cissy is his wife. I know she wants to know what he's been doing. He's killing himself."

"What difference should that make to you?"

Estelle looked at him steadily for a few seconds. She was young, but she was no kid.

"I love him too," she said.

* * *

Estelle's father, Warren Lloyd, was a philosophy professor, and her uncle Ralph was a partner of Joseph Dabney, founder of the South Basin Oil Company. She told Davin that when she was just a girl her father and mother had been friends with Julian and Cissy Pascal, and that the two families had helped out a young man from England named Raymond Chandler when he arrived in California before the war.

Estelle had had a crush on the young man from the time she reached her teens, and he in turn had treated her like his favorite girl. It was all very romantic, the kind of play where men and women pretended there was no such thing as sex. When Chandler had gone away to the war, Estelle had worried and prayed, and when he came back she had not been the only one to expect a romance to develop. One did: between Chandler and Cissy Pascal, eighteen years his senior.

Cissy filed for divorce. Estelle was confused and hurt, and Chandler would have nothing to do with her. The minute she had become old enough for real love, he had abandoned her.

Chandler's mother did not like Cissy and so Raymond did not marry her right away. Instead he took an apartment for Cissy at Hermosa Beach and another for his mother in Redondo Beach. Despite the scandal, Estelle's uncle helped Chandler get a job in the oil business, and he rose rapidly in the company. Estelle kept her opinions to herself, but although she dated some nice young men, she was never serious. Davin wanted to like her. Looking into her open face, he wasn't sure he could keep himself from doing so.

"So why are you waiting around outside his girlfriend's apartment?"

Estelle looked at him speculatively. "Did Cissy hire you to watch him or do you like peeking in bedroom windows?"

He did like her. "*Touché*. I won't ask any more rude questions."

"I'll tell you anyway. I just don't want to see him hurt himself. I know there's no chance for me anymore—I knew it a long time ago." She hesitated, and when she spoke there was a trace of scorn in her voice. "There's something wrong with Raymond anyway. He's not made Cissy happy and he would be making me miserable too if I were in her place."

"What do you think the problem is?"

She smiled sadly. "I don't think he likes women. He uses them, gets disgusted because they let themselves get used, and calls it love."

"Now you sound bitter."

"I'm not, really. He's a good man at heart."

Davin finished his coffee. Everyone was worried about Chandler. "It's late," he said. "It's time for you to take me back."

It was no cooler in the street than it had been in the diner. Davin lit a cigarette while Estelle drove, and when she spoke the strange mood of the last two days was on him again.

Hesitantly, softly, in a voice that promised more heat than the California night, she said to me, "You don't have to stay there watching all night. I have an apartment at the Bryson."

It was like she'd pulled a .38 on me. It was the last thing I expected. Her eyes flitted over me quickly as if she were measuring me for a suit of clothes. I could smell her faint perfume.

"No, thanks," I said. I almost gagged on the sweet scent of her. Ten minutes before, I had liked her, and now I saw her for what she really was. It was tough enough for a private eye to keep himself clean in this town; I'd expected better of this woman.

She let me off in the deserted street and drove away. I stood on the sidewalk watching the retreating lights of her car, inhaling deeply the scent of bougainvillea and night-blooming jasmine like overripe dreams, trying to figure out what Estelle's game might be.

A light was on in the Peterson bungalow. The curtains were partly drawn and the eucalyptus outside the window obscured his view. The night had cooled and a breeze that still held something of the sea rustled the trees as it wafted heavy, sweet air from the courtyard garden. A few clouds were sliding north toward the hills where Chandler's roadster lay at the bottom of an embankment; the high full moon turned Leeward Street into a scene in silver and black. Davin wondered at his own prudishness. He had not been propositioned so readily in a long time and had not turned down an offer like that in a longer one. As he reached his car he noticed a Ford with its top down parked in front of him. The sailors had found their address.

Something kept him from leaving. Instead he circled around the back of the bungalows until he reached number seven. The rear windows were unlit. Remembering Estelle's taunt, he crept to the side and looked in the lighted window. Through the gap in the curtains he could see a woman curled in the corner of a sofa beside a chintzy table lamp. She wore scarlet lounging pajamas. Her hair curled around her face in blonde Mary Pickford ringlets; her lips were a bright red cupid's bow and she was painting her toenails fastidiously in the same color. Davin could not

tell if there was anyone else in the room, but the woman did not act like she expected to be interrupted. Sometimes that was the best time to interrupt.

He walked around to the front and rang the bell. The scent of jasmine was even stronger. The door opened a crack, fastened by a chain, and the red lips spoke to him.

"Do you know what time it is? Who are you?"

"My name is Michael Davin. You're awake. I'd like to talk to you."

"We're talking."

"Pardon me. I thought we were playing peek-a-boo with a door between us."

The red lips smiled. The eyes—startling blue—didn't.

"All right, Davin. Come in and be a tough guy in the light where I can get a look at you." She unchained the door. That meant Chandler was gone. "Don't get the idea I'm in the habit of letting strange men in to see me in the middle of the night."

"Sure." She led him into the small living room. The pajamas were silk, with the name "May" stitched in gold over her left breast, and had probably cost more than the chair she offered Davin.

He sat on the sofa next to her instead. She ignored him and returned to painting her nails. The room was furnished with cheap imitations of expensive furniture: the curtains that looked like plush velvet the color of dark blood were too readily disturbed by the slight breeze through the window to be the real thing; the Spanish-style carpet was more Tijuana than Barcelona. May Peterson held her chin high to show off a fine profile and the clear white skin of her shoulders and breasts, but the blonde hair had been brown once. The figure, however, was genuine.

"You like this color?" she asked him.

"It's very nice."

She shifted position, crossing her right foot in front of her, and leaned on his shoulder.

"Watch your balance," he said.

She pulled away and looked at him. "You're really here to talk? So talk." May's boldness surprised and attracted him. It was not just brass; she acted as if she knew what she was doing and had nothing to hide. As if she knew exactly who she was at every moment. As if she didn't have time for lying, as if the idea of lying never crossed her mind.

"Where's Chandler?" he asked her.

She did not flinch; her eyes were steady on his. "Gone. Sometimes he doesn't stay all night. You should try his wife."

"Maybe I should. Apparently he doesn't anymore."

"That's not my fault."

"Didn't say it was. But I bet you make it easier for him to forget where he lives."

May dipped the brush in the polish and finished off a perfect baby toe.

"You don't know Ray very well if you think I had to seduce him. Sure, he likes to think it was out of his control—lotsa men do. But before me he was all over half the girls in the office."

"You work in his office?"

"Six months in accounting. He hired me himself. Maybe he didn't think he hired me because I got a nice figure, but I figured out pretty quick that was in the back of his mind." She smiled. "Pretty soon it was in front."

If May was worried about what Davin was after, who he was or why he was asking questions, she did not show it. That didn't make sense. Maybe she was setting him up for some fall, or maybe he was in detective's paradise, where all the questions had answers and all the women wanted to go to bed.

May removed the cotton balls from between her toes and closed the bottle of polish. "There," she said, snuggling up against me. "Doesn't that look fine?"

Beneath the smell of the nail polish was the musky odor of woman and perfume. It seemed to be my night for propositions; I felt unclean. I needed to plunge into cold salt water to peel away the smell of my own flesh and hers. The world revolves by people rutting away like monkeys in the zoo, but I had enough self-respect to keep away from the cage. As much as I wanted to sometimes, I couldn't let myself be drawn down into the mire; I had to keep free because I had a job to do.

Wait a minute, Davin thought. Even if May knew he was a detective, she had to realize that bedding him wouldn't protect Chandler. So why be a monk? Cold salt water? Rutting in the zoo?

I didn't move an eyelash. The pajamas fit her like rainwater. Lloyds of London probably carried the insurance on her perfect breasts. The nipples were beautifully erect. I got up.

"All right, May, pack it up for the night; I'm not in the market. Tell your friend Raymond that he's going to find himself in trouble if he keeps playing hookey. And you can bring your sailor pals back into the slip as soon as I leave."

"Sailor pals? What are you talking about?"

"Don't forget your manners, now. You're the hostess."

She looked at me as if I'd turned to white marble by an Italian master. Davin, rampant.

"Look, I'm not stupid," she said. "I figure you must be working for his wife. Big deal."

I looked down into her very blue eyes: maybe she was just a girl who worked in an office after all, one who got involved with the boss and didn't want any trouble. Maybe she was okay. But a voice whispered to me to see her the way she was—that a woman who looked like May, who said the things she said, was a whore.

"Sure, you're not stupid, May. Sure you're not. But some people take marriage seriously. Good night."

