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IF

**PREMIER
ISSUE
OF THE NEW IF**

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Eric Peterson '86



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EDITORIAL

by CLIFFORD R. HONG

Much has changed since the first incarnation of **Worlds of IF** back in the early 1950s. Science fiction is no longer relegated to pulpdom by the academics, considered fit only for a small (though devoted) audience. Today, SF books regularly make the best-seller lists, the films are blockbusters that capture the imaginations of millions, college courses are taught, SF conventions attract thousands of fans, doctoral theses are written and in depth studies are made of the field . . .

The field is older, much more established—and vastly popular. But the spirit of SF remains the same. Science fiction is a literature of ideas, constantly exploring new possibilities. Always asking, what would happen *if*? What if it could be proven that there is life after death? What if contact is made with intelligent aliens with whom we have nothing in common but games? What if learning by me-

mory transfer becomes possible? What IF . . .?

In this vein, the new **IF** will bring you stories that explore a widely diverse range of speculations, dreams, and ideas with the finest in illustrated science fiction and fantasy. Fiction will be by both popular, established pros and newer, upcoming stars. Among the regular features is the IF first—in each issue we will bring you at least one story by a previously unpublished writer. Prior IF Firsts have included Larry Niven, Gardner R. Dozois, and Alexi Panshin.

This issue's IF First is by Kerry Schaefer, a resident of Massachusetts. Recently turned forty, Schaefer has held various jobs in her life—reservations agent for a steamship company, social worker, four years as a crew-member on a schooner—and currently lives and works at a small motel on Cape Cod. She began writing six years ago after reading

Jacqueline Lichtenberg's *Sime/Gen* books. After several years and half a dozen fan stories, she began work set in her own backgrounds, resulting in a novel and two short pieces.

About her stories, she says:

"'Cloudscape' began in one of the Jesse Stuart Writing Workshops, when Marion Zimmer Bradley said, 'Now, write the opening paragraph of a new story.' Fifteen minutes later, everyone else had a beginning and I had drawn a complete blank. Of course, she called on me to read mine. Determined not to endure such embarrassment the following day, I combined the beautiful Midwest thunderclouds through which my plane had flown to get to the workshop with a speculation from one of Carl Sagan's books on possible life-forms on a gas giant, and suddenly an aging cloud-creature drifted through my mind and I knew I had my story.

"I have begun work on another novel, dealing with aliens rather than humans, as seems to be characteristic of all my writing thus far. Given my penchant for telling a story from an alien point of view, sometimes I find it a wee bit difficult to remember that I really am a human being. Whenever that happens, I run to the nearest mirror for confirmation and breathe a sigh of relief. (Or is it disappointment?)"

Upcoming issues will feature new *IF* Firsts, along with material by such notables as Gene Wolfe, Justin Leiber, Raymond Z. Gallun, Jacqueline Lichtenberg, Alan Dean Foster, and many more.

Please feel free to write and let us know what it is that you like about the magazine and what you don't, which stories and illustrations are your favorites, and what you'd like to see in the future.

Read and enjoy!

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LOVE OF LIFE

by RAY BROWN
art: Michael Gilbert

Policy was to turn swords into ploughshares, so by and by they turned "supersmart" ABM guidance units into happy faces that chased you with proto-cliches selling the favorite public service program.

"Good evening, buddy," the button-eyed moron intoned. "You've only got one self. Don't waste it. Best wishes from your National Council on Population Stabilization."

Conway swatted at the thing and it swerved in the air, flylike.

"Good evening, buddy," it started again. "Give life a chance. After all, it could start getting better any minute now. Best wishes forever from your NCPS."

Conway intersected the street where his job waited for him. He cornered abruptly and at high speed, but the thing swooped high in the air over him and again hovered right in front of his face.

"Be a friend," it said. "Report the name of your distressed friend to

the Suicide Prevention Squad of your local police force. Best wishes from..."

"You stupid pest," Conway growled, "I'm on the SPS."

He grabbed at it low. To his surprise, the thing ducked when it should have jumped and he wound up holding it in his hands, where it buzzed and tugged on him weakly. With a grunt of satisfaction, he pulled it above his head.

"Buddy?" the thing said, "I have been endowed with an elementary survival drive. The idea of being smashed into the sidewalk fills me with something analogous to dread."

Conway was interested in spite of himself. He relaxed his shoulders a little and asked. "Why should I care?"

"That's a hard one to answer, buddy," it said. "I can't plead for my life by crying 'murder' because I'm not really alive anyway. Not that I'd want to be—it would be such a poor life. After all, I'm



seized, like an epileptic, with slogan after slogan. You know, I've always wondered whether I had free will or not, but I still don't know because I've never had the time to investigate. I never will find out now, I guess."

"Sounds like I'd be doing you a favor if I smashed you," Conway said.

"Please don't," it said. "Whatever it was they gave me instead of life is all I've got; and if you spare it I'll try to do something nice for you sometime."

Conway didn't know if the thing was giving off sympathy-inducing pheromones or not, but he now felt reluctant to smash it. It sounded so pathetic.

"You can start doing something nice for me right now," Conway said. "Just keep the hell away from me." He tossed the happy face into the air.

"Thanks," it said. "And remember: One life's all you get, so don't quit on us yet. Best wishes from your NCPS."

Conway screamed and grabbed at it. His luck didn't hold, but amazingly, the happy face kept its part of the bargain and sped away over the roof of the police station. Conway sighed, and walked inside and down the dirty stairs to the monitor room in the basement.

Roth, one of the monitors, was there waiting for his shift to start. He always got there early so he could try to figure out, according to some mystical system of his own, which booth would get the fewest calls that night.

"What are you pissed at?" Roth asked Conway as he hung up his coat and signed in. "You look like they just upped your birth quota."

Conway told the story of his recent annoyance and Roth smiled. His chest swelled with importance and superior knowledge.

"They're programmed to say that when they're caught," he said. "You got suckered."

Pearson, Conway's partner for the week, entered scowling. This time, though, Roth made no comment. When Pearson scowled it was no big deal; he took his job very seriously.

"What's the count for the day, Roth?" Pearson asked.

"Average," Roth said. "118 so far. But with a rising trend."

"The antisocial bastards. How many did we stop?"

"Twenty-one. And a good thing that's all. Life Center 36 doesn't open until tomorrow."

Pearson shrugged angrily. "Stack'em like bricks," he growled. "They're criminals. They knew the consequences of their act."

The minute hand on the overhead clock twitched upright and the noon-to-eight shift rose in a body as the rest of Conway's shift slouched in. Roth edged quickly into booth #4.

"It got lots of calls during the first shift," he explained, "And it's Wednesday."

Nobody believed in Roth's crazy system, Conway included. But Conway had noticed that for some reason Roth actually got the fewest calls, more often than not. Con-

way's job was getting him down. He asked Roth if he and Pearson could work with him that night.

"Sure," Roth said, punching their codes in.

"Wait a minute," Pearson said. "Didn't you come here to work, Conway? I did."

"Roth's got just as much chance of a buzz as any other monitor," Conway said, his throat tight.

"I came here to save lives," Pearson said. Conway noticed for the first time, as Pearson advanced on him with clenched fists, that his partner outweighed him by about fifty pounds and was unusually ugly.

Roth's screen came alive at that moment—as did every screen in the basement.

"You got some work right now," Roth said. "We got a creative. One suicide and it looks like three buddies giving him the send-off. If I can figure out where it is. . . it's not coming through the regular network, it's being picked up by one of the old fixed security cameras . . . Jesus . . . It's right outside here!"

Already people were abandoning the booths and running upstairs. Pearson dropped his fists and joined them immediately. Roth and Conway followed, and caught up with him on the station's stoop.

Right across the street was an outsize cannon pointed at the station. Sitting on the end of the muzzle was a man in a superman suit draining a glass of red wine and below him were three friends doing likewise. Above the cannon

was stretched a banner: THE GREAT SPLATTO: HUMAN CANNONBALL.

"Hey!" Pearson bellowed. "You can't do that!"

A crowd was gathering around the creative, some cheering The Great Splatto, some jeering the cops. One of Splatto's friends offered him a crash helmet and, in the best tradition of daredevilry, Splatto waved it away and crawled backwards down the bore.

Pearson and a number of other cops yelled and charged across the street waving needle guns, but it was too late. One of the three touched the cannon off, everybody ducked, and The Great Splatto zoomed out and up until his body was abruptly stopped by the police station's limestone wall and his soul sailed on to Heaven.

They don't like us, Conway thought, sickly. They really don't like us.

"A flower!" said Roth, crawling back to his feet and looking at what they'd have to clean up.

The crowd broke up quickly, abandoning cannon and banner, and Pearson rejoined them. "Disgusting," he said, gesturing at the wall.

"I don't know," Roth said. "It's rather colorful, actually."

Pearson didn't turn on Roth, Conway noticed. Probably because Roth was the Chief's nephew.

So there was nothing more to say. Roth returned to the basement and Conway and Pearson hurried to the back of the station and

signed out their flyer, thereby avoiding the clean-up detail.

They patrolled for an hour without getting any calls from Roth beside a chatty one informing them that the front wall had lost about twenty square feet of plaster. It was soothingly quiet. Pearson had scarcely spoken to Conway since they'd paired up for the week, and that was just fine with Conway. But an hour was a phenomenally long time to go without a call, even for Roth, and Conway noticed Pearson opening and closing his mouth, fidgeting with his adam's apple.

Finally, Pearson spoke. "What the hell," he said, "are you doing in the SPS, anyway? You're not the type."

"The extra pay, of course," Conway said. "You got a better reason?"

"I love life," Pearson said.

It was hard for Conway to choke back his laughter. He gave himself a small coughing fit.

Pearson looked at him askance and said, "I mean it. And it's not that I'm pretending I'm a saint, either. I have good, selfish reasons for standing against the forces of dissolution and death. I always had great hopes for my life—I could have gone places, you know? I'm a natural leader of men. I could have wound up being... well, never mind about that. I can *still* go places, and if the SPS does its job I damned well *will*. What happened four months ago doesn't have to make any difference."

"If the whole society doesn't collapse first, that is," Conway said.

"Just shut the fuck up if you can't say anything constructive," Pearson grumbled.

Conway took Pearson at his word, smiled, and relaxed. With luck, that would be Pearson's last attempt at polite conversation until the end of the week.

Pearson had raised an interesting, if familiar, question, though. Why the hell *was* he in the SPS? Why, for that matter, was he a cop at all?

He hated to think the main reason was a silly argument with Grandpa Conway six years ago—but every time he thought the question over, he had a harder time avoiding the conclusion that he'd joined to prove his grandfather wrong.

When he'd first brought up the possibility of police work to the old man he'd merely mentioned it casually. But his grandfather had chewed him out good. He thought cops were bullies, one and all. His argument was simple: people gravitate to the positions for which they are best suited, and what better position for a bully than government-approved good? There must be something wrong with Conway to even think of such a thing. If he didn't start out twisted, he'd wind up that way.

Well, Grandpa had been wrong. The force had many gentle, conscientious people on it who joined with the idea of protecting the underdog. But there were a surprisingly large number of bullies.

Hell—face it, Conway told himself, *Pearson's one of them*.

And Pearson was right about his chances of rising high. That was the real problem with government work—it was the bullies who found their way to the top. The Chief was a bully, the lieutenant was a bully—even the Mayor was, in his own way. So even though Grandpa's warning wasn't quite accurate, it turned out that Conway should have listened to it anyway.

The warning might turn out to be a prophecy, though, as the bullies hung on and the others passed on . . .

His reverie was interrupted by Roth's voice rattling at them through the radio.

"I finally got one for you," he said. "Good Neighbor Report."

"It took you long enough," Pearson said.

"Hey! I'm not the only one! It's been quiet all over the monitor room—downright spooky. Something funny's going on . . ."

"Spare me the theories," Pearson said. "What's the report?"

"A good, neighborly apartment manager thinks some woman in his complex has a heaven set. He's afraid she'll croak herself and leave him with the disposal problem."

Roth gave the address and Conway turned the flyer around and punched it in. While looking in the rear-view mirror he noticed that they'd picked up a few mobile cameras and happy faces. They seemed to like to follow flyers. It was almost as if—ridiculous as it

sounded—they couldn't quite shake their military habits.

On the other hand, they were shirking their duty—ignoring the NCPS directives. So, in a sense, it was an exercise of free will. And more and more happy faces seemed to be doing it every day. Conway wondered if the one he'd encountered on the way to work was among them. He hoped not.

"Hell," Pearson said. "Even if she doesn't try to kill herself—heaven sets are the cause of all this damn trouble and it's against the law to own one. Should have been reported before now."

"Let's not go busting the apartment manager, too!" Conway protested. "Leave the little stuff alone."

"Little!" roared Pearson. "If you ask me, having one of those damned things around ought to pull the death penalty!"

Pearson realized suddenly what he'd said and blushed. Conway laughed—inwardly—all the way to the scene of the crime.

It was a first floor flat. The manager said the woman, though young, was a sickly type who had trouble with stairs. The door was unlocked. They knocked, there was no answer, they walked in.

It was dark in there, but Conway made out a pale oval suspended in the shadows, lit by the feeble glow of the heaven set. He thought it might be a face and he stepped towards it, not thinking that would put him in the set's field.

Conway had to sit on the floor,

fast, to settle himself. He'd only experienced a heaven set once before—not enough to train himself to avoid the nausea that came when he tried to move while watching two worlds at once. He realized that the second scene was all in his mind—that no physiological laws were really being broken—but that didn't help. Only being still helped.

He still saw, as dimly as ever, the ill-lit room, but he also saw sunlight sparkling in the dew on a grassy hill, and a young man sitting on a tree stump a little way up the hill, talking.

"... isn't really that much different, Miss Hensley. Like I said, the main difference is that you completely control your own body. You could get sick if you wanted to, but who'd..."

Conway looked the young man over carefully. He thought he recognized him—the small, sharp nose, the squint, the collapsed chin all reminded him of someone he'd met... oh, maybe two years ago... back in the relatively relaxed days when he was on Homicide, long before there was such a thing as the SPS.

The voice was familiar, too, but changed since Conway knew the guy. The tenseness had gone out of it—only to be expected from a man who'd gone to Heaven, or wherever it was. Might as well call it Heaven. Indeed, what else *could* you call it?

"... claimed he picked up a few tricks here and there in the capacity of His Majesty King George the

Third's personal—and all that implies—lickspittle..."

He had it. The man was Gerald Parker, the rapist and murderer who'd caused such a panic in the city two years ago. Conway had been instrumental in his arrest and ultimate frying.

"Gerry?" Conway croaked.

"Excuse me, Miss Hensley," Gerry said, and turned to Conway. "Hi there! I had a feeling you'd show up at this set at about this time, so I volunteered to talk to Miss Hensley. I always meant to thank you for catching me and getting me electrocuted."

"It was nothing..."

"Nothing! Man, this place is *wonderful!* *Everybody* loves it here—every moment's like the moment when a part catches fire and... hey, you look stunned."

"I'm just surprised to see you there," Conway said.

"Why? It's been four months since Kirchner invented the heaven set. Surely you must have heard by now that *everybody* comes here when they die—no matter what."

"I heard it and I thought I believed it. But I guess seeing is really believing. So how are you doing, Gerry?"

"Great—same as everybody. Getting laid a lot—but you know, I had these sexual hang-ups. I lost them when I got here, and sex became truly important to me."

"I don't think I get that... wait a minute, maybe I do understand it after all!"

"Yeah. And the rejuvenation

keeps you interested in the physical pleasures, too. My body was pretty rotten before I got here. Having a body in tip-top condition is very important to human happiness. While your body's wearing out on Earth you tend to fool yourself on that subject . . . you should see the old folks caper!"

Conway became aware of all the tiny pains he usually ignored. He could feel them growing, slowly, inexorably.

"What about God?" Pearson's voice asked abruptly.

Conway's head jerked toward the sound and he discerned Pearson's form, also sitting on the floor. He'd completely forgotten about him, and why they were there.

"Who's that?" Gerry asked.

"My partner."

"No, I meant . . . never mind, it was a bad joke. God is still an open question, I'm afraid. If there's a Somebody responsible for things being this way, then He hasn't chosen to reveal Himself yet."

"Who's in charge, then?" Pearson said.

"Nobody."

"I'll put it another way. Who sees that things get done?"

"Nobody," Gerry repeated, shrugging. "I lost my need to push people around when I got here—everybody does. There's not much strife. People basically do what they want. So there's no reason for anybody to be in charge."

"The same doubletalk," Pearson said darkly.

"It's no doubletalk . . ."

Conway decided to change the

subject. "What else are you doing with your time?" he asked.

Gerry grinned. "Studying English history. Right now I'm learning Anglo-Saxon from this old guy named Aelfric. History always interested me on Earth, but you know I didn't have much of a brain. Your mind gets a lot sharper after you die, though. I mean—I'm no Einstein now, but Aelfric and some of the other long-timers tell me that when I really need to get smarter again, it'll happen. When are you coming to join us, Conway?"

"Uh . . . not right away. In fact, I'm supposed to be stopping that kind of thing. I don't know how much news you get from Earth, but you must have heard of the SPS."

Gerry laughed and dismissed the SPS with the wave of a hand.

"You guys can't do anything," he said. "Don't you know that? Once Earth got a really effective way to communicate with us, the rules all changed. The End Is Nigh, Conway—can't you *tell*? In a few more months . . ."

The second vision disappeared and Conway was once again fully in the dark apartment—really dark, now. He could just barely make out the body of Pearson leaning over the heaven set. He'd switched it off.

Conway pushed himself from the floor and fumbled around the wall until he hit a working light switch. Then he saw that Pearson was still bent over the set, staring at it, panting, and trembling violently.

"Pearson?" Conway called

gently.

Pearson grunted, turned to stare with frightened eyes at Conway. Then he raised a boot high and smashed the set.

"A goddam *rapist!*" Pearson said. "I don't believe it. The whole thing's a fraud, and when we prove it..."

"You know it's not a fraud," Conway said. "Don't go off the deep end on me, Pearson."

"Gerry?" a weak female voice called from where Conway had thought he'd seen a face.

It was a face floating in a sea of blankets on the couch by the far wall. An ugly face, twisted with pain, eaten away, spitting blood. When they unwrapped her they saw that the rest of the body looked even worse.

"Cancer," Conway guessed.

She had an old Mauser .32 in her right hand. Pearson pried it loose, pocketed it, and said. "Let's take her in."

"You've got to be kidding!" Conway said. "She'll be dead in a couple days anyway!"

"I've had about all the shit I can take off of you, Conway. The law's the law and we take her in."

The law also required that they cuff her hand to foot, so she couldn't make the attempt while they flew her to the Life Center. Pearson didn't bother. Conway thought about congratulating him on that small display of humanity, but decided he'd better not. Maybe Pearson just forgot.

Life Center 35 was another

limestone building—the mayor's brother owned a quarry in Indiana—in the shape of a cereal box—the Chief's cousin was a bad architect—with barred windows underlined by empty planters. It looked more or less like a prison hospital and that was more or less what it was. Force-feeding for those who could take it, and the Drip for the rest. Straight jackets. Leg chains. Rough hemp rope when they ran out of those. There were very few successful suicides in the Life Centers.

The roof, Conway thought as they hovered preparing to land, looked strangely empty. Life Centers had been the government's main interest since the war with Tarawa ended with the islanders escaping to Heaven *en masse* and the military was dismantled; the lot was usually jammed.

He turned to check Miss Hensley in the back. She thrashed around, delirious, still calling for Gerry occasionally. As he reached for a pulse, the flyer's radio came alive.

"Don't land!" a voice—not Roth's—said. "We've got a bomb threat!"

Pearson grabbed the mike. "Is this the Life Center?" he asked.

"Right. Now get off this channel. We're trying to contact the police."

"We are the police," Pearson said, landing the flyer. "And we've got a customer for you."

"Thank God!" the voice said. "Why can't we raise the station?"

"What do you mean, you can't raise the station?"

"We can't raise the station!"

Pearson whitened. "Hang on," he said. "I'll try to raise them myself." He fiddled with the radio, yelling, "Roth! Roth!"

There was no answer. Pearson called the Life Center. "Are you still there?"

"Yes. Did you get them?"

"No. What's going on?"

"I was hoping you could tell me. I suspect they may have bombed the station before hitting the Life Centers. Our informant claims they're going to send human bombs into all thirty-five tonight."

"They've never tried anything like that before."

"Haven't you noticed that in the past four months most people have started hating our guts? This is the night they make the big attempt to free all the suicides. Don't tell me you haven't been expecting it."

"What can they do? You've still got your picket around the building, haven't you?"

"A weak one. Some of the guards have deserted. One slit his throat at roll call, in front of everybody. And I don't know what they can do, unless—hold on, I'm getting a report from the guards now . . . Jesus! Listen, can you help us?"

"Name it."

"Take off again. I think you can help us most by sniping for us from the flyer. You'll understand when you get in the air and can see what's going on."

Pearson shrugged and took the flyer back up. Conway pressed his face to the window and gasped.

At every street corner around the hospital there were crowds

carrying torches. In the center of every crowd there was a large cannon and a banner. THE GREAT BLAMMO. THE GREAT SPLOTTO. T.&T., THE EXPLODING TWINS . . .

Conway pushed his needle gun through the little port designed for it and carefully aimed at those nearest the Great Blammo's cannon, but the flyer swooped unpredictably as Pearson screamed with rage and shook the stick.

Conway thought about past "creative" fads as he aimed again. Crucifixions had been an early favorite of the more masochistic types. There had even been another circus motif once—diving from a great height into a thimblefull of water. But there had never been a fad as quick to catch on as this. Past the Great Blammo he could see, far down the street, that Life Centers 17 and 3 were also surrounded by hazy clumps of torchlight. No doubt about it, this was going to be the night.

What was really discouraging was that the crowds were making a carnival—a joke—out of the whole thing.

He squeezed off a shot and one of the men sitting on the cannon slumped. At the same time, Splotto's cannon fired and Splotto, whooping, arms and legs flailing, sailed into Life Center 35's front wall. There was an explosion, then a smoky hole.

"Looks like these missiles are armed," Conway said.

"What the hell are the guards doing?" Pearson growled.

"There are a lot more people than needles," Conway said. "What *can* they do?"

There were more explosions from the back side. The building shook. Conway breathed out, aimed at the Great Blammo again, then jerked back straight in his seat as he noticed where the cannon was pointed.

It was too late to do anything about it. There was an enormous thick *whack* and the windows on Conway's side were completely smeared. Conway and Pearson ducked and covered their faces, the bomb went off, the windows shattered, and the flyer spun wildly. Pearson swore and shook the controls, and gradually the spinning stopped. But they were losing altitude.

"Can you land us?" Conway said.

"Yeah. And we should land anyway. Those guards need some sort of leadership. I'm a natural leader of men."

All things considered, Pearson did a good job landing. He put the flyer down with a wrenching thump, but he put it right where he wanted it—directly in front of the ragged line of guards. Then he jumped out.

"Why aren't you men firing?" he yelled.

Conway turned to check their passenger again and found that the trip had been too rough for her. She'd been released. He sighed with relief and hopped out of the flyer to join Pearson.