She stayed on the sofa, watching him; as soon as he closed the door behind him, he felt lost. He had just exited on some line about the sanctity of marriage. He'd pulled away from her as if she had leprosy, as if she had tempted him to jump off a cliff. He wasn't a kid and this wasn't some Boy Scout story. He had a job to do, but he wasn't a member of the Better Business Bureau. He was talking like a smart aleck and acting like an undergraduate at a Baptist college.

He drew a deep breath and fumbled in his pocket for his cigarettes. The moon was gone and morning would not be long in coming. It was as cool as it was going to get in any twenty-four hours and it still felt like ninety-five and climbing; the heat wave would not let up.

He started up the walk toward the street and a blow like someone dropping a cinder block on the back of his neck knocked him senseless.

The jasmine smelled good, but lying under a bush in a flower bed dimmed your appreciation. Davin rolled over and started to look for the back of his skull. It was not in plain sight. He got to his knees, then shakily stood. He didn't know how long he'd been out. It was still dark, but the eastern sky was smoked glass turning to mother-of-pearl. The door to May Peterson's bungalow was ajar and her light was still on. Head throbbing, Davin pushed the door slowly open and stepped in.

The lounging pajamas were torn open and she lay on the floor with one leg part way under the sofa and the other twisted awkwardly at the knee. Her neck had not gone purple from the bruises yet. All in all, she had died without putting up much of a struggle. The shade of the chintzy table lamp was awry but the bottle of

nail polish was just where she'd left it. Someone had taken the trouble to pull the phony curtains completely closed.

Davin knelt over her and brushed the hair back from her forehead. Her hair was soft and thick and still fragrant. A deep cut on her scalp left the back of her head dark and wet with blood. The very blue eyes were open and staring as if she were trying to comprehend what had happened to her.

Davin shuddered. Light was beginning to seep in through the curtains. The small kitchen was in immaculate order, the two-burner gas stove spotless in the dim morning light; the bedclothes of the large bed in the back room were disordered but nothing else was disturbed. A cut-glass decanter of bourbon stood on the dressing table with its stopper and two glasses beside it. Davin felt a hundred years old. He rubbed the swelling at the back of his neck where he'd been slugged—the pain shot through his temples—and left May Peterson's apartment quietly and quickly.

He drove down to use the pay phone at the diner where he and Estelle had had coffee. Fumbling to find the number in his wallet—whoever had hit him hadn't bothered to rob him—he dialed the Chandler home. A sleepy woman answered the phone.

"Mrs. Chandler?"

"Yes?"

"This is Michael Davin. Is your husband at home?"

A pause. He could see her debating whether to try to save her pride. "No," she said. "I haven't seen him since he went out with Milton Philleo yesterday afternoon."

"Okay. Listen to me carefully. Your husband is in serious trouble, and he needs your help. The police are going to try to connect him with a murder. I don't think he had anything to do with it. Tell them the truth about him but don't tell them about me."

"Have you found out what Raymond has been involved in?"

Davin hesitated.

"Mr. Davin—I'm paying you for information. Don't leave me in the dark." The voice that had been so thrillingly sexy two days before was that of a worried old woman.

The light in the telephone booth seemed cruelly harsh; the air in the cramped space smelled of stale cigarette smoke. Behind the counter of the diner a waitress in white was refilling the stainless steel coffee urn.

"The less you know right now the easier it will go when the police call you," Davin said. There was no immediate answer. He felt sorry for her, and he thought about the hurt look in Estelle's eyes. "It's pretty much what I told you I suspected in my office."

"Oh."

Davin shook his head to dispel his weariness. "There's one more thing. Do you know of anyone who has it in for your husband? Anyone who'd like to see him in trouble?"

"John Abrams." There was certainty in her voice.

"Who is he?"

"He works for South Basin, in the Signal Hill field. He and Raymond have never gotten along. He's a petty man. He resents Raymond's ability."

"Do you know where he lives?"

"In Santa Monica. If you'll wait a minute I can see whether Raymond has his address in his book."

"Don't bother. Remember now—when the police call, say nothing about me. Raymond is not involved in this."

Davin hung up and opened the door of the booth, but did not get up immediately. It was full day outside; the waitress was drawing coffee for herself and the dayside short-order cook. Davin considered a cup. He decided against it but made himself eat two eggs over easy, with toast, then headed home for a couple of hours of sleep. He wished he were as certain that Chandler hadn't killed May as he'd told Cissy.

The sun was shining in his eyes when Davin woke the next morning; the sun never came in through his bedroom window that early. The sheets, sticky with sweat, were twisted around his legs. The air was stifling and his mouth felt like a dustpan. He fumbled for the clock on the bedside table and saw it was already one-thirty. The phone rang.

"Is this Mr. Michael Davin?"

"What is it, Cissy?"

"The police just left here a few minutes ago. I have to thank you for warning me. They told me about May Peterson."

She stopped as if waiting for some response. He was still half asleep and the back of his head was suing for divorce. After a moment she went on.

"I didn't tell them anything, as you suggested, but in the course of their questions they told me the neighbor who found Miss Peterson's body saw a man leave her apartment in the early morning. Was it Raymond? Do you know?"

"It was me," Davin said tiredly. "Have you heard anything from him?"

"No."

"Then why don't you let me do the investigating, Cissy—Mrs. Chandler."

There was an offended silence, then the phone clicked. Davin let the dial tone mock him for a moment before he hung up. He ought not to have been so blunt, but what did the woman expect? He wondered if Cissy had had any doubts before divorcing Pascal for Chandler. Pascal was a concert cellist, Estelle had told him. Older than Cissy. She had married for love that time. Davin imagined her a woman who had always been beautiful, bright, the center of attention. He supposed it was hard for such a woman to grow old: she would become reclusive, self-doubting, alternating between attempts to be youthful and knowledge that she wasn't anymore. He wondered what Chandler thought about her.

The speculations tasted worse than his cotton mouth. Men and women—over and over again Davin's job rubbed his nose in cases of them fouling each other up. Maybe beating up union men for a living was cleaner work after all. He pulled himself out of bed and into the bathroom. He felt hung over but without the compensation of having been drunk the night before.

A shower helped and a shave made him look almost alert. Measuring his narrow jaw and long nose in the mirror, he tried to imagine what had gotten those women so hot the previous night. What had moved May to let him into her apartment so easily? Maybe that had only been a pleasant fantasy; fantasies sometimes were called upon to serve for a sex life, as Cissy Chandler and Davin both knew. His revulsion toward both May and Estelle had been a less pleasant fantasy.

The memory of May Peterson's dead, bemused stare—that was neither pleasant nor fantasy.

While he dressed he turned on the radio and heard a report about the brutal murder that had taken place on Leeward Avenue the previous night. The weather forecast was for a high of 100 that afternoon. Davin pawed through the drawer in the table beside his bed until he found a black notebook and his phony horn-rimmed glasses. His Harold Lloyd glasses, he called them. He sat down and called the Santa Monica operator. There was a John Abrams on Harvard Street.

It was a white frame house that might have been shipped in from Des Moines. The wide porch was shaded by a slanting roof. Carefully tended poinsettias fronted the porch, and a lawn only slightly better kept than the Wilshire Country Club sloped down to a sidewalk so white that the reflected sunlight hurt Davin's eyes. The leaded glass window in the front door was cut in a large

oval with diamond-shaped prisms in the corners. Davin pressed the button and heard a bell ring inside.

The man who came to the door was large; his face was broad, with the high cheekbones and big nose of an Indian. He wore khaki pants with suspenders and a good dress shirt, collarless, the top buttons undone.

"Are you Mr. John Abrams? You work for the Dabney Oil Syndicate?"

The blunt face stayed blunt. "Yes."

Davin held out his hand. "My name is Albert Parker, Mr. Abrams. I'm with Mutual Assurance of Hartford. We're running an investigation on another employee of South Basin Oil and would like to ask you a few questions. Anything you say will be held strictly confidential, of course."

"Who are you investigating?"

"A Mr. Raymond Chandler."

Abrams' eyebrows flicked a fraction of an inch. "Come in," he said. He ushered Davin into the living room. They sat down, Davin got out his notebook, and Abrams looked him over—the kind of look Davin suspected was supposed to make employees stiffen and try to look dependable.

Abrams leaned forward. "Is this about any litigation he's started lately? I wouldn't want to talk about anything that's in court."

"No. This is entirely a matter between Mutual and Mr. Chandler. We are seeking information about his character. In your opinion, is Mr. Chandler a reliable man?"

"I don't consider him reliable," Abrams said, watching for Davin's reaction. Davin gave him nothing.

"We've got a hundred wells out on Signal Hill and I'm the field manager," Abrams continued. "I like working for Mr. Dabney. He's a good man." He paused, and the silence stretched.

"Look, I don't know who told you to talk to me, but I'll tell you right now I don't like Chandler. He's a martinet and a hypocrite: he'll flatter Mr. Dabney on Tuesday morning and cuss him out for not backing one of his lawsuits on Tuesday afternoon. He runs that office like his little harem. If you'd watch him for a week you'd know."

"Yes."

Abrams got up and began pacing. "I've got no stomach for talking about a man behind his back," he said. "But Chandler is hurting the company and Mr. Dabney. He's dragged us into lawsuits just to prove how tough he is; he had us in court last year on a

personal injury suit that the insurance company was ready to settle on, and then after he won—he did win—he turned around and cancelled the policy. That soured a lot of people on South Basin Oil.

"The only reason he was hired was because he had an in with Ralph Lloyd. He started in accounting. So he sucks up to Bartlett, the auditor, and gets the reputation for being some kind of fair-haired college boy. A year later Bartlett gets arrested for embezzling $30,000. Tried and convicted.

"Now it gets real interesting. Instead of promoting Chandler, Dabney goes out and hires a man named John Ballantine from a private accounting firm. This suits Chandler just fine because Ballantine's from Scotland and Chandler impresses the hell out of him with his British upper-crust manners. Ballantine makes Chandler his assistant. A year later Ballantine drops dead in the office. Chandler helps the coroner and the coroner decides it was a heart attack. Mr. Dabney gives up and makes Chandler the new auditor, and within another year he's office manager and vice-president. Very neat, huh?"

Abrams had worked himself into a lather. Davin could have let him run on with just a few more neutral questions, but instead, as if someone else had taken over and was using his body like a ventriloquist's dummy, he said:

"You really hate him, don't you?"

Abrams froze. After a moment his big shoulders relaxed and his voice was back under control. "You've got to admit the story smells like a day-old mackerel."

"To hear you tell it."

"You don't have to believe me. Ask anyone on Olive Street. Check it with the coroner or the cops."

"If the cops thought there was anything to it I wouldn't have to check with them. Chandler would be spending his weekends in the exercise yard instead of with those girls you tell me about."

Abrams' brow furrowed. He looked like a theologian trying to fathom Aimee Semple McPherson. "Cops aren't always too smart," he said.

"A startling revelation." I was getting to like Abrams. He reduced the moral complexities of this case. He reminded me of a hand grenade ready to explode, and I was going to throw my body at him to save Raymond Chandler. "Mostly they aren't smart when somebody pays them not to be," I said. "Does the vice-president of an oil company have that kind of money?"

"Don't overestimate a cop's integrity."

"Who, me? I'm just an insurance investigator. You're the one who knows what it costs to bribe cops."

The big shoulders were getting tense again, but the voice was under control. "Look, I didn't start this talk about bribes. You asked me my opinion. I gave it; let's leave it at that."

He was right; I should have left it at that. Instead I pushed on like a fighter who knows the fix is on and it's only a matter of time before the other guy takes a dive.

"So Chandler killed Ballantine?" I said. "What about May Peterson?" I felt good. I was baiting a man who could wring me out like a dishrag and who looked like he was about ready to.

"Peterson? Never heard of her. What kind of insurance man are you, anyway?"

"I'm investigating an accident. Maybe you were out a little late last night?"

Abrams took a step toward me. "Let's see your credentials, pal."

I got up. "You wouldn't hit a man with glasses on, Abrams. Let me turn my back."

"Get the hell out of here."

A woman wearing a gardening apron and gloves had come into the room. The house, which had seemed so cool when I'd entered, felt like an inferno. I slid the notebook into my pocket and left. The porch swing hung steady as a candle flame in a tomb; the sun on the sidewalk reawakened my headache. Abrams stood in the doorway watching as I walked down to the car. When I reached it he went back inside.

Davin shuddered convulsively, loosened his tie, leaned against the car. He squinted and focused on the street to keep the fear down: he was a sick man. He'd totally lost control of himself in Abrams' house. He wondered if that was what it felt like to go crazy—to do and say things as if you were drunk and watching yourself in a movie. He lifted his hand, looked at the hairy backs of his knuckles. He touched his thumb to each of his fingertips. His hand did exactly what he told it to. He seemed to be able to do whatever he wanted; he could call Cissy Chandler and tell her to sweat out her marriage by herself. He could drive home and sleep for twelve hours and wake up alone and free. What was to stop him?

Davin was about to get into the car when he noticed a piece of wire lying on the pavement below his running board. Just a piece of wire. The freshly-clipped end glinted in the sunlight. He bent over and tried to pick it up: it was attached to something beneath

the car. Getting down on one knee, he saw the trailing wires where someone had cut each of his brake cables.

He rode the interurban east on Santa Monica Boulevard. Along the way he enjoyed what little breeze the streetcar's passage gave to the hot, syrupy air. He got off at Cahuenga and walked north toward his office on Ivar and Hollywood Boulevard, trying to piece together what had happened.

Abrams could have told his wife to take the pruning shears and cut the cables as soon as he recognized Davin on the porch. Abrams would have recognized Davin only if he was the one who had slugged Davin and gone on to murder May Peterson. He might have done it out of some misplaced desire to get back at Chandler.

But there was a problem with this theory. Why would Abrams go on to slander Chandler so badly? It would look better if he hid any hostility he felt.

When Davin considered the picture of a middle-aged woman in gardening gloves crawling under a car on a residential street in broad daylight to cut brake cables, the whole card house collapsed. It couldn't be done, and not only that—Abrams simply had no reason to try such a stupid thing.

Then there was the question of why Davin had been slugged in the first place. Something about that had bothered him all day, and now he knew what it was: whoever killed May had no reason to knock out Davin. Davin had been on his way out, and sapping him only meant he would be around to find her dead. It didn't make any sense.

Near the corner of Cahuenga and the boulevard he spotted a penny lying on the sidewalk. The bright copper shone in the late afternoon sun like a chip of heaven dropped at his feet. Normally he would have stopped to pick it up; one of the habits bred of a boyhood spent in a small town where a penny meant your pick of the best candies on display in Sudlow's Dry Goods. Instead he crossed the street.

But his mind, bemused by the puzzles of the cut brake cables and the senseless blow on the head, got stuck on this new mystery. If he'd paused to pick up the penny, he would have been a little later getting to the office. The whole sequence of events afterwards would be subtly different; it was as if stopping or not stopping marked a fork in the chain of happenings that made his life.

The strange frame of mind refused to leave him. Normally he *would* have stopped, so by not stopping he had set himself down a track of possibilities he would not normally have followed. Why

hadn't he stopped? What had pushed him down this particular path? The incident expanded frighteningly in his mind until it swept away all other thoughts. Something had hold of him. It was just like the conversation with Abrams where he'd gone for the jugular—something was changing every decision he made, no matter how minor. With a conviction that chilled him on this hottest of days, he knew that he was being manipulated and that there was nothing he could do about it. He wondered how long it had been happening without his knowing it. He should have picked up that penny.

After a moment the conviction went away. No. To think that way was insane. He was tired and needed a drink. He could talk himself into all kinds of doubts if he let himself. He ought to take a good punch at the next passerby just to prove he could do whatever he wanted.

He didn't punch anybody.

Davin took the elevator up seven floors to his office. Quintanella and Sanderson from Homicide were in the waiting room.

"You don't keep your door locked," Sanderson said.

"I can't afford to turn away business."

Sanderson mashed his cigarette out in the standing ashtray and got up from the sofa. "Let's have a talk," he said.

Davin led them into the inner room. "What brings you two out to see me on a Sunday?"

"A dead woman," Quintanella said. His face, pocked with acne scars, was stiff as a pine board.

Davin lit a cigarette, shook out the wooden match, broke it in half and dropped the pieces into an ashtray. They pinged as they hit the glass. The afternoon sun was shooting into the room at the same angle it had taken when Cissy Chandler had come into his office.

I'd had about enough of them already.

"That's too bad," I said. "It's a rough business you're in, You going to try to find out who killed this one?"

Sanderson belched. "We are," he said. "And you're gonna help us. You're gonna start by telling us where Raymond Chandler is."

"Don't know the man. Sure you've got the right Davin? There's a couple in the book."

"Will you tell this guy to cut the crap, Dutch?" Quintanella said to Sanderson. "He makes me sick."

"I didn't think they ran to delicate stomachs down at Homicide," I said. "You have to swallow so many lies and keep your mouth shut."