Pearson had rounded up five of the guards, impressed them with

his SPS uniform, and was now herding them into position to shoot at the men behind the cannon. Another cannon went off, a body sailed over their heads, and they all looked up and turned to follow it into the Life Center wall. The explosion was bigger than usual and one side of the building seemed to sag. The crowds of cannoneers cheered.

To his surprise, Conway found himself cheering inwardly, too.

The guard's were interrupted again—this time by a large, airborne TV screen with the mayor's face on it, sailing over no man's land.

"Return to your homes!" the major boomed. "The city is now under martial law and . . ."

The rioters roared with laughter.

"... will not be prosecuted if you're home by ten o'clock. I repeat, a general amnesty for those keeping the curfew, but severe penalties for those . . ."

"Fire!" Pearson yelled. The guards fired. A few men dropped. Others took their place.

Another body tumbled over Conway's head, but he no longer found the sight discouraging. In fact, he was exhilarated. Why bother sticking around in a world with Pearsons in it?

So this is how they feel, he thought. I wonder why it took me so long.

One of the guards apparently had the same revelation, for he pushed himself up from the prone position and started to walk away. Pearson grabbed him, spun him

around, pulled Miss Hensley's .32 from his pocket and waved it in the guard's face.

"Go ahead," the guard said, smiling. "Do me a favor."

Conway stepped in front of Pearson.

"Go on home, guys," he said. "This is pointless."

"What are you talking about!" Pearson yelled. "We've got a job to do!"

The guards were all walking away now. Pearson watched them for a minute, then turned back to Conway and smashed his fist into Conway's face.

As Conway lay on the ground, listening to his head pound and feeling the blood from his cut forehead trickle into his eye, he looked with his other eye at Pearson standing over him, panting and quaking as he had over the heaven set he'd smashed. The sight made Conway feel strangely gleeful.

Another extra-loud explosion came from the back of the Life Center and Conway jerked his head around in time to see the whole building collapse. The rioters cheered again and started running towards the rubble to make sure their job was finished.

"Give it up, Pearson," he said. "Can't you see it's all over?"

"What?" Pearson asked, dully.

The rioters were shoving past them now, ignoring them. Pearson ignored the rioters, too. His attention was focused wholly on Conway.

"You, the mayor, the Chief, all you folks are through," Conway

said. "Used to be, when you pushed people around, the safest, easiest way of people to cope with it was to pretend it was for their own good. Now there's an easier way out. Can't you see how absurd, how useless these suicide laws are? You can't stop *it!*"

"We'll stop it," said Pearson, "if we have to put straight jackets on every one of you."

Pearson was actually grimacing and grinding his teeth! Amazing!

"Why don't you just relax, Pearson, and join the rest of us? We're all going to a *better place*, you dummy!"

"What better place? A leaderless anarchy! You're a life-hater, Conway, just as sick as those clowns with their cannon." He pointed the .32 at Conway.

Conway laughed, then said, "Go ahead. Do *me* a favor."

"Oh, no," Pearson said, his eyes growing frighteningly wide and earnest. "You don't understand. You're obviously a potential suicide. You need to be restrained and placed in the Life Center. But I've got business to attend to"—he waved his gunless hand towards the crowd where the Life Center used to be—"and I can't bother with keeping you under guard. But a carefully placed bullet in each limb . . ."

Conway tried to reassure himself by convincing himself that he'd bleed to death. But he wasn't sure. He crawled backwards, trying to make it to his feet as Pearson, now wild-eyed and totally bananas, aimed the .32 low.

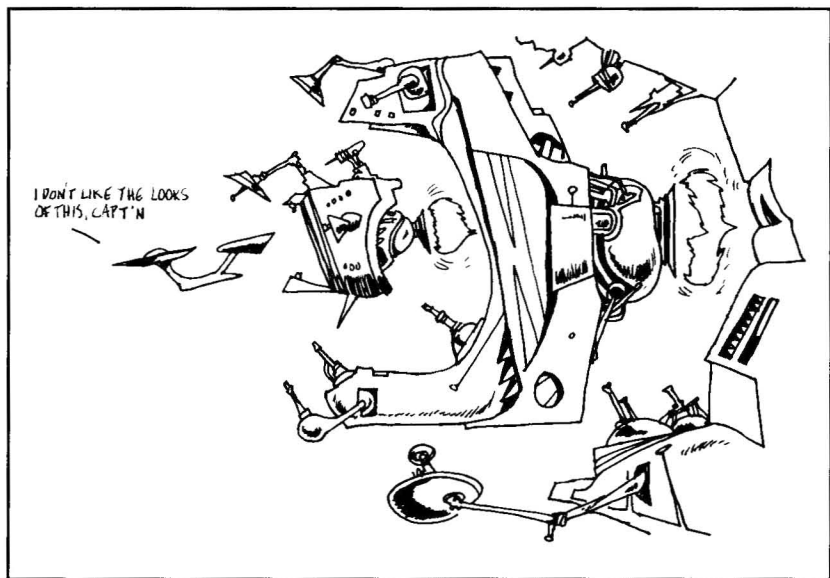
"Good evening, buddies," a voice intoned. "Give the gift of life to *your* distressed friend. Call your local..."

The happy face came in lower, lifted, and knocked Pearson's gun hand upwards as he fired. For a split second, Conway felt his face being smashed by a blow of a strength ten Pearsons couldn't match. Then he found himself, to-

tally free of pain, climbing the grassy hill he'd seen earlier. Gerry and Roth and a beautiful young woman he suspected was named Hensley were walking *down* to meet him.

"Hi, Gerry," he said. "Sorry I took so long."

THE END



CARTOON BY MICHAEL GILBERT

The Light Fantastic

Book Reviews by Orson Scott Card

I can't possibly guess what books you're going to like. If I tell you that **LaVerne and the Wood Elves** is the best epic fantasy since Tolkien, you'll no doubt fall asleep on page 10. And you'll really get annoyed that I never mention any of the works of Cecil DeBeuf, your very favorite writer.

But that's OK. Storytellers should all have a chance to find their proper audience, and readers will sort themselves out very neatly according to which stories they believe in and care about.

We're all visitors in a great marketplace of fiction. Some of us come in from the farm, others from the city; some are connoisseurs, some just like a good yarn. We wander through the bazaar, hearing bits of story from this talespinner or that yarnswapper. When we hear one we like, we settle down and listen.

When the storyteller is finished, we usually toss him a few coins and move, looking for more. Now and then, however, we find one whose tales are so true, so powerful, so **perfect**, that it's almost a religious experience. We want to listen to his stories forever, to live the rest of our lives in the worlds he

creates. We're not just entertained, we're converted. And like most religious converts, we want to spread the word. We drag all our friends to the bazaar to hear our talespinner. Some of them get just as excited as we are, and join us; others think we're crazy and move on.

Admit it—you've done that. You've read a book and been so excited you shoved copies into your friends' hands and commanded them to read. It happened in the sixties. That's how I first discovered **Dune**. And Bradbury. And Lewis' Narnia books. So many people were touting **Lord of the Rings** that I refused to read it for three years, I was so sick of hearing about it. But I finally did. And I was glad my friends persisted.

That's what I plan to do with this column. I'm going to grab you and shake you until you promise to read the books I like best. I'll point out others that I also enjoyed a lot.

Now, you may not like the same stories I like. You may not like as **many** stories as I like. I do have a tendency to read the way I watch a movie or a play—with my jaw agape, drinking it all in. That doesn't mean I'm not dis-

cerning. It just means that I'm sometimes willing to forgive mistakes and lapses that you **can't** forgive.

For instance, if you're one of those people who reads science fiction with your pocket calculator turned on so you can check the math, you're going to **hate** some things I like a lot, because I'll forgive a little silly science when the story's good enough. And if you think good literature died with Robert E. Howard or H.P. Lovecraft, you won't agree with my opinions very often.

One thing I **won't** do, though, is tell you what **not** to read.

That's where I think a lot of critics go astray. If I like a book, I can describe it to you and tell you why I think it's good. But if I really hate a book, if I think a book is completely worthless, then there isn't a single intelligent thing I can say about it. Because no matter how cleverly I describe its flaws to you, all I'm really saying is, "I don't get it." Or, in more formal terms: "I'm not a fit member of the audience for this tale."

So you won't see any killer reviews here. (Those of you with a thirst for auctorial blood will have to go elsewhere for an elixir fix.) I will only talk about books I liked.

Science Fiction Books: Grand Opera in Space

Sebastian Nightingale Cain is a bounty hunter among the worlds of the Inner Frontier. The Democracy pays him to hunt down and bring back wanted criminals who have taken refuge on planets where the only law is the local crime lord.

In Mike Resnick's wonderful novel **SANTIAGO: A MYTH OF THE FAR FUTURE**, Sebastian Cain gets a lead on the most-wanted criminal of all, the almost legendary Santiago. In follow-

ing Santiago's trail, Cain picks up a few unwanted allies and enemies:

Virtue MacKenzie (the "Virgin Queen"), a lady journalist who wants to be there to record the moment when Santiago gets killed—or interview him over Cain's cooling corpse.

Terwilliger, a gambler who cheated the wrong man, vengeful Manmountain Bates; now he hangs on to Cain as his only hope of survival.

The Jolly Swagman, a high-class, clean-hands crook who wants to be there to get Santiago's art treasures when somebody kills him.

Father William, a gun-toting born-again bounty hunter who uses the reward money from the men he snuffs to finance his ministry.

Angel, the greatest bounty hunter of all, the one to bet on if you think anybody can get Santiago.

They all weave in and out of a plot full of betrayals and doublecrosses, with dozens of other unforgettable characters, like Dmitri Sokol, Poor Yorick, Socrates, One-Time Charlie, Simple Simon, Altair of Altair, Moon-ripple, Silent Annie, Geronimo Gentry, Giles Sans Pitie, the alien named Sitting Bull, and Schussler the cyborg spaceship.

One character we never actually meet is Black Orpheus, but the epic poem he's writing about mythic frontier characters is the lens through which we see all these characters. Even as Sebastian Cain resists the nickname ("Songbird") that Orpheus has given him, we see that he deserves his legend.

Now, as soon as they know that **SANTIAGO** is a story of bounty hunters on the frontier, some critics are going to despise the book as a "western dressed up to be sci-fi." Well, that's their loss for being too shallow to see what's really going on. Western? Sure,

Resnick is using all the devices of classic westerns. He's also using motifs from Depression-era detective fiction. And the techniques of space opera. And grand opera, too. In fact, if there's ever been a literary form that had vigor, life, excitement, truth, and beauty, you'll hear echoes of it in **SANTIAGO**.

Resnick was gutsy enough to set out to create myth, and as far as I'm concerned, he succeeds on a grand scale. By the end of this book, if you aren't in love with all the characters you have no heart. If you aren't moved by the digging of the third grave in the dell by the pond, then your license to read ought to be suspended for at least a month.

By page 50 I knew I was reading one of the best sf novels of the year. The only thing that worried me was Santiago himself. Resnick was setting him up to be so mythic, so powerful, that when we finally met him he was bound to be a disappointment. (Of course, Resnick could have copped out and never let us meet him. But if he'd done that, I wouldn't be telling you about the book at all).

Suffice it to say that I wasn't disappointed. Resnick struck every note exactly right. Even his characters' views on political philosophy, an area where sf writers degenerate into silliness, were refreshingly mature and balanced. And by the end I felt fulfilled. And joyful. The glow stayed with me for days. Resnick didn't just do **well** in writing this book. He also did **good**.

Have I made myself clear? If your bookstore doesn't have copies of **SANTIAGO**, order one. Unless you read with a slide rule in hand (yeah, they hop from planet to planet the way we fly from New York to L.A.), or unless you think *Moby Dick* is about as much excitement as you can handle in

fiction (sorry, this one is never dull so it can't be Art), **SANTIAGO** belongs in your hands, in your library, in your memory.

1.5 First Novels

Brad Strickland is a soft-spoken, mild-mannered professor from Georgia who can light a fire inside you when he writes. **TO STAND BENEATH THE SUN** is his first novel.

Tom Perion comes out of stasis as his landing capsule plummets toward a planet. It is **not** the planet his expedition was supposed to reach. In short order he discovers that he was awakened a millennium late—most of the colonists landed so long ago that the starship **Galileo** is now worshipped as the goddess Kalea.

The first batch of colonists had been genetically altered so that seven out of eight births were female. The idea was to boost the population quickly, then make a genetic change to more normal birth patterns. The trouble was that the colonists never recovered a working command module, and so they could never signal the ship to send down the rest of the colonists. That birth pattern has continued: men are a rare commodity. As a result, Perion finds himself in a seafaring world where women are the dominant sex, and men are pampered "lords," prisoners of a system where siring children is all they're really allowed to do. Perion predictably has no interest in meekly accepting his sex role; instead, he is determined to recover a command module that is still in stasis in the supposedly unlivable northern desert; if he reaches it, he can contact the starship, revive the few remaining sleepers there, and restore modern technology.

Strickland is not creating a feminist role-reversal novel; instead, he has

carefully extrapolated the probable results of a seven-to-one ratio of women to men, and how society would have to adapt to deal with it. Both the individual characters and the society at large are convincingly drawn, as Perion constantly runs afoul of local customs.

It's a familiar motif—a lone man in a strange yet human environment, gradually learning how to become part of the society without ceasing to be himself. Clavell dealt with the same myth in *Shogun*, as John Hersey did in his science fiction masterpiece *White Lotus*. Strickland does as well, as far as he goes. Yet if there is any flaw in **TO STAND BENEATH THE SUN**, it is that Strickland needed to take more time with it, as Hersey and Clavell did; he needed to write the five or six hundred pages that his subject deserved.

Perion should have had to adapt more before he succeeded in bending the world to fit his needs. He should have taken several years before he was able to launch his expedition. I can even tell you the exact place where the book is telescoped to the point of losing credibility: Perion stupidly destroys all the plans of Atina, the ship captain who rescued him; yet within a day, Atina has forgiven him and agreed to **follow** him on his seemingly insane quest to the north. Not that Strickland couldn't have made this work—but it takes many pages, scenes, and transformations of character to bring it off. Scenes that just weren't there.

Still, I was already hooked; so I gritted my teeth, swallowed deeply, and went on. I'm glad I did. The novel is so good before that point, and so good after, that I quickly forgot my moment of unbelief and raced on to the end. Strickland will write better books in the future, but don't wait till then—he's

already good, and **TO STAND BENEATH THE SUN** is better than a first novel has any right to be.

FREEDOM BEACH is only half a first novel. John Kessel, one of the co-authors (and a Nebula-winning short story writer), makes his debut as a novelist with this book; the other co-author, James Patrick Kelly, previously published **PLANET OF WHISPERS** (a first-rate novel with a cover so embarrassingly bad that hiding it inside copies of *Hustler* will make you look like you have better taste).

I was a little leery of this book. Parts of it had already appeared as short stories. Excellent short stories, mind you—but I could not conceive of a way that "The Big Dream" and "The Empty World" could make sense in the same novel as "Freedom Beach."

Kelly and Kessel brought it off perfectly. Shaun, the main character, finds himself in a rehabilitation center on a bench, where life is fun and games—as long as you don't attempt to write anything. Therapy consists of powerful dreams. Until Shaun's lover dies, and he tries to swim away, and then discovers that sometimes you can wake up from reality more easily than you can wake up from a dream.

Unlike most writers who try to write dreams, Kelly and Kessel managed to make all the dream sequences clear and intrinsically interesting. One dream in particular, which inexplicably never found a publisher as the separate story "Faustfeathers," is the funniest Marx Brothers comedy never filmed. (You haven't lived till you've seen John Kessel, Greg Frost, and Marx Van Name do an interpretive reading, with wigs.)

The unconnected stories connect; the inexplicable is explained; and by the end, Kessel and Kelly have made all the strange melodies come together

in a single grand harmonious chord.

The best science fiction, I believe, is a blend of exuberant myth, believable characters and setting, and clear, compelling writing. All three of these novels admirably join these traits—but the flavor is different in each case. **SANTIAGO** leans toward myth; **TO STAND BENEATH THE SUN** concentrates more on realism of character and setting; **FREEDOM BEACH** devotes more attention to literary art. But all are exemplary science fiction.

Briefly Noted Science Fiction:

William Gibson's **NEUROMANCER** won just about every award they give, primarily because of Gibson's vigorous style and his believable, well-extrapolated near-future setting. Supposedly he is representative of a style of writing called "Cyberpunk" because of its melding of artificial intelligence with burned-out, drug-blown punk culture. The trouble is that when you look for other exemplars of the Cyberpunk movement, nobody but Gibson really belongs. It ain't every writer who can be a whole movement all by himself.

So even though I didn't care for some things about **NEUROMANCER**, I do urge you to check out Gibson's story collection **BURNING CHROME**. Don't try to read the stories all in one sitting—you might have to be hospitalized. He writes with such energy that you can strip your gears just trying to keep up.

Christopher Winn's **LEGAL DAISY SPACING** is being marketed as humor. And it is bitingly funny. It is also, by implication at least, cosmic sf. It consists of regulations and helpful suggestions for running your universe. Nothing can describe it, so I will quote from the description of A Cloud Detention Centre: "Clouds are disgustingly

incontinent and most unpredictable in the shelter they provide from the harmful rays of the sun. Detain in Approved Centres." Or this one: "Uphold the Laws of Decency at all times and keep those deciduous trees well covered. Handy tree screens can be obtained in a wide variety of sympathetic finishes like this attractive leatherette." Or maybe you just have to read the book—or at least look at the pictures.

Philip K. Dick wrote **RADIO FREE ALBEMUTH** in the mid-1970s, his first attempt to deal with material that later became **Valis**. Now, years after his death, the semi-autobiographical novel is appearing for the first time.

Usually if an author failed to publish a finished work while he was still alive, it's because the work wasn't very good. Not this time. **RADIO FREE ALBEMUTH** falls into that little triangle where bitter satire, painful realism, and desperate madness overlap. If you already loved Dick's work, of course you'll read this book. If, like me, you had not read much of his work before, this is a good place to start. In a sentence? This is the kind of book Vonnegut would write if he ever stopped talking to himself.

You can follow **ALBEMUTH** by reading **ONLY APPARENTLY REAL: THE WORLD OF PHILIP K. DICK**, by Paul Williams, the executor of Dick's literary estate. It is the kind of book you'd expect from a friend and disciple who is himself a talented writer—both worshipful and intelligent, able to explain to outsiders like me what it was that Dick's devotees loved about his work. It makes fascinating reading in its own right, even if, like me, you are generally unfamiliar with Dick's work.

It also had a strange effect on me as a writer. At times I felt enormous relief that, by comparison with Dick, I

lead a happy, normal life. Yet I also recognized that Dick had achieved exactly the effect that every writer yearns for—not just to be read, but to be believed. He built a community of people who loved his work, passed it hand to hand, reread it many times, and lived, to some degree, by its precepts. Any storyteller who says “All I want to do is entertain” is a liar—we want to change the world. More specifically, we want you to live in our world and like it. It is that accomplishment that makes a writer’s work endure after his death. What made me a bit uneasy was the question that if Dick, in his comparative madness and misery, achieved what we all long for, does that imply that the very stability of my life dooms me to failure as an artist? Don’t send me letters trying to answer that.

George R.R. Martin’s **TUF VOYAGING** is a collection of short works that appeared in magazines—mostly in **Analog** during 1985. Now, in book form, they flow together to make a coherent, interesting, entertaining story. Haviland Tuf is a tall, bald, peaceful, arrogant cat-lover—the kind of person you’d hate to have as a co-worker or neighbor, and as unlikely an adventurer as I’ve seen in science fiction. Yet he not only escapes death and injury, but also defeats his enemies and wins all the prizes of war without actually **doing** anything much himself. Because Tuf is so austere, you aren’t going to get terribly emotionally involved. But you **will** be delighted, I believe.

Carter Scholz has to be one of the most determinedly literary writers ever to publish within the sf genre. He is also one of the most brilliant. The result is that readers who are willing to work a little harder, to exercise their own imaginations, can receive stories

of startling emotional and intellectual force. Chris Drumm, who provides a great service to the science fiction field by publishing short works by excellent but overlooked writers, has published some of Scholz’s best stories in the small booklet **CUTS**. It is outrageous that only one of these stories was purchased by a major sf editor. Perhaps it’s because many of the best are stories only by implication—you have to infer the story by reading between the lines of the document Scholz presents. “The Translator,” for instance, is a nastily ironic apologia by the man who made his career translating the works of a second-rate foreign writer into first-rate English; “Players, or Some Problems of Form in New York” is a critical review of New York and, by extension, the entire Earth, as if it were a work of art by a rather mad artist; “How Should We Celebrate the Bicentennial?” is a government agency memo that finally reveals itself to be a hilarious yet bitter cry from the depths of the bureaucracy. There are other fine stories. There are also some unfortunate examples of literary self-indulgence, but you could spend a lot more and come away with a lot less—and no doubt you will, at least a dozen times this year.

By rights I should have hated David Drake’s **BRIDGEHEAD**. There were so many characters running around that by the end I couldn’t remember who half of them were—a sure sign that a writer has done a lousy job of making the characters real. So why, when I was wearily driving home from Chattanooga last January, did I stop—for lunch, I thought—and end up reading **BRIDGEHEAD** from cover to cover before I drove another inch? It’s ostensibly the story of time travelers who set up a transfer station in an American university. But the plot gets

a lot thicker and takes some wonderful turns before the end. I was three hours late getting home—but the book was worth it.

David Hartwell's **AGE OF WONDERS** is the best book **about** science fiction that I've read. It manages to be intelligent, fascinating, and readable, and it helps put into perspective the whole world of sf during the three generations it has existed as a recognizable genre.

For historical interest only, you might want to take a look at **THE JOHN W. CAMPBELL LETTERS**. Campbell was the writer and editor who can be said to have created "hard science fiction" in the 1940s and 1950s. Browsing through the book at random, you get a picture of Campbell's relationship with many writers during the 1950s. Unfortunately, there are few letters from before that decade, and the letters are rarely of earthshaking importance. But since we're still building on the foundation he laid for us, it's nice to get a look at how Campbell went about laying it . . .

Fantasy Books: The New Humanism

What Tolkien did was wonderful, because it grew out of his intense involvement with real ancient languages and his profound conversion to Catholicism. Because these strong beliefs provided the root of his mythic **Lord of the Rings**, he could get away with characters who were usually nothing more than token representatives of a species (a dwarf is a dwarf, an elf is an elf), at best two-dimensional icons (Aragorn, the hero in disguise; Frodo, Samwise, and Gollum, the three faces of the common man). The characters were not "real," but their story was truthful, since it was drawn from Tolkien's deepest loves and beliefs.

Unfortunately, Tolkien's imitators had no root except in Tolkien's epic. It never works, but people still try to write great fiction by copying the superficial attributes of a great work of fiction. Milton did not write *Paradise Lost* by copying Spenser; he wrote it out of his fervent belief in the Puritan version of Christianity, whose central myth was the Fall. Chaucer didn't try to write a new *Song of Roland*; instead he put English romances into the mouths of common English folk. Shakespeare forged other people's stories into his plays—but he changed them into utterly believable English characters.