"Tell him to shut up, Dutch."

"Calm down, Davin," Sanderson said.

"You tell me to talk, he tells me to shut up. Every time you guys get a burr in your paws, you make guys like me pull it out for you. Call me Androcles."

"We can do this downtown," Sanderson said. "It's a lot less comfortable down there."

"You got a subpoena in that ugly suit?" The words were rolling out now and I was riding them. "If you don't," I said, "save the back room and the hose for some poor greaser. You want any answers from me, you've got to tell me what's going on. I'm not going to get bruised telling you things you've got no business knowing."

Quintanella flexed his hands. "C'mon Dutch, let's take him in."

"Shut up, Tony." Sanderson looked pained. "Don't try to kid us, Davin. We got a call from Mrs. Chandler this afternoon telling us she hired you last week. She said you knew about the murder of this call girl last night."

Call girl. The words momentarily shook Davin out of it. That was what Cissy would say, and guys like Sanderson would figure that was the only kind of woman who got murdered.

"Cissy Chandler's not the most reliable source," Davin said.

"That's why we came to you. The neighbor lady at the Rosinante Apartments said she saw a man who looked like you hanging around there last night. So why don't you tell us what's going on. Or should we let Tony take care of it?"

Davin watched them watch him. Quintanella was in the chair near the door, rubbing his left wrist with his other hand. This case was getting beyond him fast. He had no reason to protect Chandler when for all he knew the man had killed May.

"Jesus," Davin said. "You're crazy if you think I need this kind of heat. I'm not in this business to draw fire. I'll talk." He loosened his collar. "Will you let me get a drink out of this desk? No guns, just a little bourbon."

Sanderson came over behind the desk; Quintanella tensed. "You let me get it," Sanderson said. "Which drawer?"

"Bottom right."

Do it. Do it now. It was like Davin's blood talking to him, like the night in the freight yard with the club in his hand. He couldn't stop to pick up the penny.

When Sanderson opened the drawer and reached for the bottle, I punched him in the side of the throat. He fell back, hitting the corner of the desk, and Quintanella, fumbling for his gun, leapt

toward me. I slipped around the other side of the desk and out the door before the big man could get the heater out. I was down the stairs and out the exit to the alley before they hit the lobby; I zigzagged half a block between the buildings that backed the alley, crossed the street and slipped into the rear of an apartment building on the opposite side of Ivar. I had just thrown away my investigator's license. I caught my breath and wondered what the hell I was going to do next.

Davin called Estelle from the lobby of the Bryson and she told him to come up. Although it was only early evening, she was in her robe. Her dark hair shone; her face was calm, with a trace of insouciance. She looked like Louise Brooks.

"I've got some trouble," Davin said. "Can I stay here for awhile?"

"Yes."

She offered him coffee. They sat facing each other in the small living room. The two windows that fronted the street were open and a hot, humid wind waved the curtains like a tired maid shaking out bedsheets. The air smelled like coming rain. Maybe the heatwave would be broken. Davin told her about his talk with Abrams.

"You don't believe those things he said." There was an urgency in Estelle's voice that Davin supposed came from her love for Chandler. He realized that he didn't want her to care about Chandler at all.

"Did they happen?"

"Bartlett was convicted of embezzling. Ballantine died of a heart attack. Raymond had nothing to do with either of those things."

"He was just lucky."

Estelle exhaled cigarette smoke sharply. "I wouldn't use that word."

"I'm not trying to be sarcastic," Davin said. He hadn't had to try at all lately. "But you have to admit that it all has worked out nicely for him. He meets the right people, makes the right impression, and events break just the way you'd expect them to break if he was in the business of planning embezzlements and heart attacks. I can't blame a guy like Abrams for taking it the wrong way."

"Things don't always work out for Raymond. I know him better than you do. Look at his marriage."

"Okay, let's. Why did he marry her?"

Her brow knit. "He loves her, I guess."

"Why did he wait until his mother died?"

"She didn't approve."

"I'm not surprised. Age difference. But he was pretty old to still be listening to Mom."

Estelle took a last pull on her cigarette, then snuffed it out. Her dark eyes watched him. "I don't know. I don't know if I care anymore."

Davin wanted not to care about the whole case. But he had been hired to watch a man and he had lost that man. In the process a woman had been killed, and he couldn't bring himself to think she deserved it. *It was a matter of professional ethics.*

Ethics? He wasn't some white knight on a horse. The idea of ethics in his business was ludicrous; it made him mad that such an idea had worked its way into his head. Only a schoolboy would expect ethics from a private eye. Only a schoolboy would think less of May Peterson because she had slept with Chandler. Only a schoolboy would have turned Estelle down the previous night.

"I was surprised you asked me here last night," he said.

"That sounds sarcastic, too."

"Not necessarily."

The wind had strengthened and it was blissfully cool. With a sound of distant thunder, the rain started. Estelle got up to close the windows. She drew her robe tighter about her as she stood in the breeze; Davin watched her slender shoulders and hips as she pulled the windows shut. When she came back she folded her legs up under her on the sofa. The line of her neck and shoulders against the darkness of the next room was as pure as the sweep of a child's sparkler through a Fourth of July night. She spoke somberly.

"I used to be a good girl. Being in love with a married man made me think that over. I'm not a good or bad girl anymore; I'm not any kind of girl." She paused. "You don't look to me like you're really the kind of man you're supposed to be."

Davin felt free of compulsion for the first time in the last three days.

"I'm not," he said, in wonder. "I feel like I've been playing some kid's game—or more like dreaming some kid's dream. I feel like I'm just waking."

Estelle simply watched him.

"I'd like to stay with you tonight," Davin said.

She smiled. "Not a very romantic pickup line. Raymond would do it funnier, or more poetic."

"He would?"

"Certainly. He's very poetic. He even wrote poetry—still does, as far as I know. You didn't know that?"

"I haven't been on this case very long. Is it any good?"

"When I was nineteen I loved it. Now I think it'd be too sentimental for me."

"That's too bad."

Estelle came to Davin, sat on the arm of his chair, kissed him. She pulled away, a little out of breath.

"No it isn't," she said.

All during their lovemaking he felt something trying to make him pull away, like a voice whispering over and over, *get up and leave. Go now. She will push you, she will absorb you. Doesn't she smell bad? Isn't she an animal?*

It wasn't conscience. It was something outside him, alien, the same thing that had pulled him away from May Peterson. But Davin had finally picked up that penny, and he felt better, as he lay on the border of sleep, than he had in as long as he could remember. Being with Estelle was the first really good thing that he had done on his own since Friday afternoon. He felt that they were breaking a pattern merely by lying together, tired, limbs entwined. Estelle's breathing was regular, and Davin, listening to the rain, fell asleep.

Davin dreamt there had been a shipwreck and that he and the other passengers were floundering among the debris, trying to keep afloat. There was no sound. He knew the others in the water: Estelle was there, and Cissy, and Abrams and May Peterson and some others he could not make out—and Chandler. Chandler could not swim, and he clutched at them, one after the other, as if they were pieces of wreckage that he could climb up on in order to keep afloat. They might have made it themselves, but they were all being shoved beneath the waves by the desperate man, and they would drown trying to save him. But Chandler never would drown, and would never understand the people dying around him. He could not even see them. He fumbled for Davin's head, his fingers in Davin's eyes, and Davin found he did not have the strength to shove him away. Davin coughed and sputtered and struggled toward the surface. Fighting against him in the salt sea, Davin saw that for Chandler, he was little more than a broken spar, an inanimate thing to be used without compunction because it was never alive. Drowning, Davin saw that Chandler had forced him under without even realizing what he had done.

He woke. It was still dark. Estelle still slept; some noise from

the other room had stirred him. The rain had stopped and streetlights threw a pale wedge of light against the ceiling. Through the doorway, Davin saw something move. Two men slipped quietly into the room.

In the faint light Davin saw that they wore sailors' uniforms and that the smaller of the two had a sap in his hand. Davin snatched the bedside clock and threw it at him.

The man ducked and it glanced off his shoulder. Davin leapt out of the bed, dragging the bedclothes after him. He heard Estelle gasp behind him as he hit the smaller sailor full in the chest. They slammed into the wall and the man hit his head against the doorjamb. He slumped to the floor. Davin struggled to his feet, still tangled in the sheets, and turned to see that the big man had Estelle by the arm, a hand the size of a baseball glove smothering her cries. He dragged her out of bed.

"Quiet now, buddy," the big sailor said in a soft voice. "Else I wring the little girl's neck."

The man on the floor moaned.