Now, it may be that you weren't dissatisfied with the flood of Tolkien imitators that was followed by a flood of Howard imitators that was followed by a flood of tedious *Dungeons-and-Dragons* fictioneers laced with frequent feminist role reversals that showed that fantasy women could be written about just as stupidly as fantasy men. Never mind that you had to put check marks on the cover to remember which books you had already read. There was enough raping and magic and hacking and tricking to keep you happy while you ate your Twinkies.

But if, like me, you wanted Romance in the great English tradition, grit mixed with glory; if you wanted stories you could chew on, stories that stayed with you, stories that could be believed, set in worlds you could live in, you didn't have all that many choices. There were a few writers doing powerful, substantive work, or at least attempting it: Patricia McKilip, Evangeline Walton, Ursula K. LeGuin, Jane Yolen, Stephen R. Donaldson.

It wasn't always easy to find them. Surprisingly, some of the best fantasies were published in hardcover as "young

adult books," even though they were far more grown-up than the endless strong-thewed barbarians (with or without floppy chests) and the parade of tacky unicorns and woodsy elves that flooded the supposedly adult fantasy market. (Don't get me wrong—I enjoyed Leiber's *Fafhrd* and the Grey Mouser series. I had a story of my own in a *Swords Against Darkness* anthology. Karl Edward Wagner and Gerald Page proved that sword and sorcery could be done well. But it was hard to find the jewels in the dross).

What was I looking for in fantasy? Believability, folks. Realism.

—Wait a minute. In **fantasy**? The whole point of fantasy is that it isn't realistic!

Wrong, Bonzo. The whole point of fantasy is that it takes place in a world where the laws of nature are different. But it can still be presented realistically.

That's why I liked McKillip and Walton and Donaldson—they were trying to be honest, trying to create real human beings in a world where power is more than politics or plug-in machinery. That's why I liked Yolen and LeGuin—they were trying to tell, in small, intense stories, the kind of truth that is usually wrestled with in massive novels.

I'm pleased to tell you that now there is a new generation of writers doing exactly the things I wished for all along. And some of those who were turning out barbarian or elf stories have grown up a little. The result is a crop of fantasists who are writing tales you can **believe** in. Many of them are shunning the traditional Medieval European setting; others are simply doing Medieval settings properly—the way the Middle English Romanticists did it.

Call it Humanist Fantasy. Worlds

where magic isn't the answer, it's the question; and human beings, the human community, are the only ones who can resolve it.

Megan Lindholm's **WIZARD OF THE PIGEONS** is the most surprising of the Humanist Fantasies. Her tale is set among the street people of Seattle, and her picture of the scavenging life is so realistic you'll feel like you've lived there yourself. Her main character, Wizard, a bummed-out Vietnam veteran, is not scavenging because he's a failure. In fact, his scavenging is part of a set of stringent rules he follows that give him magical powers—particularly the ability to help people set their lives straight. Instead of the magic staff, he has a popcorn bag that always seems to be full of pigeon feed. Instead of incantations, he follows rules—like never carrying with him more than a dollar in coins.

Most of the way through, the story was miraculously good. It weakened at the end, unfortunately, because Lindholm made the fatal error of having a vague, amorphous, fog-like Evil Force as Wizard's ultimate enemy. The grey fog was around from the beginning, but Wizard's most immediate enemy was a takecharge waitress from a cafe who knocked him out of his routines and possessed him. **She** was a believable antagonist. The grey fog was a cheap special effect.

Never mind the flaw; most of the novel is so real, so original that you won't regret buying it and reading it. And maybe you don't share my anti-fog prejudice, in which case **WIZARD OF THE PIGEONS** is perfect.

Stephen Brust's **BROKEDOWN PALACE** takes place in a labyrinthine palace that is in the last stages of decay, leading to imminent collapse. It is a daring thing for a fantasist to call forth comparisons with Peake's Ghor-

mengast books—but Brust brings it off.

Miklos is the youngest of the sons of the late king of Fenario. His eldest brother, Laszlo, is king now—and he has tried to murder Miklos. The boy's life is saved by a talking horse (I know, I know—I hated the talking horse at first, too. But be patient—it becomes a marvelous character by the end), and he goes off to Faerie to learn.

He returns with magical powers, and knows he must, somehow, save the collapsing palace. But Laszlo regards it as treason even to suggest that the palace needs repair, and Miklos nearly loses his life more than once. In the meantime, a tiny seed has taken root in the palace, drinking the water of the river, growing until it threatens to rip the palace to pieces the way tree roots tear up sidewalks.

The novel begins a little archly—the author addresses the reader directly, and the structure is at first fragmented and unclear. This is not a flaw, merely an obstacle. Give the book a chance. Get into the flow of Brust's language. He'll reward you for it.

You'll live with a family that makes **A Lion in Winter** and **Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?** look like a weekend with the Bobbsey Twins. The palace itself is a brooding, powerful, helpless character, whose death and resurrection is as powerful an event as I've seen in fantasy. Medieval? Yes, and in that sense **BROKEDOWN PALACE** is traditional. Traditional, but never, not for a moment, ordinary.

With his novel **TAIN**, Gregory Frost returns to a time-honored fantasy tradition: reviving ancient sagas and retelling them in a form that modern readers can grasp. I suppose you could dismiss it as a war that began over a cattle raid. But then, it isn't just any cow they're stealing, and not just any-

body out to steal it. Frost assembles as perverse a crew of heroic characters as you're likely to find. In fact, the only book **TAIN** can properly be compared with right now is Resnick's **SANTIAGO**—in scope, purpose, and technique Frost and Resnick set themselves much the same task. Frost succeeded, too, to a remarkable degree.

In fact, the only real problem with **TAIN** is that Frost has chosen to tell the story through a frame. Laeg, a dead hero, returns to life in order to lead a young man named Senchan through a series of visions. Senchan and Laeg are engaging characters, but Frost never does a thing with them. It is in the visions that the real story is told. It was frustrating when it finally became clear that Senchan was never going to be more than a mere device, like the little boy at the end of the musical **Camelot**, whose sole purpose for existing is to remember Arthur and tell stories about the Round Table.

So concentrate on the tales that Senchan witnesses, starting with a pair of jealous Pigkeepers of the Gods and winding through a cast of unforgettable, all-too-human characters. Not since Evangeline Walton's *Mabinogion* has there been such a marvelous straightforward retelling of an ancient national myth.

Will Shetterly's **WITCH BLOOD** suffers from the Kung-Fu syndrome, in that it gets serious about choreographed self-defense routines as a Way of Life Leading to Brotherhood and Ultimate Happiness. Many a book has died a miserable death because it depended on the reader actually believing the mystic twaddle surrounding all the kicking and poking and grunting. Kung-Fu movies all look the same to me.

Fortunately, though Shetterly uses these mystic arts, they are never the

main thrust of the book. It is instead the tale of Rifkin, a wanderer who gets caught up in the defense of one of the last strongholds of the Witches, who once ruled a great empire but now are being overcome by iron and gunpowder. Rifkin is a wisecracking free spirit who gives his loyalty only rarely, and only on his own terms. As he butts heads with the Witches—who are not always Nice People—we discover that he is both more and less than he seems to be. The result is a funny, exciting adventure story that delighted me from beginning to end. (Predictably, the cover of the book is embarrassing and the cover blurbs completely misleading about the story within.)

And don't kid yourself. Real humor is hard to write. Shetterly does a good job. Oh, now and then he repeats a running gag too soon or too often; now and then Rifkin is too aware that he's funny, like a comedian who breaks up over his own jokes. But these are momentary lapses in a well-sustained comic adventure novel.

What I really have to warn you about is the fact that this book is obviously the first in a series, even though it never says so. Still, it's worth reading now—the immediate story is fully resolved at the end, so instead of feeling disappointed or annoyed, you'll be pleased to realize that there's more to come.

M. Coleman Easton may be the least flamboyant of the writers of Humanist Fantasy. His **MASTERS OF GLASS** last year was not the kind of stunning first novel that catapults a writer to instant fame. It was a small, quiet, private little book. This year, his novel **ISKIIR** reaches for a bit more of the grand scale, and no doubt Easton will get even more ambitious as time goes on. Still, I hope that he never loses his knack for creating character with

seeming artlessness. He never calls attention to himself as a writer. And yet when I'm through reading his books, I feel like I've known real people, lived through real events.

ISKIIR is set in a non-European milieu—it feels somewhat Arabian. A vast circle of monolithic stones appears suddenly around the city. Young Iskiir is the only one in town who recognizes the immediate danger, for he is one of a handful of survivors of a similar incident in his mountain village years before. The monoliths draw steadily closer to the city, making escape nearly impossible, crushing anything in their path. As the mages prove their inability to halt the stones, Iskiir and his friend, an unusually incompetent mage, find a way out of the city to find the one wizard who knows how to stop the stones.

In the meantime, his young beloved, Adeh, remains in the city, where she catches the perpetrators of a grain-stealing scheme. We travel among pilgrims on an insane perpetual pilgrimage, join a band of desert raiders, and take part in a climactic battle in which Iskiir plays a vital role.

Nothing in **ISKIIR** will take you out of your chair the way that more ambitious novels might; but neither does Easton make a false step. While you live in his world, you're in the hands of a masterful, talented writer; you can trust him to deliver what he promises. There's much to be said for quiet excellence.

Robert Holdstock's **MYTHAGO WOOD** has already won the World Fantasy Award, and it is as deserving a choice as they've ever made. It begins slowly, as the narrator, Steve, a young English war veteran, returns to live in the home his domineering father left to Christian, Steve's older brother. Their father devoted his life to an ob-

sessive study of the ancient forest adjoining their house. Gradually, Steve discovers that the small wood, only a few miles around, is much larger inside than out; and dwelling within the wood is a woman who once loved his father and now loves him. He also learns that there are dangers in the wood—and he cannot hide from them in his safe and civilized house any longer. They will come to him if he does not go to destroy them at their source.

Some have criticized the book because it takes so long to get to the “good parts”—that is, most of the book takes place outside the wood, and only in the latter part does Steve enter the magical forest and have the sort of adventure we usually associate with fantasy. In a sense, that criticism is really flattery—such readers wanted the novel to go on. In another sense, though, the criticism is merely ignorant. The long, slow passage of time through the first 157 pages is absolutely necessary to set up the last 95 pages.

It's like chase scenes in film or TV. Sure, they can be exciting—but most of the excitement comes from knowing who is being chased, and who is chasing them, and what it will mean if they're caught. Like **The Dukes of Hazzard**, which gave the audience only enough story to provide an excuse for the chases. The empty, meaningless action may be exciting the first few times, but eventually it all starts to look the same.

That's what's been wrong with so many bad fantasies for so many years: They don't take the time, as Holdstock has done, to earn the action scenes, to invest them with meaning. Just battles with steel and spells, one after the other, with only the feeblest threads of plot and character to hold them together. **MYTHAGO WOOD** is for

grown-ups. It's for readers who are willing to take the time and effort to let a writer evoke a whole and believable world, peopled with living characters.

Briefly Noted Fantasy:

You've been good. You drank all your milk, you cut back on your vices (candy bars? cigarets? bad sci-fi novels?), and you didn't kick the neighbor's filthy annoying cat. So reward yourself with one of these three excellent story collections. (But only one—you haven't been **that** good.)

LIAVEK, edited by Will Shetterly and Emma Bull, is a shared world anthology. It's an art form launched in Robert Asprin's **Thieves' World** books, wherein several writers contribute short stories set in the same city, and there have already been many attempts to create other shared worlds. Some of these shared worlds are pretty weak—**Magic in Ithkar** springs to mind—and others, like **Greystone Bay**, contain many good stories, but don't really develop the possibilities of the world they share.

LIAVEK, on the other hand, is an example of what can be accomplished when almost everything goes **right**. As could be expected, the two most renowned writers in the book, Gene Wolfe and Jane Yolen, contribute first-rate stories. But their stories pretty much stand alone; it is the work of lesser-known writers that interweave to make the city of Liavek come to life. Stephen Brust, Emma Bull, Will Shetterly, and Barry Longyear wrote excellent tales—but here's the shocker: There isn't a single bad story in the book. In fact, every story is at least presentable, and most are downright good. More than that I will not say—ex-

(continued on page 128)

INTRODUCTION TO PROLOGUE TO FREEDOM

Almost three decades ago, the then Russian leader, Nikita Krushchev, on his way home from a visit to America, stopped over in Yugoslavia to see Tito, the leader of that Communist country.

It could have been a great moment in history, because Tito for the most part talked the best sense of any Communist leader, and acted on his own ideas.

What he said, essentially, to his Russian peer was: "Nikita, you can safely open your borders, and let the people come and go. The reason why it's safe is that you can be sure no other country wants 278 million Russians. In fact, they don't even want fifteen million Yugoslavs."

But Tito's borders reflected his thinking: they were open. Thousands of Yugoslavians crossed over into Germany and the rest of Europe, looking for jobs. When they found work, they sent part of the money home to help support their families, and it is even possible, as a result of cross marriages, that some of them managed to stay abroad. But for most of the individuals involved, presently their visas expired; whereupon they came back to their own country, whether reluctantly or otherwise made no difference.

Returning to Moscow, Krushchev suggested to the Russian leadership that Tito's was a good example to follow. His words—it was reported at the time—were greeted in stony silence by the hardcore Stalinists; and, shortly thereafter, Krushchev was the victim of a power takeover, and, though not executed, was ever after ignored, and lived in retirement.

In Yugoslavia, after Tito died, a similar hardcore group seems to have taken over; and Yugoslavians are no longer allowed to go abroad.

In view of ever more serious world tension, I really think a return to Tito's idea might release a lot of the grim emotion that could even, in an extreme, lead to a nuclear war.

Looking back a few years, imagine if at the time Vietnam was split in two, if both Vietnamese governments had agreed to easy border crossing regulations which both sides would enforce. And, similarly, imagine if, right now, all those reluctant Communist states in east Europe also had open borders, with regulated travel back and forth. Remember; the key thought is no country would ever permit more than a small percentage of individuals to cross over at any given time, and would presently require them to move on, or go home.

Anyway, that's the situation I wanted to dramatize in my story, "Prologue to Freedom", assuming throughout that human nature, capitalist and communist, never changes.

I really think it would work out there in the real world. And I believe our diplomacy should try to move our dangerously divided world in that direction.

Taking for granted that human nature has not changed in recorded history, my story dramatizes this concept.

PROLOGUE TO FREEDOM

by A.E. VAN VOGT
art: Vincent DiFate

A state, I said, arises, as I conceive, out of the needs of mankind; no one is self-sufficing, but all of us have many wants. Can any other origin of a state be imagined?

Plato, 427-347 B.C.

2004 A.D.

For more than two decades capable government advisers had authored rules of survival, requiring the most profligate populace on the planet to operate sensibly.

So that, despite the energy shortage, planes still flew. Everybody still had his car. A proper diet was available for rich or poor. And this condition of temperate living could have gone on indefinitely, despite the usual multi-millions of sly evasions.

It turned out that the dwellers in paradise were angrier than was realized. In California (where else would it begin but in earth's only heaven?) in the election of 2004, Proposition 8 passed with a majority vote of 67%.

(Only 19% voted against; the remaining 14% of those who went to

the polls simply left that item unmarked.)

The business community, which had fought 8 with the biggest expenditure in the history of state elections, was stunned. At once there was a wild scramble to get out of San Francisco.

Actually, the scramble did not include everyone. Ed Clint, TV reporter from New York, who questioned people in various walks of life, estimated that approximately forty per cent of those who had voted for Proposition 8, didn't know what it was. ("But something had to be done—" they said.)

Portions of this group and of other segments of the California population expressed a popular reaction: "If the Big Boys are scared of it, then it's got to be okay."

In the area of intellect where Sam Mebley operated his little grocery store in South San Francisco there was a mood of negative, uneasy vagueness. Meaning Sam did not have a clear picture of what would happen after the three-month transition time. How-



© 1954

ever, he was not too disturbed. During the pre-election, a small group of U.C. students came to each store on his street with reassuring statements. Sam was not quite sure what it was they said. But the shoe store owner down the street expressed himself as being greatly cheered. As he interpreted the student message for Sam, "All competent small business people will be encouraged to carry on."

Sam, who had more than a quarter of a million in hidden funds, had a secret feeling of total competence. And, besides, he rented his building and owed for most of his stock. So what the hell!

He didn't mention the hidden hoard when he was interviewed by Clint before the election. But he did report what the students had said, and that evening he described his casual, dismissing attitude to Stella, his every-other-night bed companion, adding: "In this world you've got to be smarter than the next guy."

For Sam, being smarter meant than each weekend on Sunday night he took the train to Los Angeles. (He could have flown, but for that you had to give your name and attest that it was a necessary trip.)

So after an all-night journey Sam reached his destination Monday morning. His principal task: to rent three or four safety deposit boxes in outlying branches of different banks and place in each a bundle of cash.

By evening he was on the train again, and on his way back to San

Francisco.

During the first four weekends there was no problem. But as he was returning on his fifth Monday night, the long passenger train with its puffing steam locomotive rolled to a stop just outside of Bakersfield. A trio of students came aboard Sam's car. Sam, who had been sleeping with his head against the window, had his first awareness of something new when he was shaken awake. It took a little while, then, but basically he was quick and obliging.

"Sure, sure—what's the prob?"

The interrogation trio told him. Sam nodded. "Oh, yeah, I get it. This is a check-up on who crosses the new border."

Quickly, he gave his name, stated his occupation, and gave his made-up explanation: "Kind've running out of supplies. So I thought I'd go down and see if I could get some of the stuff I needed." He added, "Got a few boxes of canned goods up in the express car."

That passed him. But it was obvious: his time was running out.

And he still had \$113,000 in stashed cash to get to safety deposit boxes in the second economic area.

"When the words 'mine' and 'thine' had entered into the world and conflicts arose among citizens concerning ownership of things, and between neighboring peoples over boundaries, it became customary to have recourse to some one who would justly and effectively

see that the poor suffered no violence from the rich, or the whole people from their neighbors."

Attributed to

Hubert Languet—1518-1581

In that first month or so a great deal of information was available from all news media.

It seemed that experts were being brought to San Francisco from the U.S.S.R. as advisors. Their first task—it was reported—was to gain control of the flow of goods, particularly of the food supply.

As, during the second month, the news rapidly grew less, it became obvious they were also getting control of the flow of information.

The food part, Sam noted early. His credit wholesalers cut him off from new supplies. But goods were still available for cash; and in fact several wholesalers came to him and offered him secret stores that they had if he would pay off in cash for what he owed them. Each man intimated he would accept a substantial discount as payment in full.

It turned out, in the consequent discussion, that some of these people were still hopeful that the government in Washington would interfere against Proposition 8. But a few days later both San Francisco newspapers quoted a government spokesman. It was a statement issued by the White House, and it said:

"All over the world for a generation or more, Capitalism and Communism have been confronting each other. Until now, citizens of

either group have been able to migrate into the other's territory only with great difficulty, and seldom with the privilege of returning unscathed, when and if they desired to do so. But now in what was the great state of California we shall be able to observe in a relatively small arena what happens when there is easy access and easy return by law. It will also be interesting to observe if the new dual system will automatically cure the negative aspects of human nature, as the promoters of Proposition 8 have claimed."

Sam had two reactions to that. First was the sarcastic thought: "Boy, those advisors sure let that item be printed." Belatedly, later in the day, came the second feeling. A puzzlement: "For Pete's sake, what is this Proposition 8?"

That evening, en route to his own house, he pulled over to a curb in front of a small shack on the same street. Got out. Walked up to the unpainted door. And knocked.

Presently, there was the wrinkled, chunky woman who, daytimes, did housecleaning for people who did not wish to make out employer social security statements about occasional domestic help; and thus—as Sam had learned—since there was no record of her having an income, she was able to collect monthly welfare checks.

Sam said, "I've had a rough day, Stella. And though this isn't our regular time, I'll need a woman tonight."

Stella peered up at him. Not much up; they were fairly nearly

the same height. For many seconds her dark eyes promised nothing. Then: "I'll see how I feel," she said finally, "and maybe come over."

Sam departed without argument. The plain, little woman generally treated him with compassion. Whenever she didn't "feel" like it she was usually willing "to take care of" him.

As he fully expected, she arrived about eight o'clock; and they had a drink. And somewhere, then, came Sam's question.

Stella didn't argue, or express surprise that he didn't know what it was he had voted for. She was a woman who, as a girl, had looked into a mirror. At which time she had the first of many ego-diminishing shocks. So that getting this plump-faced small man had been a better-than-average for a face like hers.

However, like most women she noticed the awesome limitations of her man without—since they were not married—taunting him with his stupidity.

So she explained Proposition 8 being careful the while not to make him feel like an idiot for having paid no attention to the most important election of his, or any Californian's lifetime.

The proposition split California in two just south of Bakersfield. The southern portion, with Los Angeles as its capital, would have a capitalistic economy. The northern half, with San Francisco as the capital, would have a Marxist economy.

Inhabitants of both economic

areas would use the same money. They could migrate from one area to the other as many times as they pleased, but would be subject to the laws of whichever section they chose to live in.

When she had finished, Sam sat frowning for a while; then: "This Marxist thing—it's what they've got in Russia, uh, the U.S.S.R.?"

The woman nodded, yes. "The idea," he said, "is that everything is owned by the people." She added, "I don't quite know how they make sure it's all evenly split. But that's the idea."

After a small pause, Sam said, "Oh!" He was thinking of his \$113,000. in cash being divided among the fourteen million people who lived in Economic Area Number One. His feeling was negative.

"You going to stay?" Stella asked.

"I'll have to look the situation over," replied Sam, "and that may take a while. I got most of that 3-month transition period still to go."

It turned out that it didn't take quite as long as the words, "transition period" had, somehow, implied. Or rather, it had not occurred to Sam that he might be a subject for one of the changes made as a part of the transition.

"It is plain, therefore, that the distinguishing quality of humanity is the faculty or the power of understanding."

Dante, 1265-1321 A.D.

In both papers the following day, the entire front page was an adver-

tisement. It requested—the actual phrase used was: “are requested”—all college students to register “at once” with the Department of Transitional Actions.

Elsewhere in the ad was the statement that “qualifying” college graduates would be given the available “higher paying jobs.”

Presumably, all those college intellectuals would understand that there was nothing coercive in the request; and that the wording merely implied how urgent was the need, as, presumably, was the statement that those who registered first would naturally have the choice of the best positions.

It was the shoe store owner from down the street who showed Sam the advertisement. He seemed visibly less cheerful. “What they want to do is get the intellectuals on their side. That was what my son said. He’s going down this morning.”

Sam said, “You got a college education, Harry?”

“Well—no. But I put my son through.” He added, “I had a living to make.”

“Me, too,” said Sam.

It was two days after that conversation that Sam looked up from a small transaction with old Mrs. Spidley. What he noticed was a car with the words, PROPOSITION 8, in large letters. And under it, somewhat smaller, was *Department of Transitional Actions*.

The car was in the action of pulling up in front of his door.

As he saw, one after the other, three men get out, Sam uncon-

sciously began bracing himself. And, as the men walked towards the entrance of his store and then came inside, he uttered one small sigh of regret. It was mid-afternoon. All through the day, every hour he had taken his cash accruals for that hour, and had hidden the money in a specific place he had at the back of the small building. What elicited the sigh was that the current hour had just run its course; and he had intended to take care of those accruals in approximately one minute.

One of the three men was quite young: early 20s. He carried a black executive case, and he preceded the other two. The second in line was about fifty, and Number Three was fortyish. All three were Middle Class types.

The youngest placed his case on the counter in front of Sam, and said, “My name is Paul Vakor. Are you Mr. Sam Mebley?”

He didn’t wait for a reply, but went on, “We’ve come to take over your store for the good of the people.”

Sam did a special inner bracing job. And said, “Hey, I thought competent small business guys would be allowed to continue operating their small businesses in Economic Area One.”

As his first answer the youth stepped over in front of his executive case, and opened it. He drew out a folder. “I have here,” he said, “your tax reports for the past three years. They all show a loss, and are therefore evidence that you are not competent.”

Sam said, "Oh!"

It wasn't that he had forgotten. But actually the competence he had developed in simultaneously making a large profit but never paying income tax, had become such an automatic skill that for a decade he had taken it for granted as a way of life.

At once, there was no point in protesting. But he did say bitterly, "You look like one of those college students who came around before the election to tell me how great everything would be for me."

Off to one side, the oldest of the three men cleared his throat. And, speaking English with a thick, foreign accent, said, "He is college student, yes. But is also dedicated government agent for the people."

Sam gazed grimly into the speaker's brown eyes. "I heard about your kind," he said grimly. "One of those experts invited over from U.S.S.R. to tell kids like this what to do."

His thumb indicated the "kid."

He grew aware that the Russian was pointing with his thumb at the third man. "Mr. Thompson registered college student," he said. "Big job to do. Will take over, manage your store with competence. Put everything behind glass cases. All profits to the people."

The new "owner" of Mebley's Grocery Store walked to the end of the counter, and behind it. As he came back up to Sam, he said, "Show me where everything is, Mr. Mebley. I hope you'll be willing to give me a hand during the first couple of days."

They were all three looking at him. And it seemed to Sam that he got the thought right now. Quickly, he spoke the magic words, "Sure, sure. For the people."

"Law is reason or intelligence unperturbed, and free from the influence of anger, cupidity, hate, or prejudice; nor is it deflected by tears or threats. Man, on the other hand, however well endowed with reason, is seized and overcome by wrath, vengeance and other passions."

*Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos,
16th century.*

Did a faint tendril of doubt ever move through Paul Vakor's mind? Was there a moment when he wondered if, perhaps, there was, in fact, any proof that Leninism-Marxism was the ultimate political solution for all problems?

The reality wasn't quite like that. Paul's personal struggle was with what he silently described to himself as the remaining attributes of his capitalist upbringing: ambition. Naturally, he had to conceal that he had any. And he tried to do things that would make him look selfless while he maneuvered for power.

The colossal success of Proposition 8, determinedly expected but not actually anticipated, required hundreds of individuals to fight for leadership positions. Yet each individual had to pretend he was no better than the lowliest worker—except for his dedication, of course.

That became the decisive

thought . . . We were up front during the struggle days—People who jumped aboard the bandwagon after the victory, no matter how well educated, could not be trusted in this beginning period to carry through.

So here was Paul, one of hundreds of dedicated students, personally heading a takeover team. Feeling right about it. Convinced that human misbehavior derived only from Capitalism.

The first intimation that all might not be well with him had come a week earlier when he read a jubilant announcement, printed in identical words in both newspapers. It stated that members of the American Communist Party had been invited by the government of California—the new name of the northern economic area—to come to San Francisco. Their help, and their intimate knowledge of Marxism, apparently, would make certain that everything was done right.

As the days went by, the papers and TV reported an enthusiastic response to the invitation. Every day, some 30,000 individuals were crossing the border from the other 50-odd states of the union.

It seemed that they could enter merely by showing their ACP membership card. The same card was all they needed to check in at the best hotels, and to obtain entrance to that sancrosanct of inner sanctums where, on the day after the election, the top promoters of 8 had set up the self-appointed government of Economic Area One,

and started issuing orders “for the people.”

Exactly one week after that flow of holders of the card began arriving, Paul Vakor returned from his Sam Mebley takeover and found waiting for him an order to go at once to Work Apportionment.

“ . . . Why don’t you,” said the young woman at the desk in what had been the headquarters of Bank of America, “report to the commissar in charge of Central Area Collective Farm number twenty-three, which is the process of organization, and needs dedicated help.”

She reached to one side of her desk, which was piled with pamphlets, took one, and held it out to him.

“Here’s a map on how to get there.”

“B-but,” protested Paul, “I’m a fourth year college student.” He struggled inwardly to find the right words. “I can be more useful on a—” He had been about to say “higher level,” and stopped just in time; finished lamely— “a job requiring training and education.”

“That will come in time,” said the woman. “At the moment we need farm workers.”

A suspicion had been struggling inside Paul. So at this penultimate moment, when all was lost, he was able to gulp it out: “Uh, who recommended me for this?”

The woman looked down at her paper. “It’s signed Tim Frantor,” she said.

“Uh,” stuttered Paul, “Uh—”

But she was motioning to the man at the head of the line ten feet

away. "Next," she called out.

"In all well-tempered governments there is nothing which should be more jealously maintained than the spirit of obedience to law, more especially in small matters; for transgression creeps in unperceived and at last ruins the state."

Aristotle, 364-322 B.C.

There comes an occasional moment in the life of a 22 year-old when a reluctant memory of parents surfaces without being instantly shoved back out of sight. Usually, when this rare event occurs, it has to do with a need for money.

Such a moment—and such a need—came for Paul Vakor as he emerged from his interview onto the late afternoon street. And so, after stumbling along for a while, he went into a phone booth, put in his two quarters, and made a collect call to the Second Economic Area.

At this early moment, no one had got around to "rationalizing"—a word that was being used more and more—the telephone system. And so there, presently, was his father's voice saying, "Who?" And then, when the computer supplied the name of the caller a second time, the familiar voice said grimly, "Tell that S.O.B. to go to hell. Although I paid for his way through college, hoping for the best, I haven't had a son since he got mixed up with the radical left in his sophomore year."

And with those words com-

pleted, bang!—down went the receiver.

The tinkle of his quarters being returned somehow reminded Paul that he had been so zealous all day in pursuit of his studies that he had not talked to Anasia. Or rather, when he'd phoned in the morning, there was no reply. And what with his numerous takeover actions of the day, he had not tried a second time.

He put the quarters back in, and tried again. After the phone had rung half a dozen times he was convinced. By then he had had another thought; and he recognized it immediately as his inspiration of the day. Instantly, came the feeling: saved!—

... Sam Mebley had waited until after dark. Not too early, not too late; so it seemed to him. A midnight prowler might be reported. But ten o'clock was surely a neutral hour.

After a careful survey, he stepped into the alleyway, and walked to the rear of what, until mid-afternoon, had been his grocery store. In the dark it took a little longer to lift away the camouflage from his hiding place—and to replace it after he removed the money he had hidden there—his hourly accruals—during the day.

The amount was not large: slightly less than \$1,000. But worth a short trip. That was not a matter that Sam argued with himself; his acceptance of what had to be done was automatic.

The biggest shock, then, was when all the rear-of-the-store lights

went on. They were flood bright, he'd had them that way for occasions when deliveries arrived after dark.

Sam did not try to run. After that first, stunned moment, he merely stood resigned, as the young college student who had headed the afternoon takeover, emerged from the back door, followed by Thompson, the new storekeeper.

It was the student who searched Sam, found the cash, and placed it in his executive case. As he closed the bag, Paul said to Sam in a savage tone, "We will be filing charges against you. But now, get!"

Sam got.

After the ex-owner had departed, Paul turned to the blond Thompson, "Thanks for coming to assist in this matter. But now, I'll take this to headquarters, and you'd better go home and get some sleep."

Both men went through the store. And then, after Thompson had locked up, went their separate ways in two different cars. Paul still had the official black machine with the lettering painted on the side. Fortunately, he was able to return it before midnight to the car pool of the Department of Transitional Actions. Which meant that no one would ask questions as to its whereabouts. And he still had a key to his office in the department itself. So he sat there, and spoke into the computer, stating charges against Sam Mebley somewhat different than he had threatened. His accusation was that Sam had filed false income

statements, and should be investigated by his successor. Hastily, he signed the computer printout, folded it into an envelope, and tossed it into the Work Load chute.

And so he had \$903. And the belief that it would be a long time before anyone discovered what had happened.

...Those S.O.B.s, he thought grimly, giving me a daily allowance; so I'd always be broke, and have to come back and do their dirty work. He who had been as dedicated as the next man, was being treated like a nobody who had to take any job they wanted to give. Well, they could all go they knew where!

It was after he counted the money that he phoned Anasia again. When—again—there was no answer, the first worry came. He had been intent all day, doing his job. Truth was, Anasia was an independent type, who didn't believe in telling her boy friend everything she did. So he had been merely puzzled. Until now.

He spent the night in one of the big hotels—as a precaution—and phoned occasionally. But in the morning, after eating a hasty breakfast, he took a taxi over to her apartment.

"For we have full experience of the truth of Solon's saying, that all public matters depend on reward and punishment; that where these are wanting, the whole discipline of state totters and falls to pieces."

John Calvin, 1509-1564

There are people who never

forget a sharp remark against them. During the heat of the campaign for Proposition 8, Paul had spoken sharply to seven fellow students and to three professors.

That last had the most immediate effect. He was failed in three subjects, and was accordingly not allowed to graduate.

Tim Frantor was one of the seven students. In the heat of a meeting on tactics, Paul had called Tim an idiot. The words were: "You're just another nut, Tim. An idiot, if you think anything like that will work."

... Paul let himself in to Anasia's apartment with his key. After checking the place, not sure just what he should look for, he settled down in front of the TV. And waited. The day went by slowly; but watching TV did have some interesting highpoints: the changes that had been made. The soap operas were still there; but they were dramatically changed; and words like Comrade, and terms like duty to the people, abounded. (His impression was that the writers didn't quite know how it should be; but they were trying.)

During the evening, the phone—that had been silent all day—rang three times. Each time it was a feminine voice. And each time—it turned out—the owner of the voice had not been in touch with Anasia for a week or more.

That reminded Paul. His sweetheart's best friend was Bella Arne. Bella was in the phone book. And there, after four rings, was Bella's voice, saying, "Oh, Paul, I've

been trying to phone you since two nights ago. But there was no reply at your place. Anasia tried to call you before she left."

"Left to where?"

"She phoned me from her bedroom. An "8" team came to her place, and said they had orders to send her to Satellite C.A."

Paul said, "Oh!" with a sinking feeling.

Satellite C.A. was the space factory complex assigned to the original California—now divided into two economic sections like the land far below.

"B-but," Paul protested, "how can you order somebody to?" He stopped. Gulped. And asked, "Did she say who gave the order?"

"Somebody called Tim Frantor."

"Oh!" said Paul. Then, mumbling, "Thank you, Bella. I'll see if I can get in touch with her."

He hung up. And sat there.

The following morning he phoned Tim Frantor's office. And then again later; and every day two or three times. Every day, he was told by a woman's voice either that, "Mr. Frantor is in conference." "Mr. Frantor is on another line. Can I have him call you?" Or, "Mr. Frantor is not at his desk." Or, finally, "Mr. Frantor has left the office for the day."

But on the fifth day Frantor came to the phone. His voice had an urgent note in it: "Paul, I need your help. I was ordered confined to my office here this morning, and I haven't been able to make any calls out through the switchboard. Now listen, I'm on the second floor.

So if you'll come over with one of those extension ladders—" Hastily, he described the location of his office; ended as hastily, "Don't let me down, Paul. I'll make it up to you."

"Wait!" yelled Paul, "don't hang up." When it was clear that the line was still open, Paul went on, "Before you leave your office, put through an order assigning Anasia back to San Francisco." He added desperately, "If you put that through channels, nobody will notice; you know by now how those things work."

"Oh, sure, sure," came the reply. "And also it'll show that I'm still on the job. See you. Be quick, for God's sake."

"... I do want to get rich but I never want to do what there is to do to get rich."

Gertrude Stein, 1874-1946

No one gave Paul Vakor more than a passing glance or two, as he put up the ladder.

He had rented it and the truck for \$83 cash, plus \$100 deposit, also cash. The deposit was to be refunded when he returned the equipment.

So, now, he maneuvered the relatively long, aluminum ladder against the lower window sill; and he had a pail of water standing by, and cloths, and a can of glass cleaning spray. It was part of his pretense that he was a workman doing a routine job.

Frantor must have been waiting with a desperate impatience. Because, as the top of the ladder hit

the sill, the window of that ancient building squeaked open. And, rapidly, a frantic, trousered leg poked out. It was swiftly followed by a second trousered leg, and the rear of the whole trousers.

What held up the rescue operation briefly, then, was that the part of Frantor that was still inside seemed to be busy. After nearly twenty seconds, however, the head and shoulders slid out, and one arm and hand emerged holding a large wastepaper basket, while the other hand reached down and grasped the top rung.

Like Paul's, his was a medium long body that, also, had the strength of a twenty-two year-old. And so, down he half slid, manipulating his basket, which, on reaching the sidewalk, he placed in the truck cab.

The two young ex-commissars teamed to unextend the extension ladder back to its short form. They did not, at this time, attempt to fit it into its cradle in the back of the truck; simply tossed it in. And departed; the truck, with Paul driving, swerved into the traffic, and then zipped around the first corner.

As they zoomed along, Paul watched the street, and was careful not to glance at his hard-breathing rider. There would have to be a few confrontations; but that was for later.

As the breathing slowed toward normal, Frantor spoke for the first time: "Don't worry, Paul. I'll make it up to you, what I had to do."

It was a good opening line. And it augured well for Paul's special

scheme for their future. Presumably, he would have a willing collaborator.

Once more, the long-faced youth spoke: "I got two old style automatic pistols, two S.D. computers, and the most expensive small office items I could lay my hands on."

Neither man had even a momentary thought of the qualm variety, that this was thievery Frantor was describing. Paul was nodding; and he spoke now for the first time: "Best you could do under the circumstances."

The computers and the automatics, particularly, could be useful—that seemed to be true in the upside down world where they now had their being.

They were approaching the truck and ladder rental yard; and so Paul said quickly, "I have an idea I'm going to have a hard time getting back my \$100 deposit unless we play it tough as a team."

What they did, they entered the small office of the rental company; entered it with Frantor right behind Paul. Then they spoke to each other several times to establish that they were together. But Frantor waited at the door while Paul presented his duplicate copy.

The man behind the counter glanced at it. And said at once, "I'm afraid I'm going to have to have that truck checked in our garage for damages. And so you come back tomor—"

It was at that point that his eyes must have caught the movement of Frantor taking the automatic out of his pocket and slipping it into

an exposed position at the top front of his trousers.

Pause; then: "Oh, well," came the words, "we have your address."

Whereupon, he counted out the \$100.

As soon as they were outside, Paul said, "And now, let me tell you what I think we should do to get some real money."

Whereupon, he described the Sam Mebley incident. Explained: "The guy that's running the store now—Thompson—told me he took in over \$1100 the last half of his first afternoon. True, that's the busy time; people going home from work do the most shopping. But if you add what I got and what he got, it comes to over \$2000. And that's for one day. My guess: Sam has been grossing \$60,000 a month in that little place. And somehow declaring income tax on only half of that. So—here's the point—he's got cash around somewhere; and we have to pry some of it away from him."

And the illegality of *that* did not seem to disturb Frantor either. It was almost as if they agreed that, during the transitional period, money and goods belonged to anyone who could grab first.

"How," was all Frantor asked, "do you think we should work it?"

"He doesn't know you," said Paul. "So our job is to keep track of him; and you do all the front work, and any necessary contacts, while I remain out of sight but handy. I have a feeling he's going to head south. So we'll need a car. Right now, I've got to wait here

until Anasia is returned from Satellite C.A. And then—”

“Oh, she’ll be back tonight,” said Frantor.

“That makes it all simple,” was Paul’s relieved reply.

“ . . . certain rights can never be granted to the government, but must be kept in the hands of the people.”

Eleanor Roosevelt, 1884-1962

Sam and Stella drove down Highway 385—the mountain-desert route (by way of Lake Tahoe). In addition to some funds he had in his billfold, Sam had \$5,000 hidden in the trunk. His hope was that the “commies” during this transitional stage, hadn’t got around to “setting up shop”—as he put it—“in hot as Hades Mojave.”

But there was a bad moment when the computerized car responded to a radar speed warning, and presently rolled to a stop in front of a computer eye-o, which was embedded in a metal roadside communication post.

On the post, a light blinked. So Sam maneuvered the machine by hand control until he could reach over and pick up the receiver.

A man’s voice said, “Our electronic check shows that this car is registered in the name of Sam Mebley.”

“This is he,” replied Sam gloomily.

“According to our system report your vehicle was traveling at excessive speed. The fine is \$48. Stop at the patrol station automat in Palmdale and pay the full amount

before proceeding.”

Sam was recovering. “You sure these fines are still legal under the new system?” he asked.

There was no verbal reply. Only a clicking sound, presumably of disconnect.

But he was actually glad to stop. And did, in fact, pay the fine into an automat machine; but all the time thinking happily: “By God, this proves that this is still an open route.”

Which meant that before they plugged this loophole he could go up every day, and come back—every day—until those one hundred and eight remaining G’s were safe in G-land.

The rest of the trip was in that very same G-land, now called Angelona—the new name of the second economic area. It was after they had been (safe?) in what had formerly been southern California, for at least an hour, that Stella said, “How are you going to live, Sam. Are you going to ask for public assistance?”

The plump-faced man was too flabbergasted by the question to answer immediately. Long ago, he had made the decision never to tell a woman his true financial situation. His observation: women got awfully big ideas awfully quick. So the chunky little woman knew nothing of his savings.

What staggered him about her suggestion was that it might be a handy concealment for his situation. At the moment he merely said, “I got a few hundred bucks. That’ll give us a chance to look around,

and see what's what. May be some changes down here, also.

What he had found on each of his previous visits was that Los Angeles was swarming with refugees; and according to the papers hotel rooms were hard to get.

As it turned out, there had been an odd, partial solution to that problem.

Essentially, concern for people who asked for, or needed welfare, devolved upon a small percentage of the populace. There were religious workers who dealt with the poor and the sick, and there were the town, city, or government officials who were constantly confronted by the problem of what to do with an individual, or a family, without income of any kind.

The rest of the people would rather not see, or have any direct contact with the problem. Or, if they took note, they had a negative reaction.

It was an organized body of this latter group in Angelona who saw the condition of California as an opportunity. More important, individuals among them were sufficiently educated so that they knew what had happened in Russia in 1917 and in China in '48. This group spread the word where it would do the most good, from their point of view.

How quickly does news travel? How soon do people act?

The reaction started the first week.

The poor districts of Los Angeles and San Diego—particularly those two cities—experienced a remark-

able upheaval. People began to leave. Social workers reported that ten, twenty, and even thirty year welfare cases simply got up and left their rented houses or apartments.

Since there are always observers and tale-bearers, the story was that long lines of old jalopy cars headed north over Interstate 5, 101 and 1 (the coast highway), and even 385 by way of Mojave—headed by all three routes in the general direction of San Francisco. After these various caravans crossed the "border" into Califrania, it wasn't long before a dozen cars would take this or that off ramp and, in a manner of speaking, were never seen again.

But there, also, were observers. And so reports came of how they drove into small and large communities, to ranches and farm houses, and simply moved in and took over: homes, farms, businesses.

In some places signs appeared. They all had the same justified thought printed on them: "This property taken over for the people." The signs were mostly crudely done. Sometimes, they were scrawled on white cardboard. Yet here and there was actually carved wood or shaped metal nailed onto a solidly dug-in post.

(Some owners were quick. They had their own signs up, so that when the caravan arrived it looked as if that place had already been seized "for the people.")

But when Ed Clint knocked on the door behind one or another of

these signs, and asked what the thought was, one man said, "When I heard that this is what the poor people did in Russia and China, I realized it was up to me to do my share, and show where I stood."

It turned out that the caravans were a little late for Nob Hill and other fine residential sections in northern California. In those areas, members of the American Communist Party had moved their families into all the fancy homes.

Attempts made to interview this level of takeover were mostly repulsed. But here and there Clint elicited a reply. One woman came to the door of a 20-room mansion, and said, "We are dedicated persons who have the interest of the people at heart. This house was formerly occupied by someone who had no such concern."

Ed Clint pointed out. "The outward appearance is that another elite group has taken over. What do you think of the claim of Proposition 8 promoters that the two interacting economic areas will solve all these problems of human greed and the negative side of human nature in general?"

There was no verbal answer to the question. At that point the door was slammed in Clint's face.

*"Genuine government
Is but the expression of a
nation, good
Or less good—even as all
society,
However unequal, monstrous,
crazed and cursed
Is but the expression of men's
single lives,*

*The loud sum of the silent
units."*

*Sonnets from the Portuguese
by Elizabeth Barrett Browning,
1806-61*

Stella's suggestion, and his reaction, had an important immediate effect on Sam: when they arrived in Los Angeles he drove straight down to one of the well-defined welfare areas.

Everywhere they looked there were "to let" signs on small houses. Many of the signs also stated: "Furnished."

It was one of these furnished 2-bedroom houses that Sam rented for one month for \$2,000. Inflation, that exact measure of the phenomenon known as a Seller's Market, had moved into Los Angeles, along with two million refugees from California.

The following day Sam was still inwardly arguing as to what his best course of action would be—when the phone rang. It was a youthful male voice that represented itself as being from the local office of the Internal Revenue Service. The voice gave the address of a hotel, and a room number.

"Come by this afternoon. Ask for Mark Armour."

"What time?" asked Sam, gloomily.

"Two o'clock."

"Okay, okay. I'll be there."

"Oh, and by the way—"

"Yes?" Resignedly.

"Don't be surprised at the appearance of confusion. "There's

hundreds of us down here from the northern economic area. And we're all in temporary quarters."

As he broke the connection after that call, Sam was bitter. "Those damn computers!" he complained. "If you sign up to live somewhere, instantly your name is recorded; and, boy! they've got you."

Stella said nothing. She had been strangely quiet since the previous day. She had accepted the better of the two bedrooms without argument. Accepted a visit from him in the late evening; and made breakfast for him this morning. But now, as she sat on the couch beside him, Sam grew aware of a strange expression on her face.

The chunky little woman seemed to shrink down there beside him on the couch. Her plain and wrinkled face acquired a timid expression.

Finally, in a small voice she said, "Maybe the time has come for us to get married." She added quickly, "I promise always to treat you just as good as I do now."

Sam did not need her to explain what she meant. There was a time when Sam had married. During the courtship period it had looked like he was involved with a sex maniac. Twice an evening was nothing. Several times a week she would let herself into his house at 6 A.M. and crawl into bed with him. And a number of times she showed up at his store during her lunch hour—she was a secretary in a government office. (They went into the back room.)

But within a week after the wed-

ding bells ceased to toll, she developed her first not-tonight headache. And thereafter it was all downhill.

He ended the marriage after two years by simply filing suit for divorce; and the two attorneys worked out the financial settlement.