"What's the deal?" Davin asked. Estelle's frightened eyes glinted in the dark.

"No deal. We just got some business to take care of."

Davin stood there naked, helpless. He was no Houdini. All he had to keep them alive was words.

"You killed May Peterson," he said. "Why?"

"We had to. To get at that bastard Chandler. He makes a good impression. We wanna see what kind of impression he makes on the cops."

Davin shifted his feet and stepped on something hard. The sap.

"What have you got against him?"

The big man seemed content to stand there all night with his arm around Estelle. He gasped, almost a chuckle. "Personal injury is what. Ten thousand bucks he cheated us outa. We hadda accident with one of his oil trucks. We had it as good as won until he made 'em go to court."

The man at Davin's feet rolled over, started to get up. "Be quiet, Lou," he said.

"What difference's it make," the big sailor said. "They're dead already."

"Be quiet and let's do it. There's other people in this place."

Davin's thoughts raced. "It makes no sense to kill us. I'm no friend of Chandler's. I've been tailing him."

"You was there last night," the small sailor said, poking around

the floor in the dark for the sap. "That's good enough. We've got to get rid of you."

"Who says?"

Neither one answered.

"What the hell are you looking for?" Davin asked.

"You'll know soon enough," the short one said.

"Damn, you guys are stupid. This doesn't make any sense. How do you expect to get away with this?"

Big Lou jerked back on his arm and Estelle struggled ineffectually. "It was you two that got caught in the bed together, right? Like a coupla animals? You don't deserve to live." He spoke with wounded innocence, as if he had explained everything. As if, Davin realized, he was hearing the same voice that had whispered to him. Davin trembled, furious, holding himself back, feeling himself ready to fight and afraid of what might happen if he did. Don't move, he thought.

Move.

The shorter sailor was still obsessed with finding his weapon, shuffling through the sheets on the floor, picking up Estelle's discarded camisole with two fingers as if it were a dead carp.

"Let me help," I said; I snatched the sap from beneath my foot and laid the sailor out with a blow across the temple. The small man hit the floor like the loser in a prelim. At the same time I heard Lou yell. Estelle had bitten his hand. Lou threw her aside, shook the pain away, and catlike, quickly for such a big man, moved toward me.

Lou wasn't too big. Tunney could have taken him in twelve. I tried to dance out of his way, but he cut me off and worked me toward the corner of the room. I swung the sap at his head; Lou caught the blow on his forearm and I tried to knee him in the groin. He danced back a half-step. I stumbled forward like a rodeo clown who missed the bull. As I tried to get up I got hit in the ear with a fist that felt like a baseball bat. Just to show there were no hard feelings, Lou kicked me in the ribs.

"Stop!" Estelle yelled. "I've got a gun."

Lou turned slowly. Estelle was kneeling on the bed, shaking. She had a small automatic pointed at him.

Lou charged her. Two shots, painfully loud in the small room, sounded before he got there. He knocked the gun away, grabbed Estelle's head in one hand and smashed it against the brass bedstead once, twice, and she was still. I was on him by then. Oh yes, I was real quick. Lou shook me off his back and onto the floor, grunting now with the effort and the realization that he was shot.

He shook his head as if dazed and stumbled toward me again. When he hit me I stood and heaved him over my shoulder. There was a crash and a rush of air into the room: Lou had gone through the window. Six stories to the street.

Davin shuddered with pain and rage—not at what Lou had done, but at himself. The other sailor was still out. Estelle lay half off the bed, her head hanging, mouth open. Her straight, short hair brushed the floor. Davin lifted her onto the bed. He listened for her heartbeat and heard nothing. He touched her throat and felt no pulse. He lay his cheek against her lips and felt no wisp of breath.

A great anger, an anger close to despair, was building in him. He knew who had killed Estelle, and why, and it was not the sailors.

No one had yet responded to the shots or the dead man in the street. Davin pulled on his clothes and left.

Davin didn't know how much time he would have. He burned with rage and impatience—and with fear. Estelle was dead. He shouldn't have moved. He was not a hero. Somebody had made him. Somebody had made him walk by that penny on the sidewalk, too, and as damp night gave way to dawn his confusion gave way to cold certainty: Chandler was his man. And, Davin realized, laughing aloud, he was Chandler's.

He took the streetcar downtown, past the construction site of the new civic center. He got off at Seventh and Hill and walked a block to South Olive. He was hungry but would not eat; he wondered if it was Chandler who decided whether he should become hungry. He watched the officeworkers come in for the beginning of the new week and wondered who was trapped in Chandler's web and who wasn't. In the men's room of the Bank of Italy building he washed the crusted trickle of blood from his ear, combed his hair, straightened his clothes.

Nothing that had happened in the last three days had made sense. Cissy hiring Davin, Chandler running off the road, Davin getting knocked out at May's apartment, the sailors killing May and then Estelle, the cutting of Davin's brake cables, Sanderson and Quintanella letting him get away so easily—and the crazy way things fit together, coincidence straight out of a bad novel. All of these things ought not to have happened in any sensible world. The only way they could have was if he were being pulled from his own life into a nightmare, and that was what Davin had realized. The nightmare was Chandler's.

Somehow, probably without his even knowing it, whatever Chandler wanted to happen, happened. Lives got jerked into new patterns, and his fantasies came true. Maybe it went back to Bartlett's embezzlement and Ballantine's heart attack; maybe it went back to Chandler's childhood. Whatever, the things that had been happening to Cissy and May and Estelle and even Big Lou and his partner, even the things Davin could not imagine any man consciously wanting to come true—were all what Chandler wanted to happen. Estelle was dead because of the situation the sailors and Davin had contrived to trap her in, and they had contrived this without knowing it because they were doing what Chandler wanted. There was no place in Chandler's world for women who liked sex and weren't afraid to go out and get it. There was no place in Chandler's world for the ordinary kind of private detective that Davin was. He had to find Chandler before the next disaster occurred.

He waited until he saw Philleo show up for work at South Basin Oil and followed him up to the fourth floor. Most of the staff was there already and talking about May Peterson. They stared at Davin as if he were an apparition—he felt like one—and Philleo turned to face him.

"May I help you?"

"Let's talk in your office, Mr. Philleo."

The man eyed him darkly, then motioned toward the corner room. They shut the door. Davin refused to sit down.

"Where's Raymond?" he asked.

"I talked to the police yesterday. You're no policeman."

"That's right. Where is he?"

"I have no idea," Philleo said. "And I'm not going—"

The phone rang. Philleo looked irritated, then picked it up. "Yes?" he said. There was a silence and Philleo looked as if he had swallowed a stone. "Put him on," he said.

Davin smiled grimly: yet another improbable coincidence. He had known the moment the phone rang who was calling. Philleo listened; he looked distressed. After a moment Davin took the receiver from his unresisting hand.

The man on the phone spoke in a voice choked with emotion and slurred by alcohol, with a trace of a British accent.

". . . swear to God I'll do it this time, Milt, I can't bear to think what a rat I am and what I'm doing to Cissy—"

"Where are you?" Davin said softly.

"Milt?"

"This isn't Milt. This is Michael Davin. I'm the man who helped you the other night when you ran off the road. Where are you?"

There was a pause, and Chandler's voice came back, more sober. "I want to talk to Milt."

"He doesn't want to talk to you anymore, Raymond. He's sick of you. He wants me to help you out instead."

Another silence.

"Well, you can tell that bastard that I'm in the Mayfair Hotel and if he wants to help me he can identify my body when they pull it off the sidewalk because I'm going to do it this time."

"No you won't. I'll be there in ten minutes." Davin gave the phone back to Philleo, who looked ashen. "He says he's going to kill himself."

"He's threatened before. I could tell you stories—"

"Just talk to him."

Davin ignored the elevator and ran down to the lobby, flagged a cab that took him speeding down Seventh Street. He didn't know what he was going to do when he got there, but he knew he had to reach Chandler. The ride seemed maddeningly slow. He peered out the window at the buildings and pedestrians, the sunlight flashing on storefronts and cars, searching for a sign that something had changed. Nothing happened. When Chandler died, would any of them who were controlled by him feel the difference? Would Davin collapse in the back seat of the taxi like a discarded puppet, leaving the driver with a ticking meter and a comatose man to pay the fare? Or would Chandler's death instead set Davin free? If Davin could only be sure of that, he would kill Chandler himself. Maybe he would kill him anyway. He needed to stay mad to keep from thinking about whether he could have saved Estelle. If Davin had walked out of her apartment instead of asking to stay, if she had kicked him out, then she would probably still be alive. She'd be a good girl, and he'd be a strong man. If May had slammed the door in his face—

They reached the Mayfair and Davin threw a couple of dollars at the driver. The desk clerk had a Mr. Chandler in room 712.