Fortunately, she presently remarried. And Sam was off the hook

"What bothers me," said Sam now, "is, I think there's supposed to be some recompense for expropriated property. And I should get, uh, maybe one-fifty for my equity in my place in San Francisco. And maybe if that happens we can get married."

It was the best excuse he could manage on short notice. Truth, he was not entirely opposed to the idea of marrying the little woman. Two pre-Stella associations with considerably better looking females had taught him his final lesson: the fancier a woman looked, the more expensive she was.

That afternoon, 2 P.M.

The confusion at the temporary office of the Internal Revenue Service wasn't that great. There were boxes, loaded with what looked like files and stacks of white paper, piled in one corner—Paul and Tim had carted the boxes up a back stairway of the hotel one at a time.

The hotel desk in the room they had hauled over to the window on the other side of the bed. The person sitting at the desk was a young man; and he faced the door. There was an extra chair to his right; and

he motioned Sam toward it

As he settled into it Sam noticed that there were the usual IRS pamphlets spread along one edge; and some invoices with Internal Revenue Service printed onto them—that had been a hasty Xerox achievement. But, in fact, there was no problem. Sam had no suspicion as he gazed uneasily at the young man who now said, "I'm Mark Armour. And you?"

"Sam Mebley."

The lean youth looked down at some papers on his desk. Nodded. And drew them closer to him. While still studying them, he explained that the two economic areas were transmitting information to each other, as required by Proposition Eight. And that, as a result—at that point he looked up and stared balefully into Sam's eyes.

"Charges have been filed against you," he said.

"By whom?"

"By our San Francisco office."

Since that was the correct location, Sam braced himself. "What are the charges?"

"That you falsified your income tax reports, and that in fact you made a considerable hidden profit each year of the four years examined."

It was truth. And, oddly, it felt good to have it stated openly. Sam said in a relieved voice, "I can see that whoever filed the charges is not familiar as yet with the problems of operating a grocery store in a poor neighborhood."

"You deny the charges?"

"Totally."

Pause. The young man was straightening in his chair. His expression was grim, as he said, "It turns out, Mr. Mebley, that you're actually very fortunate. Because of the special situation created by Proposition Eight, we could waste a lot of time discovering the exact amount of your debt. Accordingly, I am authorized to fine you \$25,000; and that will be all there is against you. However—"the eyes were baleful—"if the fine is not paid into this office by tomorrow morning you will be subject to Clause Eleven of Proposition Eight."

There was silence while Sam unhappily considered parting with \$25,000. Yet, in fact, to a practical person like himself, it had the look of being an easy way out.

"Let me understand you," he said. "If I can, uh, borrow \$25,000. from some friends up north, I will be given a release from all IRS claims against me?"

"You will receive a proper release document," was the reply.

"Can I pay it to your office in San Francisco?" Sam asked. "I'll have to fly up tonight, and borrow the money."

"Let me check on that," said the false Mike Armour, "and I'll phone you."

When the phone call came an hour later, it developed that Armour had been assigned to ride herd on the situation. "So," his voice came on the phone, "I'll fly up with you, and we'll settle the matter."

As Sam explained it to Stella,

that was obviously a practical solution to the many confusions created by Proposition Eight. "I guess they figure it's better for me to talk to one guy than keep meeting new people who don't know what's gone before."

Stella would stay behind and hold onto the rented house.

"Indeed, I thought, slipping the silver into my purse, it is remarkable, remembering the bitterness of those days, what a change of temper a fixed income will bring about."

Virginia Woolf, 1882-1941

After Sam departed the hotel room, Paul entered from the bedroom. They stood looking at each other; and for a long moment Paul did not notice that his companion-in-crime was not smiling jubilantly as he was; and, in fact, he was not smiling at all.

"What's the matter?" asked Paul.

"We may have to kill the old S.O.B.," said Frantor, "after we get the money."

Paul was astounded. "Whatever for?"

"He may go to the authorities and describe us. You, particularly."

"He's not going to see me in this situation. And he'll never see you again. This is a one-shot deal. And, besides—" Paul smiled grimly—"he has to keep a low profile, so no one will suspect how much more cash he's got."

"Well!!!" The other youth seemed uncertain. "I'm ready to do what has to be done. In this Proposition Eight shiftover it's begin-

ning to look as if it's every man for himself."

There was a pause. A silence. Paul Vakor stood and Tim Frantor remained seated; and they looked not exactly at each other but slightly off to one side, two young instant criminals, with one of them—Paul—suddenly remembering what Frantor had already done against him... *Every man for himself*... I'm going to have to watch out for this so-and-so.

At once he was cunning. "Okay, Tim, count me. We'll do what has to be done. But I don't think we have to do that."

"I guess you're right," was the quick reply from a young man who had suddenly had his own private thought, that the less he confided in anyone, the better.

"Step one," said Paul, "we get the money. Step two, then we decide what to do next..."

The money, they got. That was no problem. Sam had made his peace with the payment of 25 thousand in full in return for an IRS receipt, a xerox version, which Tim signed with the name Mike Armour. By the time he arrived back in Los Angeles, with 12 thousand more of his hidden funds, Sam was feeling quite cheerful. And wondering what his next move should be in the game of life under Proposition 8.

Stella had some puzzling news for him. "The I.R.S. called," she said. "They want you to come and see them. Here's the number to call."

It was a different number and a

different name. And, when he got there it was actually inside a building devoted entirely to government business. No piled boxes. No hotel room confusion. Everything was in order. Neat desks, private rooms; and in one of the latter a big, well-dressed man in his thirties whose name was Warren Tate.

It took a while. Sam explained. Sam showed his receipt. Twice, Warren Tate went out, and twice came back, presumably after consulting with someone else. In fact, the second time he returned with a middle-aged woman, who also listened to Sam's story.

And, evidently, there had been other persons contacted; for a young man came in, and said, "The hotel reports that the room was occupied by a young man named Mike Armour."

The woman asked, "Did they verify his name?"

"Well—" a pause—"it seems that a newly hired night clerk let him in. Maybe a bribe—"

(A bribe it had been: a \$200 direct payment, not counting the room rent for two days and two nights.)

(No one suspected Paul Vakor. His action in originally filing the charges somehow proved him to be unconnected with what followed.)

After about ten minutes, the woman came over to Sam, and said, "Proposition Eight has created many confusions that, apparently, cannot be easily resolved."

They let him go.

Later, when Ed Clint got onto the story, he found Sam and Stella in their rented house, waiting—as the TV reporter described the situation to the vast audience in the eastern United States—for the government of Califronia to reimburse Sam for his expropriated house in South San Francisco, so that he and his lady could get married.

Clint added, "This is just one little event of many that I have observed in bits and pieces as they developed."

The reporter, to whom millions listened every night for an update on the west coast situation, concluded:

"It would appear that, although Proposition Eight has not yet produced the morality claimed for it by its proponents, there is a rough justice beginning to show through. Sam Mebley was persuaded by some inner reaction to the new conditions to pay his back taxes without an argument. This was a result that was achieved only when the state took over his small enterprise. And, equally important, those who stole the money from him will gain thereby only a brief postponement of their personal rendezvous with destiny, prices out here being what they are."

As Clint later observed to his own lady friend, a news media person who expected to operate in both Angelona and Califronia, had better learn to notice every favorable aspect because there were so many unfavorable ones.

CLOUDSCAPE

by KERRY SCHAEFER
art: Vincent DiFate

R'hyledd drifted in the breeze, fully unfolded and nearly transparent. While skimming above the cloud fields, dropping down occasionally to absorb a choicer fleck of moisture-coated dust, he

watched the roiling top of a fresh bulge of greenish cloud as it poked its way ominously through the opaque gray haze below. Such an upwelling could mean danger, storms brewing in the lower levels.



And sometimes darters hid in such places, their denser bodies less likely to be damaged by the turbulence. A darter could be a threat, even to a full grown adult like R'hyledd.

Thinking with resigned irony that the best grazing always seemed to be in the most dangerous spots, R'hyledd settled down on the ridge of atmospheric density defining the top of the misty blue-gray cloud pasture.

Trying to judge how much flexibility remained in his aging body, he stretched. Yes, with a little more moisture to act as ballast, it might be possible to swoop down again,

joyously cleaving to the rich atmosphere of the lower clouds to return coated with nutritious particles of all kinds. The youngsters would flock around then, anxious to partake of the harvest brought up by their elder. Their approval would be warm and pleasant to feel, and their bodies, fragile almost to the point of invisibility, would sparkle brightly against his as they fed.

For just a little longer, R'hyledd might be able to believe there was still something to look forward to in life.

Foolish, foolish, he thought. Attempt to dive again, and you may



well have no more life to look forward to. Do not invite your death before its time. A long ripple of resignation fluttered through his outstretched drifting veils. Wiser by far to dismiss all thoughts of diving again. Oh, yes, far wiser.

Better to cling to what remained of life. Let some other adult feed the young. The segments he had ruptured in his last dive had only now healed and begun to function properly. He chided himself yet again for having taken such a chance.

Keeping at a safe distance from the bulging green cloudtop, R'hyledd fed swiftly, not so much hungry as thirsty for the moisture condensed around the individual solid particles. The blue-gray cloud field stretched endlessly around him in all directions, here and there rising in contorted configurations that slowly changed their shape as pressures and densities shifted in the turbulent atmosphere.

It was the world R'hyledd had known all his life, ever changing and yet ever the same. Dimly he remembered how exciting it had seemed, with new possibilities to be found in each cloud, new tastes and textures. He tried to recapture the sense of freshness and beauty he had felt so long ago, his first impressions as a truly self-conscious adult after combination, just emerging from the group consciousness of the young-flock. So marvellous had it been then.

A tiny tremor ran through his extended veils. Life no longer seemed so new, and yet it was precious

still.

R'hyledd let himself drift closer to the greenish cloud. Grazing was good here. He swooped through the sweet-tasting mists, keeping several eyes trained on the threatening cloud as he fed. When he finally noticed the sparkles of a young-flock in the distance, he knew it was too late to avoid them. Well, let them come. He would refuse to hear their pleas. He had his own life to consider.

Feeding voraciously on the thin dust, the young-flock flitted quickly, jerkily, amongst the blue-gray clouds. They were hungry, very hungry, their fragile bodies thin and brittle with near starvation. They were conscious of nothing save their frantic search for food, their sense of group desperation. They had found no adult to feed them for a long time.

They saw R'hyledd, and knew fresh hope. They had not enough of awareness to realize he was old; they merely knew he was an adult. He could dive, and bring them the food they needed. No other consideration mattered to the group mind.

Sparkling with anticipation, they flittered after him.

Inside the swirling turbulence of the green upwelling, the darter waited, its body drawn together to protect itself from the currents, watching, gloating. Its prey was almost near enough to attack, but the adult was too close. The adult might lure them away. It would

wait. Perhaps the adult would move off, and the young drifters would come nearer.

Resigned to an encounter he would have preferred to avoid, R'hyledd went to intercept the young-flock, preparing to herd them away from the danger of the spreading green cloud. They were young; they wouldn't have the sense to keep at a safe distance. It was his duty to protect them. They were fragile and beautiful with the promise of life. He felt himself expand in instinctive response, aching to be able to feed them and feel their warm glow on his failing body. But it would be dangerous to yield to that temptation. He would lead them away from possible danger, that was all. They'd have to find another adult to feed them. Hadn't he already decided that?

The young-flock saw him coming, but they ignored his warning flutters. Not comprehending their danger, they clustered around his huge body, begging, entreating, their need for food clearly to be felt.

R'hyledd knew he should get them to move farther from the greenish cloud, but they felt so good rubbing against him, so warm and full of life. Their anticipation ached through every fiber of his diaphanous body. His drifting veils quivered with sorrow, because he knew he dared not attempt to feed them.

Enough. He only prolonged the inevitable frustration and rejection by allowing them near.

He shook himself, whipping the clustered multitude of young away from his veils, warding them off with cautious flicks as they sought to come to him again.

Find another. I cannot help you.

But the young-flock ignored his silent plea. Their rudimentary intelligence unable to comprehend even the concept of individual being, they sought to impress upon R'hyledd their corporate need.

Through the shifting curtains of greenish mist, the darter watched, growing impatient at the delay.

R'hyledd looked at the young-flock fluttering persistently around him. This flock held promise. It was large and bright. He hated to abandon it to possible starvation. The youngsters seemed almost bright enough to combine with another young-flock soon. If they were properly fed.

What kind of an adult would he be, if he abandoned such a promising flock? The last flock he had produced would be about that age now, although he was sure this wasn't it. Young-flocks always showed a distinct aversion to contact with the adult that had spawned them. These had greeted him eagerly.

Frustrated, R'hyledd gathered himself tentatively inward, shortening and folding his veils as he assessed his physical condition.

His sac held almost enough moisture. He could dive, but it would be tricky. His body might be old, but it would stand the strain, if he wanted it to. Just this one last time.

What was life worth, without those few sharp-edged moments of impossible joy? What else gave meaning to the endless grazing and drifting? Most of an adult's life consisted of waiting, preparing, gathering moisture. Without the sublime satisfaction to be derived from feeding the young, he might as well be a particle of dust, tumbling aimlessly like the cloud particles on which he fed.

He almost had second thoughts, but then he glanced once more at the sparkling young-flock. Their brilliant anticipation simply hurt too much. He couldn't bear to disappoint them. He had to try.

He *would* try.

R'hyledd continued to fold his veils, slowly, carefully, lest he tear something. In youth, it had been a quick and easy process. Now, there was need for caution.

As he drew in the extended veils, he began to sink. The gray-blue mists of the cloud pasture closed around him, blocking the youngsters from his sight. They couldn't dive. They were much too fragile to withstand the pressures down below.

R'hyledd couldn't see, but he could feel the growing increase in pressure as he fell lower. He sampled the particles surrounding him. Tasty, but nothing special. He would go lower still. Since this might be his last dive, let it be an

exceptional one.

He tilted the edges of his contracted veils, driving himself deeper into the atmosphere. Blue faded gradually into green, and he even thought he could make out a hint of yellow not far below. Yellow was especially good. Thick, nutritious particles permeated the low yellow clouds. If he could reach the yellow, he could unfold and collect those particles. They would adhere to him easily.

But he mustn't get overanxious. The pressure had increased considerably. He felt it pressing in on the hollow, air-filled segments of his body. He was stiff and inflexible with age. It wouldn't take much to crush those segments. With too many destroyed, he would never rise again.

The terror of an endless fall into heat and intolerable pressure was almost enough to make R'hyledd seek an updraft immediately. What was he doing down this far anyway? He was an old fool. *Unfold now, gather what you can, and return to safety*, he told himself.

But the yellow tempted him lower, rich, delicious, always favored by the young. A bit further. Just a bit further. It wasn't as if he'd never gone this deep before. Hadn't he even touched red once? He trembled with the thrill of that memory. It had been hot and terrible and marvellous, but he had returned, the outer edges of his veils scorched and seared, two segments crushed hopelessly. Two separate young-flocks had come to him to feed, a rare happening.

Many combinations had taken place.

You were young then. Flexible and strong. You had only just combined. You cannot do today what you did then. The truly wise know their limits.

An upwelling of yellow engulfed him. He tasted. Oh, yes, this would be fine.

R'hyledd unfolded cautiously, buffeted by the fierce gale. He jettisoned some of the moisture he carried, becoming lighter as a result.

The yellow cloud swirled upward and R'hyledd rode it happily, feeling the juicy particles clinging to his outspread veils, sticking to his main body segments. He ate a little himself, but he wasn't very hungry. The youngsters would be hungry. Youngsters were always hungry.

The upwelling began to dissipate as its heavier particles sank back down toward their more normal levels. R'hyledd released more of his remaining moisture, rising above the turbulence. He unfolded to his fullest extent in an effort to gain altitude. A downdraft caught him, swirling him suddenly deeper. He fought to get clear of it.

A small segment ruptured, unable to tolerate the rapid pressure change. No matter, he could live without it. He had lived through minor ruptures before. Only if he couldn't get free of the current would he be in real danger of being crushed. He fought the buffeting winds, but his reactions were slow, his body ponderous and weary,

lacking the responsiveness of youth.

The young-flock danced happily along the top of the cloud pasture. The adult had gone below. Soon they would eat. They skimmed and sparkled in short, jerky flights, drifting slowly towards the yellow-green cloudtop as they tasted the richer particles scattered around it.

The darter unfolded its stubby segments, preparing to swoop.

Tenaciously angling his veils against the fierce current, R'hyledd worked his way to the side, slipping out of the threatening downdraft and once again making his way upwards. He had certainly lost some of his precious coating of particles in the struggle, but that couldn't be helped. He would still have enough.

The mists shifted to greens, then blues. Soon he would come out on top of the cloud pasture. The young-flock would see him, and welcome him. He was not too old, after all. He had succeeded. His ruptured segment ached sharply, but it would heal.

Brimming with anticipation, R'hyledd sailed triumphantly out of the blue-gray mist, seeking for the flock in expectation of imminent ecstasy.

They would eat of the rich harvest he had brought them. They would sparkle with joy and warmth as they gathered around him. Perhaps they would awaken a spark of life inside his old body,

and he might even prepare to spawn again. There were so many possibilities now. They—

They had not heeded his warning! They had moved closer to the dangerous yellow-green cloudtop! A darter flew among them, devouring them as effortlessly as they devoured dust particles, its hideous maw opened wide.

The youngsters stayed together, as any young-flock must, easy prey for the creature that fed upon them. They could not scatter, since they weren't even aware they were all separate entities. In mindless panic and shock, they fluttered here and there, but not fast enough to escape the darter's swooping flight.

R'hyledd's veils sagged in bitter despair. The flock he had meant to feed, destroyed, dying.

As he watched in limp horror, another youngster disappeared into the darter's maw, fluttering helplessly. And he could do nothing to stop it.

Nothing? R'hyledd thought, catching sight of one of his yellow-encrusted veils. Darters seldom actually fed on adults if there were youngsters nearby. They didn't seem to like the adults' tougher skins. However, they had been known to pursue an adult carrying a harvest. Perhaps he could tempt this one, lure it away from the flock?

R'hyledd drifted, quivering with indecision. A darter could be dangerous. If it closed its jaws on

one of his veils, it could tear him to pieces, ripping the tenuous veils beyond repair, sending him plummeting into the depths with no way to check that fatal plunge. He had no wish to die. He would go in search of another flock to feed. There were others, after all. They had not care for his safety when they had urged him to dive. Leave them to their fate.

R'hyledd began a slow turn, his body heavy under the thick food particles. He turned his eyes away from the remnants of the young-flock, trying to turn his thoughts away also. The youngsters should have obeyed him and stayed away from the upwelling cloudtop. They should not have expected him to dive. It was their own fault.

But R'hyledd couldn't quite bring himself to believe that. After all, it was the nature of the young to be thoughtless. No one could expect a youngster to be otherwise, not until after it combined with a member of another flock to become an adult. Then it would begin to think and reason, but certainly not before. Prior to that, it wasn't even a separate individual.

There would be others. Leave these to their fate.

(And yet, how many other healthy young-flocks had been seen recently? Surely, there had been more when he had been younger, hadn't there? And how many adults had he encountered, in all of his long life? Not enough. Certainly not enough.)

He couldn't simply desert them.

R'hyledd cut sharply down in

front of the darter, coming between it and the flock. At first it ignored him, munching on its latest catch as it angled around to make another pass over the confused youngsters. R'hyledd snapped the edge of his longest veil, shaking loose a puff of yellow food particles just in front of the creature. It couldn't help but notice that.

The darter whipped itself around with the horrible speed that made its kind so feared by drifters like R'hyledd. As it twisted, R'hyledd swooped into a graceful arc, gaining altitude, luring the beast higher. He played with it, letting it almost catch him before he flew into an updraft. The cloud field sank further below them. The underside of the white death-clouds that formed the upper limit of R'hyledd's world were close above him now. He'd never dared to float this high before. The pressure dropped as they climbed, and the world grew colder.

The darter was afraid. It hesitated, drawing its body together to ward off the cold. The youngsters flickered far below, still tempting. But the adult would be good to eat. The adult was moving slower, probably tiring. The darter would catch it first, and then return to graze on the flock.

R'hyledd slowed down, feigning exhaustion. He fluttered one of his veils almost within reach of the darter's maw, luring it on. With unexpected cunning, the creature lurched forward, catching the edge

of the veil.

R'hyledd struggled loose, tearing off the part of the veil caught in the darter's maw. He should dive, plunge down to the cloud pastures, bury himself in their mists for safety. The darter might not follow him into the mist. It would give up and go off in search of other prey.

He looked down, hoping against hope that the young-flock would have fled by now. His torn veil was a raw edge of pain, leaking precious moisture from his ripped tissues.

The youngsters grazed, oblivious to everything except their burning hunger, moving closer to the subsiding green upwelling. All thoughts of danger had been forgotten. Occasionally, they would turn their eyes upwards, wishing for the food-laden adult to return to them.

Ah, to be young again, and not to know—R'hyledd thought, watching them from the freezing heights. He returned his thoughts to the present problem. If he dove for safety, the darter would go after the young-flock. He watched the creature chewing, the torn edges of his ripped veil gradually being drawn into its mouth. It swerved abruptly up towards him, evidently wanting more.

Higher, then. He would go higher.

With reckless disregard, R'hyledd lured the darter into another updraft. They were lifted, tossed almost into the icy fringes trailing

below the death-clouds. R'hyledd felt one of his segments rupture outwards in the reduced pressure.

Less able to tolerate pressure changes, the darter twitched violently, trying to pull itself together into a ball, hoping to sink. Its mouth opened and closed, belching out bits of what it had eaten. Its fierce hunger was replaced by sudden fear.

R'hyledd struggled not to look at the mess the darter had disgorged, fragments of his own veil mixed with chunks of delicate flesh from the devoured young. As he tried to fight free of the updraft, he felt another of his veils rip in the cold wind, sharp agony cleaving almost into one of his main segments.

The darter couldn't free itself from the updraft. It was tossed higher, almost into the white clouds overhead. It exploded in a sudden burst, ripped segments whipped further upwards in the wind, torn and shredded. Even as R'hyledd watched, the bits of the darter's body began to sink down, heavier than the thin atmosphere surrounding them.

The young-flock saw the rain of drifting particles begin to descend. They flittered joyously, racing to be beneath it when it would reach their level. They never thought to wonder where their unexpected bounty had come from.

The darter was gone. The young-

flock would be safe.

But R'hyledd drifted just below the high clouds, fluid leaking slowly from his ripped veils and torn segments. He might be able to regain the comfortable regions of his familiar cloud pasture, but he would surely never dive lower again, not after such injuries. He would drift awkwardly for the rest of his life, crippled and vulnerable.

Turning his eyes downward, R'hyledd surveyed the cloud field spread out beneath him. How could he have spent all his life down there and not realized how beautiful it was? Off in the distance, he could just make out the happy sparkling of yet another flock of young.

The youngsters would no longer gather around him. Their gentle flashes of gratitude and approval would warm his torn and ragged body no more, for he could never hope to dive again. He had thought he'd gotten used to that idea once before, but he realized now that he would never be able to accept it.

Descend from these soaring heights to that bleak and lonely prospect of a useless, shredded life? What for?

No. Better to let it end now, here, alone.

Alone. As an adult was always alone, in life or in death. Only the young could fool themselves into thinking otherwise, caught up in their flocks, dazzling against each other. And yet, they too were alone in the end. When a darter's cruel maw crushed their tender bodies, even the young died alone.

Was there not, after all, a time for dying? And was not this the time? Without at least the possibility of ecstasy, what was life worth?

R'hyledd let himself drift higher, his depleted mass making it all too easy to gain altitude. With sudden decision, he jettisoned the last remaining bit of his moisture. He couldn't sink now even if he wanted to.

The raw hunt in his torn segments began to fade into numbness as he floated through trailing crystalline fringes of the death-cold clouds that had always marked the extreme upper boundary of his world. Far below, the ugly greenish eruption in which the darter had hidden was barely visible. The youngsters he had saved were lost from sight, but probably still there. They would have forgotten him by now, with the typical short memories of the extremely young. No matter; their memories, like their shallow and fleeting emotions, would grow long and deep in time.

In time. In the time he would never have, now. But that was as it should be. He had done his part. He had given them a chance. (For the first time, he wondered if some other adult had once done as much for him, in the time before his private memories began.)

R'hyledd caught an updraft, letting it carry him through icy mists glowing with an impossible brilliance. He could hardly feel his frozen body, except for an occasional twinge of pain as the more vulnerable sections shattered outward in

the rapidly decreasing pressure around him.

Lifted in the rising column of air, he floated at last above the enveloping cloud. For an amazed moment, R'hyledd stared down at its top, where colors reflected in bright rainbows from the cloud's crystalline dust motes. There was something else above the top of the world, where he had thought to find only clouds! Fighting the pain that lanced through his body as more segments ruptured, he turned his eyes upward, straining to see.

Death came, not with the darkness and crushing pressure he had always expected, but in a burst of fierce light.

R'hyledd's body flew apart in a shimmer of frozen particles, each one sinking down again toward the cloud pastures below, becoming drifting motes of organic dust, gathering moisture as they fell into zones of warming temperatures.

The flock of youngsters saw the rich fall of dust and headed joyously towards it. In the distance, another flock approached also, drawn by the prospect of good grazing. Many combinations would take place when the two flocks merged, and many new adults would begin their lives. Together, the youngsters swooped and gathered nourishment, sparkling with enjoyment and vitality.,

For the last time, R'hyledd fed the young.

STAYING RICH

by LARRY NIVEN

The average citizen of planet Earth is wealthier today than he has been throughout human history. From time to time we need to remember how much we've got to lose.

After all, you don't *feel* rich.

Do you understand how it can be that more people *feel* poor today than ever before? Here are clues. It isn't smog, and it isn't too few negative ions in the air. It's the same effect that robbed the Vietnam War of any shadow of glory. It's one aspect of the rising crime rate. It's the reason everyone seems to be shouting in your ear. It's the reason most of us wouldn't consider powering our cars with liquid hydrogen.

It's communications. Faster and better and more realistic every decade.

Remember the Hindenburg disaster? Giant dirigible that burst into flame as it pulled up to a mooring tower. Two-thirds of the passengers survived, did you know that? That doesn't happen when a DC-10 crashes! But the Hindenburg disaster was the first such to be reported live on radio. The radio audience of the time had no defense against that vision of passengers writhing in a storm of flaming hydrogen. Later generations have learned not to respond so emotionally, not even when there are pictures and gory special effects to increase the impact.

We have learned, yes. Cast your memory back to Kitty Genovese, who was knifed to death in New York over a period of several hours. Witnesses watched from scores of windows in surrounding apartment buildings. None of them so much as phoned the police.

And everyone wondered why, but the answer is simple. They had been trained not to help . . . even as you and I have learned not to interfere with the horrors *we* see happening . . . on our television sets. From adult Westerns to *Alien* and *Gremlins* to live coverage of the Vietnam War, we watch people bleeding and we remain seated.

Jon Sheen is an aspiring writer stationed in Germany. In 1984 he wrote to me as follows:

"I just witnessed a murder. Don't worry about me; I'm in no danger: the killer was caught immediately. In fact, you probably witnessed the same murder, and in the same way: on television. I'm sure you know the case I'm talking about: Gary Plauche murdered the man who kidnaped his son Jody: one Jeffrey Doucet. You've seen the same tape, I'm sure, and my God, it is astounding! If you were directing a suspense film, you couldn't ask for a more dramatic scene, right down to the way the victim's head eclipses the gun just as the shot is fired. This is the third such piece of astounding newsfilm I've seen since the beginning of February. . . .

"It's affected me strongly. *How*, precisely, I don't know, but watching that and, earlier, watching two grown men in Rhode Island walking to a car in comical embrace (rendered entirely unamusing by the fact that one of the men was a cop, and the other a hunted criminal holding a gun to his head) and seeing the car shot to pieces by half-a-dozen cops, wounding the captive officer and killing the fugitive; and watching a Lebanese man in a light blue shirt writhing in pain, denying that his factory held armaments, his right arm broken and mangled and twisted within the sleeve—and then, watching the films taken moments later, of his corpse being carried away. . . . All these will stay with me for a long time, and I don't know how I'm going to judge this new capacity to eyewitness mayhem, but when I finally do decide how to react, it will be strongly.

"I know what I'll have to weigh against it, though: I've seen the Shuttle launch, and land, live. I've seen astronauts floating along through the void, untethered—live. I've seen the Earth, so huge and blue and beautiful—even on a 25" RCA—that it made my throat close up. And I was one of the first human beings to gaze across the sands of Mars; at the same time as Sagan, Hibbs, and the whole gang at JPL, I looked at the *place* that is Mars, watched sliver after sliver of Viking's-eye-view of another planet—live.

"'Electronic Global Village,' the man said.

"Yeah."

You don't feel rich. Right? But you're very aware of the taxes you pay. In California some years ago, it reached the point of a taxpayer revolt. We set a legal limit on our property taxes.

But a taxpayer's revolt used to mean tax collectors hanging from trees! partly because society could not yet afford lampposts. Taxes are enormously higher now than they were during the Whiskey Rebellion in Vermont. Why aren't there tax collectors hanging from lamp posts?

Because even after the tax collector gets through with you, you've

still got too much to protect. Because you're rich.

And if *you* don't feel rich, the little old lady on a fixed income must feel still worse as she watches her dollar dwindle to its intrinsic value—high quality paper. What is it that's doing this to you?

It's communications. Advertisements! An endless stream of advertisements! An endless stream of advertisements interspersed with every kind of inducement to keep you watching. And while you learn of the wonders you can't afford, you're also learning not to believe what you hear; because after all, these products can't *all* be best. What were you thinking while you watched the Presidential candidates on your television sets?

The world is rich, and the easy resources that won the wealth are nearly gone. Outcroppings of copper and iron ore. Surface seepages of crude oil. Coal and wood: free power. A place to dump the pollution. Yes, that was wealth, and is!

Even coal can't be mined without technology; the first steam engines were built to pump water out of British coal mines. Once mined, the coal has to be moved to where it's needed, somehow.

If civilization collapsed today, it may be that no future civilization could be built on our bones.

We have a great deal to lose.

We expect starvation to be rare.

We expect paved streets. Side-walks. Sidewalks with ramps for wheelchairs. Freeways. Lighted streets at night, all night. Universal schooling.

We used to expect cheap gasoline. Remember?

We expect that the streets will be empty of dead bodies in the morning. Every morning. All of this is fairly recent. Consider Welfare: for the failure, total failure has a bottom limit. Some can crawl back up from there. In **The Way the Future Was**, Frederick Pohl tells of being a boy in the Depression. It was ugly, before Welfare.

We expect help in time of disaster. Communications and easy transportation will mitigate the effects of famine and flood. Somebody will know it's happening; somebody will come with what we need.

We expect the freedom to go our own way, without the compulsion to be like our neighbors. But being unlike your neighbors has *always* been a crime. Your present freedom of life style depends utterly on your freedom to move away from your neighbors, to find a place where you needn't conform, or even to find people who think like you do. With modern communications, you can do that without leaving your living room. With *real* communications, with a wall hologram phone, you could accomplish any possible social goal short of exercise or sex!

We can lose all of that. We can lose more. We can lose the vote.

Collecting and tabulating votes is terribly expensive. Many nations

can't afford it. We could be one of them, if we continue shipping our money to the Arabs while we shut down power plants. Tyranny is cheaper than democracy. Only one nation in all of Africa offers its citizens the vote. Can you name it? It's the rich one. It's South Africa.

We are richer than other nations. If starvation among our neighbors didn't bother us, we wouldn't be human—and *all* nations are our neighbors on this single planet. But the wealthy nations are vulnerable to more than guilt. The have-not nations outnumber us. Modern communications, including advertisements, have told them what they're missing, and who's got it.

We could share the wealth equally—and make the whole world poor. You've heard that before, but you may not have grasped what it means.

As long as there have been cities, corpses in city streets have posed a continual health problem.

The police force paid by taxes is a recent invention.

Murder is a recent invention—as distinctly opposed to killing a man who has armed relatives. That has always been dangerous. But killing a tramp used to be quite safe.

Throughout human history, women have been property. In general women are less muscular than men, more vulnerable to enslavement.

Slavery in general was the result of better farming techniques. It allowed civilized peoples to take prisoners instead of killing them, because now they could *feed* prisoners. The horse collar was a first step in freeing slaves; it meant that the horse could do about three times as much work as a man, without strangling. But if civilization collapsed *now*, could we afford horses? And grasslands to feed them, instead of farms to feed us? Everywhere? I think we'd go back to slavery.

In the name of "protecting the environment"—surely a laudable aim in itself—there are those who would oppose *all* forms of industrial power. I believe that they have forgotten what an environment is like before men have shaped it. They have forgotten tigers and tsetse flies and rabies. It would cost us dearly to lose our present level of civilization.

We also can't stay where we are.

The easy resources are running out, yes, but there's more to it than that. *No* civilization has *ever* been able to stay in one place.

We have to deal, somehow, with the information explosion. The proliferation of laws and rules and regulations is part of that. Perhaps we can be educated to tolerate the flow, assimilate it. Perhaps we need information-free vacations—"anarchy parks," places with no newsflow and no rules at all, as laid out in "Cloak of Anarchy"—for our sanity's sake.

Cars and freeways and airlines give us the freedom to be ourselves, but easy transportation carries its own penalties. Almost every state in

the Union has too few state hospitals for the criminally insane. Every time a judge sends a patient to a California mental institution, some doctor has to decide not **whether** to put a patient back on the street, but *whom*. Now the patient is out here with me.

Why can't we build more psychiatric hospitals, and schools, and prisons? Because voting citizens are not trapped where they are. Some won't vote their money to improve their neighborhood because it's easier to move.

We can't stay the way we are. We have to go up—or down.

Today we have the power to make the whole world as wealthy as we are right now. It would take thirty to fifty years, if we start now . . . and we *have* to start now. If we wait, we may wait too long.

I'm pushing space travel. The resources are all up there, and the first resource we need is solar power.

We have several choices as to how to use it. Most people favor picking up the sunlight with collectors several miles across—which doesn't mean they're particularly heavy; the Echo Satellite was both huge and flimsy. The collectors would convert the power into microwaves, or laser beams, and beam it down to collectors on Earth.

Or try this. Big, flimsy solar mirrors. Beam the sunlight down directly, all to one tiny patch of desert. Nobody would live there, of course. The collectors would run at around 350 degrees F.

Again we face choices. We can carefully intercept only the sunlight that would have reached Earth anyway. No heat pollution. Or we can pick up light that was on its way to interstellar space.

Do we want heat pollution? Ocean thermal difference plants (OTEC, using the temperature difference between the top and bottom of an ocean) produce none. Nuclear plants produce just as much heat pollution per kilowatt as coal plants do. But maybe heat pollution is what we want! We've got fair evidence that the next Ice Age is starting now. Right now.

We may have been holding off the next Ice Age for the last couple of hundred years, just by burning so much of our fossil fuels, polluting the troposphere, producing a greenhouse effect. The fuels are running out. If we build nuclear plants and put them on line as fast as we can, it may be enough; though we'd have to be producing *more* power, because there's no particulate pollution. But these mirrors would do the job for us too.

There's second choice, and if you like protecting the environment, you'll love this. Besides beaming power down to the factories from orbit, we can move the factories into orbit, and beyond.

The resources of the Moon include metals and oxygen-bearing rock, and more. Astronauts who have worked on Earth, in free fall, and on

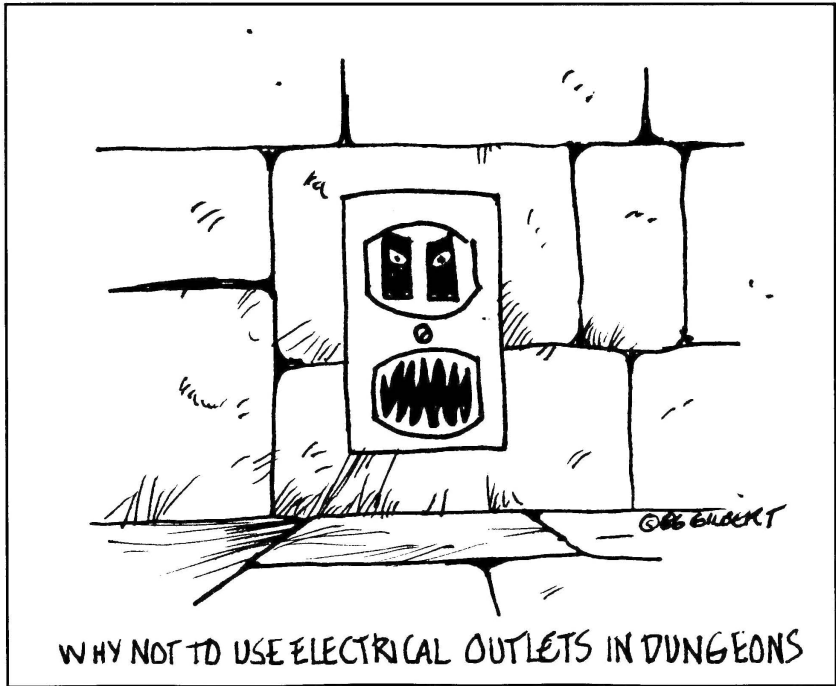
the Moon, prefer the Moon for working conditions. Something has been leached from Earthly soil over billions of years; mix lunar dust into it and the plants fall in love.

A nickel-iron asteroid a mile across would hold five years' worth of the Earth's total production of metals, in metal deposits richer than any now to be found on Earth. If you like iridium, you'll love the asteroids; it was that which gave Alvarez his clue to the extermination of the dinosaurs. We'll probably find water ice; certainly we'll find water loosely bound in compounds.

Behind the problem you just solved you will find another problem, always. There are social implications to making the whole world rich. "The poor are always with us—" up to now. Somebody's going to face a hell of a servant problem.

Well, we'll burn that bridge when we come to it.

PREVIOUSLY APPEARED IN NIVEN'S LAWS, ©1984 LARRY NIVEN



CARTOON BY MICHAEL GILBERT

Savage Cinema

scattered thoughts on the state of SF on film
by Ralph Sevush

I'm still upset. I mean, it's been months since the Academy Awards and I'm still cursing those cretins for their lack of vision. They have once again ignored the Science Fiction, Horror and Fantasy genres in their balloting, and I think it's time to break out those high explosives.

If the members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, that bastion of self-aggrandizement, were not already brain-dead from substance abuse, they might occasionally acknowledge the films that have been the life blood of the industry since its inception.

But no . . . every year the pretentious hacks, insecure artists, aging queens, and cigar-smoking barbarians gather together, in their frilliest finery, to anoint some fine example of mainstream mediocrity as Best Picture of the year. Then, they toss around some more accolades to movies that also mistake importance of subject for importance of content. The canonization of films like GHANDI, CHARIOTS OF FIRE, KRAMER VS KRAMER, and this year's OUT OF AFRICA and THE COLOR PURPLE does a great disservice to the unique qualities of cinema.

Movies *are* science fiction. The subtle blending of light and movement, created by technology, brings three dimensional life to a two dimensional surface. As we sit here, in the dark, we are awash in the flickering illusion. We are swept to whatever worlds the storyteller takes us, and we feel betrayed if that world is dull or cliched—or worse still, if we are taken nowhere at all.

Movies, then, have a unique capacity for Fantasy . . . a capacity greater than that of any other art form. It would seem that SF, Fantasy and Horror would be most well-suited to exploring those potentialities, and the public is well aware of this. It is not by accident that many of the top grossing films of all time are contained by these genres. People instinctively know that nothing in a movie is more satisfying than fantasy, and the dreams that come true in the darkness fade quickly in the light.

I'm not suggesting that great films haven't been made outside of these genres, nor do I imply that they won't be made in the future. Obviously, filmmakers from Allen to Zinnemann have created beautiful and moving

works that are certain to endure as long as the culture does.

All I would intimate to the Academy members is that such critically elemental modes of cinematic expression not be so consistently overlooked in their annual tribal ritual.

And it has been consistent. In the 58 year history of the Academy Awards, the number of Oscar nominations garnered by the SF/F/H films could dance with the angels on the head of a pin. There are 7 major award categories: Picture, Director, Screenplay, Actor, Actress, Supporting Actor, and Supporting Actress (these categories receive the most media attention and so have the greatest impact on public opinion, which also translates into \$\$ at the box office). If you assume an average of 5 nominations per category, over 58 years, this results in over 2000 nominations and over 400 winners. Of this huge sum, only the following 20 SF films have ever been acknowledged by the Academy:

* **DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE** (1932) — OSCAR: BEST ACTOR (FREDERIC MARCH)

* **THE MAN IN THE WHITE SUIT** (1952) — NOMINATION: BEST SCREENPLAY (ALEX MACKENDRICK)

* **DR. STRANGELOVE** (1964) — NOMINATIONS: BEST PICTURE, BEST DIRECTOR (STANLEY KUBRICK), BEST ACTOR (PETER SELLERS), BEST SCREENPLAY (TERRY SOUTHERN)

* **CHARLY** (1968) — OSCAR: BEST ACTOR (CLIFF ROBERTSON)

* **2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY** (1968) — NOMINATIONS: BEST DIRECTOR (KUBRICK), BEST SCREENPLAY (KUBRICK AND ARTHUR C. CLARKE)

* **CLOCKWORK ORANGE** (1971) — NOMINATIONS: BEST PICTURE, BEST DIRECTOR (KUBRICK)

* **YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN** (1974) — NOMINATION: BEST SCREENPLAY (MEL BROOKS AND GENE WILDER)

* **STAR WARS** (1977) — NOMINATIONS: BEST PICTURE, BEST DIRECTOR (GEORGE LUCAS), BEST SCREENPLAY (LUCAS), BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR (ALEC GUINNESS)

* **CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND** (1977) — NOMINATIONS: BEST DIRECTOR (STEVEN SPIELBERG), BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS (MELINDA DILLON)

* **THE BOYS FROM BRAZIL** (1978) — NOMINATION: BEST ACTOR (LAURENCE OLIVIER)

* **THE CHINA SYNDROME** (1979) — NOMINATIONS: BEST ACTOR (JACK LEMMON), BEST SCREENPLAY (JAMES BRIDGES), BEST ACTRESS (JANE FONDA)

* **E.T.** (1982) — NOMINATIONS: BEST PICTURE, BEST DIRECTOR (SPIELBERG), BEST SCREENPLAY (MELISSA MATHESON)

* **TESTAMENT** (1983) — NOMINATION: BEST ACTRESS (JANE ALEXANDER)

* **WAR GAMES** (1983) — NOMINATION: BEST SCREENPLAY (LAWRENCE LASKER)

* **STARMAN** (1984) — NOMINATION: BEST ACTOR (JEFF BRIDGES)

* **GREYSTOKE** (1984) — NOMINATION: BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR (RALPH RICHARDSON)

* **SPLASH** (1984) — NOMINATION: BEST SCREENPLAY (BABALOO MANDEL)

* **BACK TO THE FUTURE** (1985) — NOMINATION: BEST SCREENPLAY (ROBERT ZEMEKIS)

* **BRAZIL** (1985) — NOMINATION: BEST SCREENPLAY (TOM STOPPARD AND TERRY GILLIAM)

* **COCOON** (1985) — NOMINATION: BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR (DON AMECHE)

In looking over this list, some things come to mind. First, there are only 2 winners on this list. Second, 2001 wasn't even nominated for Best Picture. Third, more than half of these pictures have been made since 1977, the year of the mega-hits STAR WARS and CLOSE ENCOUNTERS. Most importantly, there are no films on this list from 1952-1964, considered by many to be the most fertile period in the history of the SF cinema.

If you add all the fantasy and horror films that have received nominations, the list doubles and would include everything from PSYCHO and THE EXORCIST to HERE COMES MR. JORDAN and its remake, HEAVEN CAN WAIT. Even at that, though, all these genres combined have only gotten about 60 nominations and 6 Oscars, about 3% of the total figure.

It is apparent, then, that Hollywood did not take SF seriously until Lucas and Spielberg, having grown up with those neglected classics from the 50's, practically re-invented the form and grossed huge amounts of money. So, finally, some attention was paid.

Not, however, a great deal of attention. The voting members, you see, do not wish to appear to be the greedy swine that they are. So, though they churn out formula movies based on the superior work of those filmmakers that allow them to stay hip deep in cocaine, they give the awards to the bullshit "prestige" films in order to convince the public of their artistic integrity. What Hollywood is about is *IMAGE*, which should not come as a revelation to anyone.

To get a better look at the films that have been neglected by the Academy over the years, here is another list of 20 films. It has been compiled by cross-referencing the "10 Best" lists of such writers as Arthur C. Clarke, Brian Aldiss and Harry Harrison, and such film

scholars as Tom Milne and Peter Nicholls, as well as various French critics. In chronological order, here are 20 of the greatest SF films of all time:

- * **METROPOLIS** (1926)
- * **FRANKENSTEIN** (1931)
- * **KING KONG** (1933)
- * **THINGS TO COME** (1936)
- * **THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL** (1951)
- * **THE THING** (1951)
- * **THEM!** (1954)
- * **FORBIDDEN PLANET** (1956)
- * **INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS** (1956)
- * **THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN** (1957)
- * **QUARTERMASS II** (1957)
- * **DR. STRANGELOVE** (1964)
- * **ALPHAVILLE** (1965)
- * **2001** (1968)
- * **SOLARIS** (1971)
- * **A CLOCKWORK ORANGE** (1971)
- * **THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH** (1976)
- * **ALIEN** (1979)
- * **BLADE RUNNER** (1982)
- * **THE ROAD WARRIOR** (1983)

Not one film on this list has won a major Academy Award, and only 3 (all directed by Kubrick) have even been nominated. It should be noted that SOLARIS, ALPHAVILLE (both foreign films), and METROPOLIS (pre-1927) were not eligible for the awards. Still, Hollywood's ability to disregard these films has been an amazing accomplishment.

This year, it seems, there might be a new film to add to this list of neglected masterworks. It is BRAZIL, Terry Gilliam's funny, dark vision of our dystopian future. It is a flawed but brilliant creation, surely one of the most stylistically original films to come along in eons. Gilliam has remade Orwell's "1984" with visual bravado and laughter born of fear.