The door was not locked. The room stank of tobacco smoke and sweat and booze. Chandler had to have his own private bootlegger to stay drunk so consistently. The man was sitting in the opened window wearing rumpled trousers, shoes without socks, and a sleeveless T-shirt. He had his back against one side and one leg propped against the opposite. An almost-empty bottle stood on the sill in the crook of his knee. The phone lay on its side on the bedside table with the receiver dangling and a voice sounding

tinnily from it. A book was opened face down on the bed, which looked as if it hadn't been made up in a couple of days. Beside the book lay a pulp magazine. *Black Mask*. Above a lurid picture of a man pointing a gun at another man who held a blonde in front of him as a shield, was the slogan, "Smashing Detective Stories."

Chandler did not notice him enter. Davin crossed to the phone, stood it up, and quietly hung up the receiver. The silencing of the voice seemed to rouse Chandler. He lifted his head.

"Who are you?"

Davin's weariness suddenly caught up with him, and he sat down on the edge of the bed. He had felt some sympathy for Chandler even up to that moment, but seeing the man, and remembering Estelle's startled dead eyes, he now knew only disgust. Everyone who loved this man defended him, and he remained oblivious to it all, self-pitying and innocent when he ought to be guilty.

"You're the guy—" Chandler started.

"I'm the guy who pulled you out of the wreck. I'm the private detective hired by Cissy to keep you from hurting yourself. She didn't say anything about keeping you from hurting anyone else, and I was too stupid to catch on. Before Friday I had a life of my own, but now I'm the man you want me to be. I get beat up for twenty bucks a day and say please and thank you. I'm a regular guy and a strange one. I talk sex with the ladies and never follow through. I crack wise to the cops. I'm the best man in your world and good enough for any world. I go down these mean streets and don't get tarnished and I'm not afraid. I'm the hero."

"What are you talking about?"

"You're mystified, huh? Before Friday I could touch a woman and not have to worry about her getting killed for it. Now I'm busy taking care of a sleazy momma's boy."

Chandler pointed a shaking finger at him. "Don't you mock me," he said. "I know what I've done. I know—"

Davin was raging inside. "What have you done?" he said grimly. "You sound like you've got a big conscience. So tell me."

Chandler's weeping had turned into anger. "I've betrayed my wife. I'm not surprised she put you onto me—I would have told her to do that myself, in her situation. I've—" his voice became choked, "I've consorted with women who aren't any good. Women with death in their eyes and bedrooms that smell of too much cheap perfume."

"Are you serious?" Davin wanted to laugh but couldn't. "Where

do you get all this malarkey? May and Estelle are dead. Really dead—not perfume dead."

Chandler jerked as if electrically shocked. He knocked the bottle out the window, and seconds later came the crash.

His face set in a sour expression. "I'm not surprised about May. She led a fast life." He paused, and his voice became philosophical. "Even Estelle—it doesn't surprise me. I finally figured out that she wasn't the innocent she pretended to be."

Davin's rage grew. He got up from the bed; the book beside him fell off and closed itself. *The Great Gatsby,* the cover read.

"May and Estelle were killed by those sailors you fought in the insurance suit. They said they were out to get revenge against you."

Chandler was shook again. "That makes no sense," he said. "May and Estelle had nothing to do with that. Anyone out to get me should come for me. There must have been some other reason they were killed."

Davin grabbed Chandler by the arm. He wanted to push him out the window; it would be easy, easier than the night in the railyard. Nobody would know. For the first time, Chandler looked him in the eye. Davin saw desperation there and something more frightening: Chandler seemed to know what he was thinking, was granting him permission, was making an appeal. He did not try to escape Davin's grasp. Davin fought the desire to give the one quick shove that would end it; the frustrated need, the rage of the years of keeping himself sane, pushed him toward it. The whole struggle was the matter of an instant. He pulled Chandler into the room.

"Quit the suicide act. What have you been doing since you left May?"

If Chandler had felt anything of the communication that had passed between them, he did not show it. "What does it look like?" he said. "I couldn't stay with her; when I first met her I thought she was innocent, defenseless, but I learned the kind she was quick. I couldn't go home and face Cissy. I came here."

He looked toward the window. "If I had any guts it wouldn't be an act."

"Those sailors had no reason to kill except you. They did it in the stupidest way possible. Not for revenge. Just so things could work out the way you want them to."

Chandler pushed by him and went into the bathroom; Davin heard the sound of running water. He was getting ready to shave. He seemed to be sobering fast.

"You're crazy," Chandler said as he lathered his face. "The way *I* wanted? Look, I feel like the bastard I am, but what did I have to do with any of this? Am I supposed to stop defending the company when we're in the right? I've got to try to do the right thing, don't I?"

Davin said nothing. After a few minutes, Chandler came out of the bathroom. Hair combed, freshly shaven, he seemed already to be on the way to becoming an executive again. The news of the deaths, the struggle on the windowsill, had knocked the booze out of him; knocked the guilt down in him, too. He picked up his shirt and began buttoning it.

Davin felt he was going to be sick.

"You know, that credo you spouted—you were just joking, I realize—but there's something to it," Chandler said seriously. " 'Down these mean streets.' I'd like to believe in that; I'd like to be able to live up to that code—if we could only get all the other bastards to."

Davin rushed into the bathroom and vomited into the toilet.

Chandler stuck his head into the room. "Are you all right?"

Davin gasped for breath. He wet a towel and rubbed his face.

Chandler had his tie knotted and put on the jacket of his rumpled summer suit. "You should take better care of yourself," he said. "You look awful. What's your name?"

"Michael Davin."

"Irish, huh?"

"I guess so."

"I'll bet being a private investigator is interesting work. There's a kind of honor to it. You ought to write up your experiences some day."

Estelle was dead, lying upside down with her hair brushing the dusty floor. Her mouth was open. "I don't want to," Davin said.

Chandler took the copy of *Black Mask* from the bed. Davin felt hollow, but the way Chandler held the magazine, so reverently, sparked his anger again.

"You actually read that junk?"

The other man ignored him. He bent over, a little unsteadiness the only evidence of his bender and the fact he'd been ready to launch himself out the window half an hour earlier. He picked up the copy of *Gatsby*.

"I've always wanted to be a writer," he said. "I used to write essays—even some poetry."

"Estelle told me that."

Chandler looked only momentarily uncomfortable. He motioned

with the book in his hand. "So you don't like detective stories. Have you tried Fitzgerald?"

"No."

"Best damn writer in America. Best damn book. About a man chasing his dream."

"Does he catch it?"

Sadly, Chandler replied, "No. He doesn't."

"He ought to quit dreaming, then."

Chandler put his hand on Davin's shoulder. "We can't do that. We've got nothing else."

Davin wanted to tell him what a load of crap that was, but Chandler had turned his back and walked out of the room. ●

MARTIN GARDNER (from page 131)

SECOND SOLUTION TO TWO ODD COUPLES

If one person on the bench is twice the age of the other, and their ages total 51, then one must be 17 and the other 34. You were told that "her age is an even number." Therefore Clyde must be a woman of 34, and Ann a young man of 17. It was, of course, part of the unisex trend that first names no longer distinguished males from females.

As my spirit floated leisurely through the foggy fifth astral plane, back to my bedroom in North Carolina, my hyperactive brain snatched from the mind of Floridian Alan Wayne an ingenious cryptarithm. His puzzle was in strange synchronicity with my having encountered the two odd couples:

$$\begin{array}{r} \text{COUPLE} \\ \text{COUPLE} \\ \hline \text{QUARTET} \end{array}$$

Each letter stands for a digit (0 through 9), and each digit has just one letter value. No number starts with zero. Can you decode the letters to make the sum correct? Next month I will reveal the only answer.

ON BOOKS

by Baird Searles

Superluminal
By Vonda N. McIntyre
Houghton Mifflin, $12.95

There has always been a mystique about those minor deities who are in charge of vehicles. The captain of the sailing vessel or the steamship, the engineer of the train, and the pilot of the airliner all have a certain glow to us. Why this is so is not all that clear; it's obviously not just being in charge of something—otherwise the officer manager and the shop steward would have it, whatever *it* is. Presumably it has something to do with the command of a miniature, inhabited, moving world combined with an element of danger—the ship may sink, the plane may fall.

This, of course, has been long since transferred to the space-traveling future in science fiction, since the spaceship is epitomally your miniature, inhabited, moving world. (Curiously, the realworld space program seems more inclined to teams; the true captain figure has not as yet developed.)