Unfortunately, that fear extended to the Hollywood studio executives who saw in Gilliam's work only that it was too long and had an unhappy ending. A struggle ensued, as the studio tried to coerce him into butchering his work to meet their Luddite standards. When the film opened to critical acclaim in Europe in its original form, Universal was forced to modify its position. When the film won the L.A. critics award for Best Picture after a limited engagement there, the studio's hand was forced again. After a brief but moderately successful run in NY, Universal finally gave the film a national release. Gilliam succeeded in getting his vision on the screen, but the bitterness he caused certainly played a role in the Academy's subsequent snubbing of his film.

It is interesting, though, that they did nominate *KISS OF THE SPIDERWOMAN* for a host of awards, including best picture. In its stagy and plodding

way, that film explores our need for fantasy and celebrates the role that the movies have played in providing it. It is, however, a static, pretentious load of trash... inferior in every way to Woody Allen's *PURPLE ROSE OF CAIRO*, which addresses the same themes with cinematic brilliance. Needless to say, Allen's film had to settle, like *BRAZIL*, for a token nomination for Best Screenplay.

I am much calmer now, as this outpouring of bile has exhausted my indignation. I have put away those explosives, at least for another year. Perhaps it is best, after all, that Hollywood continue to ignore the creative contributions of SF/F/H films. As Brian Aldiss said, "If the SF cinema is to retain vitality and subversive intent, it must remain a minority taste, and not try to perennially hit the warm heart of Middle America."

So there... but remember to keep your powder dry.



SCENE FROM *BRAZIL*. MRS. LOWRY VISITS HER PLASTIC SURGEON

RING SHOT

by HILBERT SCHENCK

art: Paul Lehr

The little girl stumbled into a thorn bush, whimpered, then stopped walking and wiped her eyes. "Where are we *going*?" she said petulantly. "Where *are* we anyway?"

The stout young man in hunting clothes reached down and hefted his daughter up into his broad arms. "I'll carry you a while, Amy," he said in a low voice. "We're lost, sweetie, but if we keep going on the same compass course, we're bound to run into something."

"Yeh, more woods," said the trimmer, plain-faced young woman in ripped grey slacks and a ski jacket, walking beside him.

"Hey Peg," said her husband, already puffing with the weight of his daughter, "this is Rhode Island. You can walk across the whole thing in two days."

"I knew we should have stayed in that apartment," she snapped back. "It was crazy getting into those traffic jams. No gas. It was stupid!"

Her husband shook his head tiredly. "Don't remake history, Peg. The cops had guns. They told us to go, for God's sake!"

"You've got a gun!" said his wife with a snarl.

David Bidwell quickly yet gently put his daughter back on the ground and straightened up, his round, usually-cheerful face flushed with anger, his hands planted on broad hips. "Great!" he snarled back. "I'm supposed to take on a SWAT team with a thirty-thirty hunting rifle with you and Amy there, huh? Don't be so *stupid*! We never had a choice in any of this."

"We had a choice of getting lost or getting to Westerly!" his wife spat back.

"The map they gave us was useless," said David, but now he spoke more quietly. "Okay, so we guessed wrong in some places and we started with half a tank. Did you want to go into that station with the two guys on the ground and all



the blood on the apron? Did you!"

Peggy Bidwell was about to make another angry retort when her eyes opened wide and she put a trembling hand on her husband's arm. "David," she breathed, "Smoke . . . and close!"

Sure enough, over the next small hill, coming up over the scattered trees and underbrush was a thin column of white smoke, drifting east in a gentle breeze.

David Bidwell looked around, then went to a large rock where he unslung his rifle and carefully hid it among some mossy ferns. "If they don't want us, we'll just leave, but there's no point coming up like we offered trouble." His wife said nothing and Amy, suddenly sensing the tense fright of her parents, seized her father's hand tightly and said nothing more as they walked slowly through the sparse woods toward the rising smoke.

They came in hesitations and pauses over the rise to a clearing with several small outbuildings, a trail bike leaning against a tree, and what appeared to be a prefabricated cabin in the center with the smoke coming from its cinderblock chimney. Sitting on the front stoop was a portly, very old man dressed in a rough tweed jacket, jeans, and wearing a Swedish yachting cap. He was busily cleaning a World War Two Sten sub-machine gun.

He looked up, saw them at once, and sent them a big smile. "Hi there," he called out. "You folks are lost, I suppose?"

His cheerful tone brought them

walking rapidly forward while David smiled and nodded in the most positive gestures he could manage. "You're right, sir. We were in the convoy to Westerly . . . that's our host city in the relocation plan . . . but the traffic got so jammed they set us all off in groups over the back roads. Well . . ." David shrugged, "we just ran out of gas. The maps they gave us were useless since the roads are shut now through most of the towns."

The old man peered professionally down the barrel of his gun, then grinned up at them. "Hell, the Civil Defense honchos in Providence and Washington knew *they* weren't going anywhere," he said cheerfully, "so the maps didn't interest them very much. They've got those underground places right close for their gang." He gave a thin chuckle. "Won't do them a damn bit of good, of course. For once the captain and the officers will be going down in the vessel with the rest of the crew." He sighed and shook his head. "Cold comfort for people as young as you folks."

"Could I have a glass of water, please?" said Amy politely to the old man.

He got to his feet nodding. "You can if you tell me your name. I'm Phillip Stewart Hoskins, but you better call me Uncle Phil, I think."

"I'm Amy Bidwell," said the child directly. "How old are you, Uncle Phil?"

Hoskins gave her a measured look, his small, round eyes twinkling. "If I tell you, Amy, will you tell me if I look that old and then tell

me how old you are?"

"I will if you'll then tell me if I look that old too," said Amy quickly and with a bright smile.

"Done!" said the chuckling old man. "Okay, I'm eighty-one."

Amy looked at him more closely, then tilted her head in deep thought. "Well," she said finally, "you don't look quite as old as Granny, and she's only seventy-nine."

Hoskins roared with laughter, his round cheeks puffing out. "The nicest compliment I've had in ten years," he said to David and Peggy, who were now almost smiling themselves.

"And I'm six-and-a-half," said Amy seriously.

The old man pursed his lips and stroked his pudgy chin. "Funny," he said in a slow, puzzled voice. "I would have guessed seven-and-a-half, if a day. You sure you're counting right?"

The little girl turned at once to her mother. "Are we, mom? I mean, you should know . . .?"

Peggy Bidwell finally saw that they had, through some miracle, stumbled on a friendly haven, and she suddenly laughed out loud, the first time in days. "I guess I *should* know, Amy!" she said, then added, "Mr. Hoskins . . ."

"Uncle Phil, now . . ."

"Yes, well I think Uncle Phil is just saying that you're a very mature girl for your age . . . We're Peggy and David, Uncle Phil."

The old man picked up his gun and cleaning tools and held open the screen door. "Come on in. How

about some orange juice, Amy? Water can be boring, boring, boring."

"That would be lovely," said the girl, now looking around the big central room in wonder, for it contained books at every level and in every crevice. A table and several chairs filled the center of the room while an ancient player piano crouched in one corner and a huge desk covered with papers and the connected parts of a small micro-computer in another, but otherwise there were books everywhere.

Hoskins opened a small door next to the fireplace and carefully put the Sten gun into a narrow closet also containing, the Bidwells saw, several other weapons. "Don't worry about all that ordinance," said Hoskins slamming the door shut and turning to grin at them. "I can easily see that you folks are solid citizens, but on a day like this one, you never know until it's over what might happen or who might come."

He went into the small, lean-to kitchen at the back and soon returned with a big glass of orange juice. As he handed this to Amy he peered sideways at the adults from under thick, drawn eyebrows. "I gather the name, Hoskins, meant nothing to you people?" he said in a tentative voice.

Peggy shook her head at once, but David had been thinking about the slightly-familiar name since the old man had spoken it. Suddenly his eyes went wide and he turned to look carefully at the old man.

"That scientist . . ." he said softly, "the guy who defected to Russia . . . Oh, wow!"

Hoskins beamed at the large young man and turned, as though in a lineup, to show all sides of his puffy face. "Yes, they really made a big thing about it. Actually, a good friend about my age went to Berlin on my passport, dropped out of sight there, and came back using, ah, *other* documents. In any case, I'm afraid I wouldn't have been any safer in Russia. Less safe, if anything, since probably only half of their weapons will detonate properly." He sighed again, then gave them a smile. "Say, how about a beer to charm away these final moments?"

David and Peggy nodded dumbly and when he returned, Hoskins also carried a shoe box along with the beer cans. "Amy," he said, "when my granddaughter, Ruth, came to visit me years ago, she played with this china village. But the rule is, only on the big bed in the little room over there. This is a very fragile village so you mustn't let parts of its knock together."

He shook his head sternly. "I'm afraid some of the cows have suffered serious leg wounds from Ruth's cattle stampedes, but I know that a girl of your advanced age will realize that there is nothing anywhere more placid than small, china cows."

The girl delightedly carried the box into the small room and they heard her exclamations of joy over the china houses, people and livestock packed in layers of cotton.

"Sir, uh, Uncle Phil," said David, "why haven't they found you here?"

Hoskins gestured them to seats around his small, central table, then shrugged as he popped open his beer can. "They weren't looking, I suppose. They assumed I had gone east, to the nasties. People in Washington tend to think the worst about the rest of us."

"Is there going to be a war?" said Peggy, leaning to put a hand on the old man's arm.

Hoskins wrinkled his nose. "I'm not sure that war is what to call it." He got up and went over to his wide desk, then studied a disorderly mass of spread-out papers. "You see, from first launch to warhead separation somewhere over the middle of Canada takes about fifteen minutes . . . Then they have to slow up and maneuver some of the weapons to form the ring in a resonant manner, so maybe six . . . ah, say ten minutes more until the shot is complete. Within ten or fifteen minutes the fires will have coalesced and set the air masses in motion. If counter-launch occurs at, say, minute eight, the resonances will lag a bit, but the Soviets have more trees." He shrugged, his face twisted in contempt and anger. "Say one hour until the earth is dead. Is that long enough to call it a war . . .?"

The young couple stared speechless at his calm, now angry smile, his sharp, twinkling eyes. "The truth won't make you free," said Hoskins slowly, "but maybe it will

help. So listen close and I'll tell you what's going to happen. You've never heard the term, 'ring shot', I suppose?"

David spread out his thick hands in a gesture of guilt. "I'm a programmer in an accounting firm and Peg teaches first grade. I guess we should have paid more attention to what was happening," he said in a lame voice.

"Everybody in the world is going to be repeating that lament pretty quick," said Hoskins drily, "but without a secret clearance you would have never known about it anyway. *Mother Jones* missed it completely and if the *Times* knew, the news didn't fit what they wanted to print.

"Okay, I was a physicist with a specialty in the study of the atmosphere; sort of a glorified and theoretical weather man. A few years ago I published a series of papers on computational and analytical methods, using large-frame computers, to predict what are called 'trigger events' in the atmosphere. The method seemed to have promise in the early prediction of hurricanes and, most especially, in tornado study and warning. Unfortunately," the old man's face hardened and his stained, old teeth clenched, "the method can also lead to designs of nuclear attacks, of which the most terrible is the Resonant Interspaced Nuclear Grouping technique which those insects in Washington with their stupid acronyms have naturally called, the ring shot!"

He stared at them, his face set

and again angry. "When you deploy and detonate fifteen or so warheads, all carried by a single rocket, in a particular sequential, geographic and altitude pattern, you can trigger a hundred-thousand square miles of atmosphere into a single, circular cyclonic pattern. The initial firestorms will join, augment each other, until the entire ring of fire organizes a single, vast weather system. Winds inside this system will exceed two-hundred-miles-an-hour. No living thing inside the ring will be able to withstand the wind-driven flames during such a catastrophe. Concrete, aluminum siding, bricks, everything will burn. A single large missile, so programmed, can devastate a third of this country."

Hoskin's voice had risen in intensity to this final statement while Peg and David stared at him in complete dismay. "They... they wouldn't use a thing like that...?" said David, shaking his big head.

The old man's eyes glinted. "They would if they thought the other side didn't have it. But wait, you haven't heard it all. Listen now! It's important. After the first two parts of my paper had been published, the editor of the journal called me up. He was an old friend and he risked his career to make that call. The people from Washington had seized the manuscripts, working proofs, back issues involving my articles. He told me to run, to go to Zurich and see a particular physicist, another old friend, who now lived there."

Hoskins rubbed his hands as

though to warm him from a remembered chill. "I went that night and that call saved me. I shaved off my beard, my hair too, dressed in my one suit that I never wore, and headed for the airport. The plane was full but I got on first class, used my credit cards. I had never done anything like that before. My wife and I, before she died, always went tourist with people like you three, at a discount, tickets bought weeks ahead.

"The Swiss passport man questioned my picture but I was ready. I let my cheeks sag, my shoulders slump . . . not too hard to do, under the circumstances . . . and said I had lost my hair to chemotherapy, that I was in Switzerland to see specialists."

The old man gave them a confident wink. "He couldn't have been nicer, found a man to lug my stuff, a cab, the whole bit. In Zurich I went to the apartment of my friend and there I learned how my lifelong, peaceful efforts had provided the final keystone to the terrible ring shot and other abominations.

"Listen!" said Hoskins suddenly and intently to them. "We are not without hope, you two! Listen and understand, for faith and resolution may save us when all else fails. And strange and awful as the ring shots may seem to you folks, far stranger events may face us." Somehow his intensity had caught them up and they could only nod in stupefied agreement.

"We made more calculations in Zurich. It was a dreadful few weeks but there could be no doubt. If our

missiles created even a single firing vortex in the Russian heartland while they were producing a comparable pattern over our midwest, the source-sink effect across the globe could set up an intercontinental circulation that would actually eject the atmosphere into outer space, the flow being driven by the huge pressure defects in the rings. Yet only two of these attacks were trivial. Clearly each side will launch many, so any threshold uncertainties in the calculations are of no meaning. The answer is clearly that we will lose our entire atmosphere in a very few minutes after the source-sink phenomenon is established. Understand, the effect is synergic, that is, the pressure imbalance and the ejection rate grow as the atmospheric loss proceeds."

He paused, sighed, and pointed in the direction of the player piano. "On that piano is a recording barograph so that I can know when the pressure decrease begins." He shook his head. "The air loss will be swift, a few minutes at best, but I thought it would be a good idea to get the whole curve on that gadget . . ."

They sat silent until Peg blinked and shook her head, her eyes blank with shock. "Who would read it, Uncle Phil . . . with all the air gone?" she whispered.

His more cheerful smile returned. "A sensible question. Peg, Think of it as a final, gallant puff on the cigarette as the firing squad cocks its rifles . . . or an old man muttering in fear-besotted senility.

But let me continue with my story of Zurich. There was formed years ago in Western Europe a quiet group of men and women, scientists, thinkers, philosophers. As they watched Washington and Moscow sink into wretched posturing and madness they sought ways to slow or change the dreadful business. At first these people identified the very smartest young scholars. They had found sophisticated ways to spot them, through university records, structural analysis of their publications, many other ways, and these young thinkers were then recruited away from high-energy and weapons studies into wholly new paths of research and scholarship, an attempted synthesis of all human activity. Some few were even brought out of the eastern nations and Russia. They hoped, in this manner, to prevent any more so-called breakthroughs in large weapons systems and, at the same time, seek a total and radical solution to the world's fatal problems."

The old man was now thoughtful and his mood was somber. "They did not contact me because I was old, in my seventies, and ideas that underlie such freakish horrors as the ring shot almost always come from the very-bright young, the new PhD.s. But alas, 'almost' is not good enough and when I began to publish my papers on atmospheric triggering, they had men who saw at once what I had not seen. They realized then that their cause was hopeless, that they did not have the resources or abilities to find

everyone in the world who might discover a way to end it."

Hoskins sucked thoughtfully on his beer can. "Once we decided that several northern-hemisphere ring shots would cause the ultimate trigger effect, the group realized they must keep me from the authorities lest I be forced to help produce this final insanity. It was evident to the people in Zurich that both east and west were attempting to achieve the fire-ring first. The group had contacts everywhere and almost unlimited resources. After all, who has more to lose than the very wealthy? They arranged to buy this old hunting place, then work out my 'defection' from Berlin and get me secretly back to the States. But I am only a small part of their salvage efforts . . ."

At this moment the small radio perched on a book shelf that had been muttering along on low volume began to give a thin, steady shriek.

The old man's face instantly became ashen and his hands, that had gestured so firmly and with such angry movements, now simply shook. "How quickly it comes . . ." he gasped. "You see . . . I never really believed it myself . . . in my heart . . ." but then he recovered himself almost as quickly, got to his feet, and walked to the radio to turn it up slightly. The shriek continued for another half a minute and Hoskins, his face now regaining its normal, ruddy color, curled his lips in contempt and disgust. "Who launched first. I won-

der?" he said bitterly. "Let's see how efficiently they'll give us our epitaphs."

The shriek suddenly stopped and a deep, modulated voice came smoothly out of the tiny radio. "Attention. This is *not* a test. The President of the United States has just announced that about seven minutes ago, at least nine large missiles left their launching sites in the Soviet Union. These weapons are aimed at targets throughout the United States. Our forces are now retaliating in overwhelming strength to prevent any further attacks. Everyone listening to this message should go immediately to the center of their dwelling space and as far below ground level as possible. Persons in vehicles . . ."

Hoskins shut off the radio and as he returned to his seat in the sudden, total silence, they all heard Amy get down off the bed in the other room and walk over to the open, bedroom door. She walked slowly and gently for in the hollow of her cupped hands sat a small, china shepherdess in flounced skirt and puffed sleeves and bearing through a tiny hole in her closed hand, a golden wire crook. Amy stopped and looked at them across the room.

"What did Ruth call this lady?" she asked the old man in a serious voice.

Hoskins took a deep, shuddering breath, smoothed back his sparse white hair with a slight tremble, then completely concerned himself with the little girl's question. "Well, Ruthie called her Marie An-

toinette." He gave Amy a cheerful shrug. "That lady was Queen of France and she liked to dress up and pretend she was a shepherdess. I told Ruth that she needed Versailles Palace to keep such a grand lady happy, but that didn't seem to change her mind."

Amy nodded, then turned to go back through the door. "I like Marie," she said in a thoughtful tone. "That's a very good name for such a pretty lady."

Peggy Bidwell's eyes had suddenly spurted tears as her daughter turned to reenter the bedroom and her mouth, indeed her whole face, was now contorted into a silent scream of "Amy!" but the old man had darted out of his seat and over to her side. He seized the young woman tightly in both his arms and urgently pressed his lips to her ear.

"No, Peg! Stop!" he whispered. "Now, if ever, you must be steady! Steadiness is everything. Amy may be our salvation, but you *must* keep her from this!"

Her flood of grief was dammed and softened by the old man's fierce, quiet words and now David also held his wife in his large arms as she snuffled, then rubbed her eyes and blinked silently.

"We are pressed," said Hoskins to them in a tight voice, "but there is time left. And perhaps what I will tell you now is best said at the very end, so there will be no long time to consider and question it."

He seized Peggy's hand in a tight, passionate grip. "You two, teacher and programmer, you must have gone to college and somewhere in

those years you must have heard some philosopher discourse on the nature of reality, and on the relationship between human perception and reality. Now listen! What those people in that brilliant, secret group, in Zurich and elsewhere, have come to believe is beyond imagination and beyond hope! To put it briefly, they have shown a direct, causal relationship between the development of perception and consciousness in self-conscious beings and the increasing complexity of the universe. Once you understand it, the evidence is everywhere! In the dinosaur bones, in meteorites, in the cells of living things. Saying it as simply as possible, as humankind has developed ways of seeing and studying natural phenomena, those phenomena have progressively developed and deepened its very structure. The old question concerning the meaning of the sound of a tree falling with no one near enough to hear it was not trivial, but the truth is grander and even more astonishing. Once nervous, self-conscious being can hear sound, then there is sound from then on. That's how it works!"

He stared sternly at them, then flicked an eye at his watch. David Bidwell had been closely following the old man's words, nodding thoughtfully, but now he shook his head in dismay. "For God's sake, Uncle Phil. Then every time we build a bigger telescope, somebody or something has to put more stuff way out in the sky... masses of stuff! I mean..."

"Exactly!" said Hoskins, pointing a fierce and steady finger at him. "*Exactly* what happens, and there is proof of that too, but we have no time for it."

David continued to shake his head. "All that stuff, all that changing... why? Just because we get clever at studying something? That can't be possible!"

Hoskins shook his head back in sudden anger. "Don't be stupid and claim you know what's possible and what isn't. The favorite cosmological theory today among western, establishment savants, those same men who have also given us this appalling and abominable moment about to come, is that the universe began as a tiny, infinitely-dense speck, smaller than the tiniest speck of dust on this floor and with a lifetime at birth of ten-to-the-minus-forty-fifth of a second. Does that totally incomprehensible, stupidly useless and philosophically banal sort of model please you any better, sir!"

The old man's small, pudgy finger now waved directly under David's large nose, while with his other hand he pointed rigidly at the door to his bedroom. "That child," he said in a hissing, fierce whisper, "has created a whole village, a whole society, on that blanket. If you could take it all from her head... Right now!... the detail of geography, history, social mores, family life, everything, would be beyond words to encompass, yet she is six-and-a-half. Who are you to say what can and cannot happen in the cosmos, when your own

small daughter can already create whole worlds that you cannot possibly enter!"

"None of it makes sense," said David doggedly, but his wife, her eyes now dry and her face set and desperate, seized his arm in a strong grip.

"Listen to him, David!" she said intently. "What else have we got? Listen! My God, *listen!*"

Hoskins nodded in gratitude at her. "If their theory is not true, then all life on earth will end within the next few minutes. But suppose they are right? What happens to an entire, evolving universe when the consciousness that has created it, given it meaning, is suddenly and *totally* eliminated? What?"

He stared fixedly at them until Peggy shook her head, her hands trembling, her face collapsing. "This is all beyond us, Uncle Phil . . ." a lassitude of despair.

Hoskins seized her hand to steady and squeeze it. "No one knows what will happen, Peg. But they have all theorized, those in the group with appropriate specialties, and there were many ideas produced, even during the short time I was with them in Europe. But let me tell you, finally and quickly, about one afternoon in a Zurich park with Jacob Hirschman, for of all of them, I believe he has the deepest insight, the most reliable model."

Hoskins looked again at his watch, then at the barograph, and he spoke carefully. "Hirschman is a philosophical mathematician of the finest sort, younger than I am,

but still old and thoughtful. He had turned his mind to this great paradox of creation and destruction for some time and on my last afternoon in Zurich, as I waited to be secreted back to this house some months ago, I walked with Jacob in the park to watch him feed the pigeons. I asked him there, when we were alone, what he planned to be doing when the ring shots were fired. It was an obvious question that transcended and utterly simplified his dense and mathematical predictions circulated among group members.

"He smiled at me when I asked that, but he answered at once. 'If it comes at night, Phillip, I plan to be reading in my favorite chair some well-loved work. Possibly *War and Peace*, but perhaps not. The book will be selected when the time arrives. He peered at me from large, quiet eyes. 'If you expect to make the transition, Phillip, you must insure that it is as simple and probable as you possibly can. Those crouched in shelters and cellars, their minds choked with red rage, inconsolable grief, and blind terror will have no way to fit into any alternate, more benign, reality. And that reality *must* appear, old friend. The cosmos cannot exist without us. We must, somehow, be fitted in.'