A variation on the theme threatens to become a new cliché, however. That is the human who must, to become a pilot/captain and guide a spaceship through the various intricacies of interstellar space, be physically and/or mentally changed, and is concomitantly alienated from the rest of humanity. This provides an opportunity to combine the human drama of the lonely-mutant theme with the space travel theme, and to realize one of the prime necessities of SF writing, that the plot must grow from the science fictional elements.

It has not quite yet become a cliché, and Vonda N. McIntyre does a nice handling of the idea in her latest novel, *Superluminal*. Here in a busy future universe with human colonies spreading rapidly, the starship pilots must submit to various changes (such as the removal of the heart, thus the resented nickname "Aztecs") to enable them to survive "transit" between the stars. All ordinary mortals die in transit unless subjected to drugged sleep.

The protagonist of *Superluminal* would at first seem to be Laenea, whom we meet just

after her operation but before her initial flight as pilot (she has heretofore been starship crew). During her recuperation period, she has an affair with a young colonial crew member, Radu, who at this point more or less takes over the novel.

The affair is naturally doomed, under the circumstances, but there are odd subsequent events. On his next voyage, Radu wakes in transit and survives. And on her training voyage, Laenea's ship is lost, which would ordinarily be fatal to those aboard. Needless to say, the story doesn't end there.

Nevertheless, and despite the intricate decoration with which McIntyre embellishes the plot, it's a tenuous tale that really boils down to "boy gets pilot, boy loses pilot, boy finds pilot at the end of the Universe."

That it doesn't come across as this simplistic is due to the embellishments, which include another crew member, Orca, who is one of an artificially-mutated race of humans who have established their own marine culture and strong rapport and interaction with that of the whales. Here's another theme that might be well on the way to overuse; on the other hand, *anything* that continues to promote knowledge of and sympathy for our cetacean neighbors is not only desirable but necessary. Keep those whale and porpoise cultures coming, authors!

Not By Bread Alone
By Naomi Mitchison
Marion Boyars, Inc., $12.95

It's not every day a book turns up by a woman who is a Mmarona (Mother) of the baKgatla baKgafela tribe of Botswana, and 86 years old to boot. Not to mention being a member of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union of Arkansas. The works of Britisher Naomi Mitchison are hardly known in this country, which is this country's loss. Her many historical novels are worthy of comparison to Graves and Renault, her Arthurian fantasy is as funny and tragic as T. H. White's (and has never even been published here), and her first SF novel, which appeared when she was a mere 67 in 1964, was an astonishing preview, in style and attitude, of many of the excellent novels being written in the field by women today. Not widely read (though it did see U. S. publication), its prescient influence remains a mystery.

Her latest novel, *Not By Bread Alone,* is a more traditional effort; in fact, it's downright classic in form and were it not for Mitchison's sophisticated handling, could well seem old-fashioned. It is the start-in-the-lab story of the revolutionary discovery which affects society

radically, and its unexpected concomitants, usually seen through the eyes of those intimately involved in its discovery and/or promulgation. This could well be the purest sort of SF, a pattern set by Verne and Wells, and Shelley for that matter. It's a tricky form to pull off these days; the discovery and its results must be realistic enough to convince of the changes wrought on the society, and yet interesting enough to keep up the drama—the author can't just extrapolate a new form of food production and then tell us the world didn't go hungry after that. And then there's the everlasting problem of SF, that of working in the human characters and *their* dramas.

It is indeed a new form of food cultivation that forms the basis of *By Bread Alone,* the cheap and almost infinite expansion of vegetable foods through morphogenesis; the major characters are the two discoverers, a Sikh and an Englishwoman living in India. The discovery is developed with the help of a multinational corporation, but no, it is not a simple tale of unscrupulous exploitation; Mitchison is too subtle and too *au courant* for that. She knows the world of science very well indeed (her brother is the noted biologist, J.B.S. Haldane); she makes not only the technical material convincing, but the ins and outs of the politics of science. Over the years, hunger does become a thing of the past for humanity, and it is the long range social developments that are part of the novel's concern.

Another concern is the "holdouts," principally the autonomous aboriginal state established in northwestern Australia. Mitchison is right on top of the vogue for things Australian, and her aboriginal culture of the future is presented as a contrast to the society dependent on "Free-Food"; there is a touch of the mystical (the native "Dreaming," et al), but thank God, not the mushy, druggy stuff that has been passing for mysticism lately.

The novel is astonishingly succinct (just over 150 pages) for what it includes, which is not only the story of the changes brought by Free-Food, but the personal dramas of the discoverers and their involvement, first with the discovery and later with the aboriginals. (The woman has a lengthy lesbian affair with a member of the corporation's board, the Sikh's son studies, then joins the native Australians.)

One tiny touch must be cited: a note, left by an irascible Scots/Australian scientist which reads, in toto: "Gone walkabout. Bak Son." The combination of aboriginal and Poohiana is irresistible.

Naomi Mitchison has given us an SF novel of the most fun-

damental sort, and made it work by casting it in the most contemporary terms possible. Perhaps we need a few more 86-year-old writers working in the field.

Damiano
By R.A. MacAvoy
Bantam, $2.95 (paper)

R. A. MacAvoy's *Tea With the Black Dragon* of last year was so interesting and offbeat that I thought I'd bend the rules of fairness a little, and take a look at her next novel, though it follows hard upon. The title is *Damiano* and it's an historical fantasy, set in the time of Petrarch (14th century—the Renaissance is just bubbling).

The hero, Damiano, is a witch (he prefers wizard, but usage seems to insist on witch), resident in the small town of Partestrado in the Piedmont section of Italy. He has inherited his powers and knowledge from his late father, who was an unpleasant person, but Damiano is a paragon of niceness, spending his time making cough medicine for the townsfolk, studying the lute with the archangel, Raphael, whom he has somehow conjured up, and yearning after Carla, the *ragazza* next door. In return, he is regarded as something of a freak by the townspeople, who leave him behind when Partestrado is invaded and taken over by one of the wandering warlords of the period. (Damiano has been inside three days stirring cough syrup.)

Nevertheless, he sets off on an odyssey to rescue Carla and the town, during which he has a couple of interviews with Lucifer, meets and falls in love with a Finnish witch living in Italy, and gets in and out of various other scrapes while realizing the real extent of his powers.

This isn't quite as cutesey as it sounds; MacAvoy is an excellent writer with a particular talent for creating idiosyncratic characters, and a jaundiced eye toward the world in general and Renaissance Italy in particular. And she has some interesting theories about witchcraft (such as an answer to the old question: why aren't witches all rich and beautiful, given their powers?), which is treated with a nice casualness.

But the author has rather undermined the whole book with her leading character. Damiano is something of a single-minded, goody-goody twit and I got pretty tired of his allowing himself to be taken advantage of, or, contrariwise, being so determined to do what he thinks is the right thing that, for instance, he causes the demise of the only really appealing person in the story. This novel is the first of a trilogy; let's hope that Damiano is a little less of

a tiresome innocent as time goes by.

The Neverending Story
By Michael Ende
Doubleday, $15.95

The outsider's idea of SF and fantasy, despite their growth in popularity in the past decade, still remains pretty strange. Until recently, for instance, a mainstream author would sit down to write a fantasy and usually come up with a story that combined the worst qualities of *Pilgrim's Progress* and the ickiest sort of twee children's literature. That was fantasy so far as most people were concerned, save for those few who had had different standards set by Tolkien and Dunsany. The general theory seemed to be that it *had* to be cute, for one thing; and for another, it didn't have to make sense (it was *fantasy,* after all). Coherence and believability were hardly important, since it was to be read for its whimsy and/or its deep inner allegorical meanings.

That that sort of thing is not dead is proved by the publication with much blat and fanfare of *The Neverending Story* by Michael Ende. It has reportedly been on the best seller list in Germany for three years.

The Neverending Story is about this little boy named Bastian Balthazar Bux, who is reading an absolutely *too* enthralling book which takes place in a *wonderful* country named Fantasiana. In the opening pages, we meet a will-o-the-wisp named Blubb that has lost its way, and isn't that strange, since will-o-the-wisps are supposed to make other people go astray? Chuckle, chuckle. He encounters a rock giant; the rock giants eat holes in mountains that makes them look just like Swiss cheese, and therefore they're known as Cheesiewheezies. Darling, isn't it?

It goes on like that—for over three hundred pages. Do you want to know more? I didn't think so.

(There's a rumor going around that Walt Disney turned down the film rights because it was too cute.)

Codex Seraphinianus
By Luigi Serafini
Abbeville Press, $75.00

Ladeeez—and gentlemen! I will now attempt, right before your very eyes, an extraordinary feat. May I request absolute silence? For here, in a couple of paragraphs, I'm going to try to review the unreviewable.

Codex Seraphinianus is a very large book. It is more or less divided between text and pictures; there are pages and pages of text and over 1100 pictures. It seems to be an encyclopedia. I say seems because the text—which is very handsome

in a scrolly, Islamic way— is in no known language. (The only comprehensible print is on the title and copyright pages.) There is a chapter on plants, and another on animals. Here is one on machinery, and one on food; another on clothing, and one with maps that may be history or geography. All this, of course, one gathers from the pictures. The thing is that they have no relation to reality as we know it. The plants are strange; the animals and machines are stranger. There are humans in the pictures, but there are also other beings. The maps are of unknown territories; the scientific principles illustrated were never applicable in this cosmos.

What we have, in fact, is an encyclopedic guide, only partially comprehensible, to an alien universe. It's really an art book, but don't expect the slick illustrative pictures of a Boris or Rowena. The artwork has the odd quality of textbook illustrations, except for the magnificent color. The artist's work has been compared to Escher, and that's partly valid; the book lies in the uneasy boundary between surrealism and fantasy, given a odd literary status by its masquerade as a book of fact. Obviously given the price it's not something one dashes out and buys, but seek it out if you can. It's a very peculiar thing.

The Deep
By John Crowley
Bantam, $2.50 (paper)

Members of the cult that is forming around John Crowley's *Little Big* will be happy to hear that his first published novel, *The Deep,* is again available. Even those who were turned off by the pastel shapelessness of LB might give Crowley another try with the earlier novel; incisive storytelling doesn't seem to be his forte, but this one is *vivid.*

Its world is a variant to Earth: flora, fauna, and people are not exotic. The Folk are ruled by a feudal, warring aristocracy, divided into Reds and Blacks, which are clans, not races. They continually form shifting alliances in an endless struggle for power; spicing the social stratification are the Just, a continuing revolutionary underground dedicated to the assassination of those in power, and the Grays, a legal/religious order who maintain stability.

Tradition says that this world lies on a tray supported by a pillar which is founded on the Deep. Into it comes a stranger, sexless, inhuman, and memoryless being who is immediately involved in the complex power struggles of the Reds and the Blacks.

It's all like a personified game of chess, complicated by many different pieces with human choices, two more colors and a

Joker. Keeping track of them all is something of a problem, but it's worth the trouble. This was a True Original when first published, and still is.

Shoptalk . . . Piers Anthony must have set some sort of record recently when three new books from him appeared within a week. They were *Dragon On a Pedestal* (#7 of the Xanth series), *On a Pale Horse* (#1 of a new series), and *Bio of a Space Tyrant* (#1 of *another* new series!) . . . Zeising Bros. Publishers have brought out a collection of stories by Gene Wolfe in a deluxe, limited (to 200) edition at $30. The title is *The Wolfe Archipelago* which comes from the fact that it includes the stories "The Island of Doctor Death," "The Doctor of Death Island," and "The Death of Dr. Island," among others. Another Neverending Story . . . From Underwood-Miller, a hard cover edition of Jack Vance's "Durdane" books, *The Faceless Man, The Brave Free Men,* and *The Asutra.* They are $15 each and there is a boxed autographed collector's edition at $80 . . . What is perhaps the best SF art book of the past decade has appeared at last in paperback; it is Dougal Dixon's *After Man* (St. Martin's, $9.95). At first glance it appears to be a beautifully illustrated zoological textbook —only on close examination does it reveal itself to be about the expertly extrapolated animal kingdom of fifty million years after mankind's demise. Text, pictures, and concept are brilliant.

Recent publications by those connected with this magazine include *Isaac Asimov's Magical Worlds of Fantasy #1: Wizards* edited by Isaac Asimov, Martin H. Greenberg, & Charles G. Waugh, NAL, $3.50 (paper).

Books to be considered for review in this column should be submitted to Baird Searles, c/o The Science Fiction Shop, 56 8th Ave., New York, New York 10014. ●

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SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR

by Erwin S. Strauss

The Spring con(vention) season is at hand, with cons all over the world. Make plans now 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. When calling cons, it's polite to say who you are and what you want first. Send a #10 SASE when writing. Look for me as Filthy Pierre at cons.

MARCH, 1984

17-19—**LunaCon.** For info, write: **Box 779, Brooklyn NY 11230.** Or phone: **(703) 273-6111** (10 am to 10 pm only, not collect). Con will be held in: Hasbrouck Heights NJ Sheraton (near New York City) (if city omitted, same as in address). Guests will include: editor Terry Carr, artist Tom Kidd, fan Cy Chauvin. The dowager queen of Eastern conventions. Used to be the only big East Coast con.

16-17—**ExploraCon. (804) 486-3984.** Pavilion Conv. Center, Virginia Beach VA. Space exploration.

16-18—**MidSouthCon.** Quality Inn West, Memphis TN. C. (Downbelow) Cherryh, M. Middleton, Coger.

23-25—**NorWesCon.** SeaTac Hyatt Hotel, Seattle WA. This usually draws a hundred or more authors.

23-25—**StellarCon.** Elliot University Center, University of North Carolina, Greensboro NC.

24-25—**Nova.** Oakland University, Rochester MI. Masquerade. Run by Order of Liebowitz.

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, c/o Howell, 959-A Waverley Ct., Norcross GA 30071.** Tucker (near Atlanta) GA. Anne (Pern) McCaffrey, artists K. Freas & M. Whalen, Ralph Roberts, B. Linaweaver, M. Resnick.

30-Apr. 1—**ICon, c/o SF Forum, Box 461, Stony Brook, NY.** At the Lecture Center.

APRIL, 1984

13-15—**CapCon, Box 2625, Lubbock TX 79408.** R. (Mythconceptions) Asprin, A. Offutt (John Cleve).

13-15—**CostumeCon, Box 1947, Spring Valley CA. 92077** San Diego CA. SF, fantasy & historical costumes.

20-22—**MiniCon, Box 2128 Loop Sta., Minneapolis MN 55402.** S. (Aquila, Mallworld) Sucharitkul.

20-22—**BaltiCon, Box 686, Baltimore MD 21203.** Parke Godwin, Robin Wood, Marta Randall, Alan E. Nourse, Marvin Kaye, C. L. Moore. At the Inner Harbor Hyatt. Usually sells out its limit (2001).

20-23—**SeaCon, c/o Burns, 23 Kensington Court, Hempstead NY.** Brighton, England. The annual British national con, combined with the European continental con. At the Metropole Hotel.

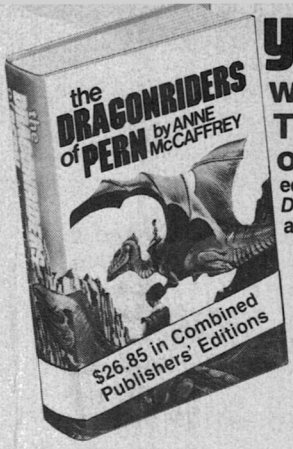
AUGUST, 1984

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. World Con for 1985.

30-Sept. 2—**Chilicon, 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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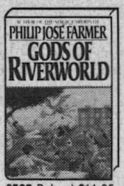

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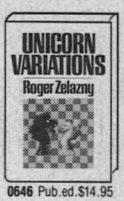

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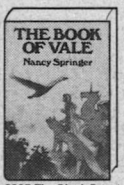

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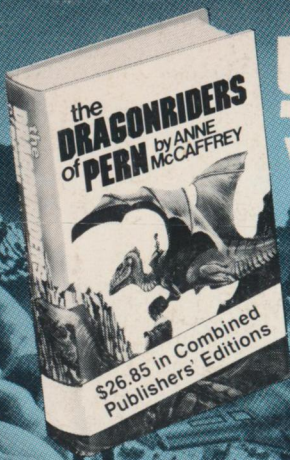

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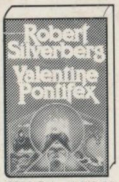

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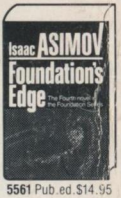

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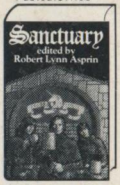

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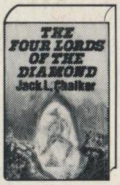

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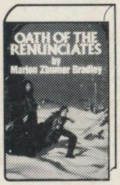

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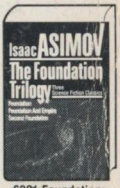

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