"And during the daytime?" I asked him then."

"Feeding the pigeons, of course,' he said, gesturing at the several dozen birds strutting and pecking here and there. Then he added, 'And having, most impor-

tant of all, very pigeon-feeding thoughts.”

Hoskins stared deeply into each of their faces. “Do you understand what he was saying? You must! We three, and *God be thanked*, greatly helped by Amy, must think *nothing* but pigeon-feeding thoughts from now on! You must seize that final courage in your innermost souls if we are to have a chance of survival. Now, *on your feet*, cheerful, smiling, and if you love each other and your child, sing and dance now from the utter core of your hearts!”

“Amy,” called the old man as he walked over to turn on the player piano, “how would you like to come in here and sing some songs with us at the piano?”

She appeared in a moment at the door, the china shepherdess cradled again in her hands. “Can Marie come too?” she asked.

“Absolutely,” said Hoskins, “but I think you’ll find her voice rather high and squeaky . . . quite hard to hear at all, actually,” he added with a grin.

Amy giggled at this and began a long, slow, sliding walk across the room so that there would be no chance of the china figure suffering a collision or jolt. But the old man stood rock-steady watching her from the piano, his round, ruddy face mild and avuncular in expression and only with the tiniest dart of an eye did he, now and then, catch a glance at the barograph chart or his watch.

Hoskins finally took the small figurine from the little girl’s lifted hands and gently raised it up to set

it well back from the edge of the piano top. “There,” he said, “she can watch, even if she can’t carry a tune. He turned and poked into a large case of piano roll boxes. “Let’s try *Beautiful Ohio*,” he muttered, threading the roll and starting the vacuum motor, then sitting down on the piano stool.

Amy now stood next to him. “I don’t know the words to that, Uncle Phil,” she said.

“They’re right on the roll,” said the old man as the music started, “and I know you must be a speedy reader.”

Amy soon learned to coordinate the printed words moving downward with the tune, and her high, sweet voice drew them all in loudly so that the song ended with a series of cheers and handclaps, mostly from Amy. As the roll rewound swiftly, Hoskins looked over at the barograph, and seeing no change in the steady line, removed the roll and pulled out another one.

“Okay,” he said, “that one was from the farmlands so it must be time for the big city,” and the mandolin-style tinkle of *Sidewalks of New York* filled the room. Their voices rose and fell, following the old song. “I voted for Al Smith,” said Hoskins reflectively during a piano interlude. “Sure wish we could get him back from wherever he went.”

This time during the rush of the rewinding roll, the old man saw that a tiny light he had installed in the barograph case was now glowing. This signalled a statistically-significant one-percent loss in at-

mospheric pressure. Was the wind rising? It was hard to tell with the curtains drawn. He took a deep, involuntary breath.

Amy was now jumping up and down and clapping her hands in complete excitement over the player piano. "What does 'trip the light fantastic on the sidewalks of New York' mean, Uncle Phil?" she cried in delight at him.

"That," said the old man, rising briskly from the piano stool and pointing a finger at her head, "is exactly what you are now going to discover, Amy." As the music began, the old man bowed low before the little girl and took her right hand in his left. "May I have this dance, my lady? he said grinning down at her.

Amy immediately and solemnly curtsied, then grinned back at him. "Yes, but you'll have to show me how," she said.

"This is *Harlem Strut*, written by James P. Johnson and played in this very room for your enjoyment by the composer," said Hoskins cocking his head at Amy. "So, you must strut, just so Amy. . ." and off he went, kicking, strutting and posturing around the table and drawing Amy with him by the hand, but she soon understood the simple, rhythmic steps and danced lightly beside him, kicking and shaking with bursts of laughter.

Around they went, the piano tinkling brightly, Amy now fully mimicking the old man's elaborate, strutting steps as he shouted, "Fingers, Amy, snap 'em! Shoulders, shake 'em! Come on, you two! Amy

and I are showing you how to do the thing. No time for shyness now!"

So David and Peggy started to follow them around, feet tentatively kicking out, fingers starting to snap. "That's it!" said Hoskins beaming at them from across the table. "If Mozart had lived in the Bronx, he would have written *Harlem Strut!* Back straight, Amy! Knees and ankles floppy! Wonderful, wonderful. . . !"

Behind them on the piano the line on the barograph was now visibly turning downwards and a second and then a third light were glowing inside the instrument case, but the two couples now paid no attention, strutting, swaying and grinning. When Amy momentarily pressed her left hand against her ear and said, "My ears feel funny, Uncle Phil," he only strode ever-more-stiffly and kicked with ever-greater exuberance.

"Ears are for listening to *Harlem Strut*, Amy! Snap those fingers, young lady!"

And as the tune neared its end, the tempo began to slow a bit as the pneumatic system of the player piano progressively failed to keep pace with the accelerating decrease in room pressure, but they still danced gaily, swaying and strutting around the room.

"Perfect! Super! Unbelievable!" came the glad cries of a young man who dashed into the room and jerked a set of headphones off his ears while waving a compact super-16 minicam at them. He whirled to gesture wildly at the

other doorways. "Weren't they great! Hey, Pol, I mean, wasn't that something *else!*"

A slim, pretty young woman sitting behind a portable light-control switchboard set up in the kitchen got up while busily rubbing red, streaming eyes. "It sure was!" she snuffled as she pulled off her own headset, then got up and walked into the main room. "Boy, you guys really had me going. Oh, wow!"

She went over and tearily hugged Peggy. "When you broke up in that silent scream as Amy came out of that room with the doll in her hands . . . that was like *heart-rending*, you know?"

Peggy hugged her back and wiped her own tears away. "Yeah, I really got into that story. Well . . . when it's your *own* kid it makes it easy. And Amy was so great . . ." Peggy wiped away another tear and patted her husband's shoulder with a loving gesture.

The young film director had dropped to his knees and seized both of Amy's hands. "You were just totally super, Amy!" he said to her. "The way you picked up on that dancing, watching the Prof, getting into it. Ohhh, it was soooo good!"

Amy beamed delightedly at him. "I loved the dancing part," she said positively. "I'm going to be a dancer when I grow up, you know?"

"Sweetie," said the young man passionately, "this film will kick you off into a great career." He stood up and waved his hand at

two more young men and another young woman who had come in to the room through the other doorways. "We've got a winner! I know it. Absolutely!" He turned to David, Peggy and the old man. "Wow, am I glad I got you people out of that extension acting class instead of using some undergrad acting majors from the campus. This film unit is one of ten in the U.S. already. If our movie makes the first three in that contest, it goes on national prime time. And . . ." he said, swiveling and grinning at them all, "arty, serious shorts are coming back in a big way in movie theatres. Hey, we're all going to be rich and famous!"

On that cheerful note the student film crew packed up the cameras, lights, and other gear and began to load everything into two vans parked outside the house. As he pulled on his hunting coat, David Bidwell gave the old man a slightly-guilty smile. "Uh, Phil," he said, "you wouldn't have any gas in cans, would you? We ran out on the south access road and hiked in. Damn gauge is busted."

"Why sure," said Hoskins, then turned to the young lighting woman coiling her cables. "Hey, Polly, there's a two gallon can of unleaded in the far shed. Drive these folks in your van down to the south access road and stay with them until they get their car going, okay? Take off the air cleaner and pour a little into the carburetor before you crank it," he said to David.

The Bidwells and the film stu-

dents went out of the house talking cheerfully to load the large van, then went rumbling off over the open ground to the south. The unit's director had seemed to be in no rush to follow the rest of his crew, and now he stood at the front door to the big central room, looking across at the old man, his intent face seeming puzzled, almost concerned. "Doc," he said, "you were almost *too* good in that thing, you know? You really caught me by the throat. I mean, the way you kept kicking and strutting, so loose and happy, drawing Amy along. But your face just got firmer, more rigid; that tight, almost-mad smile . . . hey, you defined that moment *totally*, all that joy, terror, hope, death, the whole *bit*, man!"

Hoskins smiled and nodded. "You're kind to say that. It was fun doing it, but I guess it was wrenching too. I was as caught up in that story as anyone. And . . ." he paused, then shrugged as though suddenly catching an afterthought, "it worked, didn't it? Here we are, safe and sound."

The startled director, bewildered by this strange comment, bit his lip then shook his head with a small, embarrassed frown.

"Well yeh, but, I mean, there wasn't ever any doubt, was there Doc? It was just a short film. You know, we had a script . . ."

The young man paused, then said seriously, "Doc, you don't think they might ever be able to do something crazy like that, do you? Like that ring shot, I mean?"

Hoskins shook his head.

"They've been trying for over fifty years, ever since World War Two. Good grief, they've spent more money on splitting atoms than on the space race. Understand, studying the atomic nucleus isn't my physics thing, but apparently there's just no way to get what they call the multiplication factor in an atomic reacting system beyond unity, so you can make more particles than you use up. Old Fermi thought he had it solved when he built a system at Stagg Field, in Chicago, but the thing wouldn't work then and they don't work now. They still aren't sure why, but it has something to do with changing probabilities of fission events as that magic number, one, is approached."

The student director nodded and rubbed his cheek. "Thank the Lord for that," he said fervently. "After doing this story today, oh wow, I mean *nobody* needs ring shots!"

But Hoskins's old face had grown sober in apparent deep thought. "Still," he said with a spurious intensity as he saw how thoroughly his young friend had been drawn into their short, intense dramatic effort, "the sudden removal of the atmosphere raises an array of interesting questions. You see, the seas will boil as the pressure drops, with the tropics starting first since the vapor pressure is high over the warmer water. Yet that sudden cloud cover will prevent the sunlight from warming the surface so there will be an immediate and drastic depression of solar insolation and surface tem-

perature. So you're going to wind up with steam and ice, but . . . in what proportion? Or maybe all of one or all of the other . . .?"

He had now taken on his lecturing tones and was looking musingly over at his small computer system with its keyboard, TV monitor, and disc drives spread about. "Interesting problem, actually. Quite challenging . . ."

But the old man's clever acting spoof had drawn in the young man completely. "Doc," he said, almost in tears, "no, no! Don't mess with that stuff. Hey, don't use that thing on the table to do those numbers! You and Amy dancing, that's the only way to deal with weird, crazy, horror stuff! You've done it, Doc . . . beautifully . . . don't, don't . . .!"

Hoskins stepped forward and clapped the young director on the shoulder. "You're absolutely right," he said in a laughing voice. "Also," he added, waving toward his computing system, "I have a date tonight with a Pac Man Nine disc . . . you can gobble ghosts throughout N dimensions."

The young man, finally realizing that the old professor had sucked him almost effortlessly into their holocaust fantasy once again, shook his head ruefully. "Wow, you should have done this acting stuff instead of physics, Doc." He paused, then looked over at the piano. "Listen, can I take that barograph for a couple of days? I want to cut away from you and Amy dancing to the graph paper on that thing and end the film with

that line going right down towards zero." He walked across the room to lift the instrument off the player piano.

"What about the visual background behind the barograph?" asked Hoskins as they walked out the front door.

The director shrugged. "No problem. I want to go in tight on the chart, then show the pen dropping steadily and quickly, maybe a twenty-second shot in all. I might iris down on the pen and fade the light too.

The old man nodded. "Okay, I'll ride over to the school tomorrow and give you a hand with that. We can disconnect the arm inside there and move the pen by hand while you shoot. What about the sound while the barograph goes to hell in a hack?"

The student slammed the door of his van and grinned out the window at the old man. "Just more of *Harlem Strut* from your tinny, out-of-tune player piano, doc, maybe going slower and slower. I mean, after that dance with Amy, *what else?*" He gave a big wave and roared the engine. "See you tomorrow," he cried as the van backed away.

Professor Hoskins waved in return, then turned to go back into his retirement house deep in the woods of Rhode Island. As he entered the big, central room, he saw at once the small, china figure of a shepherdess sitting on top of the silent player piano.

He walked to the piano corner, bowed, and said quietly, "Marie,

our dance I think," then fitted *Harlem Strut* again onto the pick-up roll. When the bright, unremittingly-cheerful music started, he lifted the china shepherdess firmly but gently in his closed left hand and set off in a strutting, finger-

snapping, posturing dance around his center table, humming and muttering to himself, while on his round old face could now be seen an extraordinarily happy expression of complete and total satisfaction.

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Under Gaming

by Stefan Jones

Welcome to the first installment of **Under Gaming**, a column about gaming which will be appearing with some regularity in **IF**. The title comes from my dissatisfaction with the “other” SF magazine gaming columns. Mere descriptions and light-weight reviews of an odd game or two do not do justice to the genre. I will try to delve a bit deeper, perhaps getting a bit philosophical and probably a bit arrogant and curmudgeony. I’ll begin with a rough history of gaming, as a prelude to where I think the genre is going.

Over ten years ago, SF magazines began carrying ads for an unusual breed of game: military simulations. Though they were largely set in historical times (with World War II and the Napoleonic Wars the seeming favorites), some of these games had a science fictional theme. Boardgames all, these simulations tended to be grand, strategic exercises. They attracted a small but enthusiastic group of fans who held their own conventions, but had little crossover with the SFannish mainstream . . .

Little crossover, that is, until two games changed the entire gaming in-

dustry. The first was produced by Metagaming Concepts, the first game company to concentrate solely on SF&F themes. The game, released in 1979, was **Ogre**, a tiny “Microgame” that was easy to learn and play. **Ogre** set the stage for an explosion of science fiction and fantasy game titles, many of which were far easier to learn than the heavy simulations of the past.

The second revolutionary game was, of course, **Dungeons & Dragons**. It was the first commercially produced **role-playing game**. Instead of taking the rather abstract role as a leader of vast armies, each player took control of a single, highly-detailed “character,” a fictional person described by numerical representations of a series of attributes (intelligence, combat ability), etc.). The concept, if not totally original, had come of age in **D&D**. Clones, supplements, new games, and playing aids burst the sluice gate; within eight years **D&D** became a household word and had its own Saturday morning cartoon. Dozens of other games are available on subjects ranging from rabbits to time travel to post-holocaust survivalism.

Nearly every gamer I know also

reads SF and fantasy. Nearly every fan I know has tried role-playing and other types of games. Many science fiction authors have participated in gaming projects, ranging from tie-ins to popular books (*Ringworld*, *Thieves' World*, etc.) to games designed by authors themselves. Gaming suites, and even organized gaming, seem mandatory at SF cons.

But . . . how "legitimate" is the gaming genre? Is running a game the same as writing a novel? Should there be, as suggested by an article in the first issue of **The Space Gamer** over a decade ago, a Hugo Award for games? Though gaming is one of my favorite hobbies and designing gaming material a remunerative sideline, I can't imagine a gaming Hugo . . . yet.

One type of gaming, the board game, has no literary pretensions. Board games simulate battles, economic conflicts, and occasionally the rise and fall of galactic empires. Their story is told by numbers and distribution of units, stockpiles of resources, and occasional elaborations such as morale levels. They are abstract and cool, and require more intellectual effort to learn and play. Board games, even the SF&F brands, have fallen on hard times lately. Kids raised on video games don't have the patience to learn them. They head for the RPGs (Role Playing Games) without giving board games a second thought; thus we move to the hottest part of gaming today.

To be blunt, the vast majority of role-playing games are crap. The fantasy universes (with notable exceptions such as M.A.R. Barker's "Tekumel" and Greg Stafford's "Glorantha") of FRP (Fantasy Role Playing) games are often rehashes of Tolkien with liberal doses of oriental mythology and cutesy fannish aliens thrown in. Science fiction campaigns are almost always set

in a "sci fi" universe of galactic empires, space mercenaries, and starship traders. Modern sophistication in these games is having a giant megacorporation be the enemy rather than an alien horde. Many game masters (the fellows who run the adventure and determine the behavior of background characters) are convinced that the only way to play is to purchase "modules" (pre-planned adventures) and adopt every new character class and monster that surfaces in gaming periodicals. Individual creativity is exchanged for a consumer mentality.

Because it is the *players* — this includes the all-important GM (Game Master) as well as the ordinary folk running the protagonists in a game adventure—who bring a game to life, who make an adventure what it is, it is they who are the true indicators of the state of the art of gaming. If Hugos were to be given for gaming, it could be argued that players would be the nominees. Alas, the players too seem to lack spunk. Characters are modeled after stereotypical space mercenaries, barbarian warriors, and wizards. Heck! Many players consider their characters to be little more than *units*—for all intents and purposes, they are playing a win-or-lose wargame. The attitude most players have in these games—and therefore the nature of game adventures—can be described, quite simply, as juvenile. The *A-Team* and Japanese cartoons about robots that turn into dump trucks are often more sophisticated.

Whoa there! Calm down, fella. (Sound of a forehead cracking against the document ledge of a PC keyboard.) Ah, that feels better. Though I am often disgusted with the state of gaming, its true purpose (thrills, fun, and—in the case of role-playing—an emotional escape valve), must not be subverted to

literary pretensions. A gaming Hugo would only confuse the situation.

Though conventional gaming will be around for some time, I can see it being overtaken as the "leading edge" of gaming by a strange newcomer—the computer game. I DON'T mean "video" or "arcade" games when I say computer games. Arcade games made and killed the home computer market a few years ago. They are light entertainment, the electronic equivalent of picking at scabs or popping the little bubbles in plastic packing sheets. The computer games with real potential are best represented by titles such as **The Seven Cities of Gold, Mule and Balance of Power**. They are *deep* games.

Deep computer games have a lot to them. A lot of detail, a lot of playability, a lot of options. They use the power of the computer to give the illusion of the "endlessness" that makes role playing games so appealing. An example: the New World generation system in **The Seven Cities of Gold**. This is a nifty exploration game: the player plays a Columbus or Magellan-like character charting and exploiting the Western Hemisphere. The flipside of the game disk is equipped with a computerized map of North America. Terrain, native villages (including Inca and Aztec cities) and special features (gold mines, the Grand Canyon, etc.) are all laid out in nice graphic form. When the adventurer has "played out" the real Western Hemisphere... he can make a new one. A sophisticated continent generation program is included with the game. Though random numbers determine the exact layout of the lands beyond the Atlantic, various rules keep things logical. Mountains come in chains, villages appear on river banks, and the river systems run

from mountain to the sea and not vice versa. The world thus created is logical and consistent. Because the player's job is to explore it without running out of food or getting lost, it has "meaning" to the player, rather than being a chunk of random real estate.

Given the speed, graphic power, and huge memories of the new breeds of game computer (the Amiga and Atari ST computers), we can look forward to some really great stuff in the future. Imagine a world and civilization generator. Given sufficient elements that can be varied, plus good rules to eliminate silly results, very "real" worlds and aliens could be created. Such worlds could change with time: seasons would cycle, civilizations wax and wane, governments bubble with intrigue. One would create the world, set up the rules, and start the clock.

Another important part of a good game is interactivity. I suppose the ultimate in this is the ability to "talk" with game characters. Though we can't expect a mere game to pass the Turing test, making conversation a useful, enjoyable part of a game is quite possible. Giving each character in a game a personality via an *Eliza*-like program (*Eliza* is a program that simulates a psychiatrist; it picks key words out of inputted sentences and uses them in replies—the "counseling session" thus simulated can be unnervingly realistic) is quite possible.

One more element that has to be added to computer games to make them competitive with conventional role playing is to make them multiplayer. This is difficult. Home computers are essentially one-user devices. There is, however, a model we could imitate to solve this problem. This will be the topic of my next column.

MARCHPLATEAU

by ROBERT THURSTON

art: Vincent DiFate

Day 1

This isn't my first day on March-plateau. In this cage. Guess it's a cage. It has cylindrical bars, but

they're transparent. Sometimes they catch the light. Then it looks like they've got layers of water, in gentle waves, inside them. My



mother used to have lamps that had gently-lapping water trapped in their bases.

Although I'm dating this entry Day 1, I've actually been here a long time. Weeks. Longer maybe. I hate trying to organize my thoughts for a journal. But I've got to record something.

My name is Richard Treskitte. I was abducted from Earth by space travelers from Marchplateau who brought me here and put me on

having a barbecue but none of them did anything. New Yorkers are like that. Hard to get their attention unless you've got a real show business sense or a Saturday Night Special in your hand. I started to scream but an alien pressed a three-quarter-sphere against the skin of my arm and I passed out immediately. I woke up on their ship, which looked like the inside of an Earth space capsule but bigger. One of the aliens told

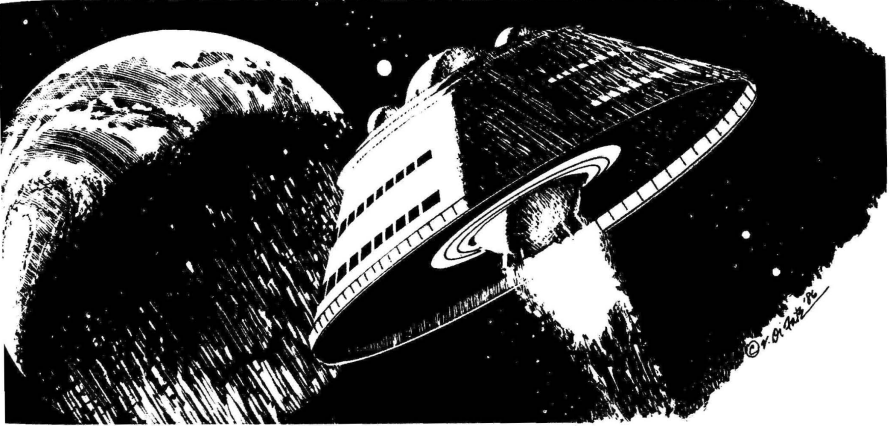


exhibit. This might be a zoo. Maybe not. The planet's name sounds like Marchplateau in their language, a language which isn't much different in sound, syntax, and grammar from my own. This place could be a museum, I guess. Maybe I'll soon be pickled in some odorous liquid.

Marchplateauians came down to Earth in a spaceship. To the roof of my building, actually. There was a bunch of people on a nearby roof

me in accented English that they were taking me to their home planet and I shouldn't worry. I asked why they'd kidnapped me. I was just an ordinary guy, why me? I said. He just ran a spaceship, he said, don't ask him.

So they brought me to this luxury cage. I think I'm being studied. Observed, at least. A lot of Marchplateauians pass by and through my cage. None of them tell me any-

thing about why I'm here. I can't figure out what they're looking for. I'm exactly like them. They're like me. Frank, apparently my keeper, or chief scholar, is a good deal like me.

They look human. Faces arranged the same way as Earth-people's. Ditto bodies. I can see no difference between a Marchplateau man and an Earthman. A Marchplateau woman and an Earthwoman. They have woman's liberation here, too, so I have to be careful about nomenclature. Marchplateauperson?

Marchplateau itself looks an awful lot like Earth. Overcrowded cities, pollution. Jeans. Even designer jeans, though with different names sewed or applied on their pockets. Bad plays on their Broadway, the usual movies. Cars. Trees, TV. Prepackaged foods, fast-food chains. How could fast-food chains develop independently on two different planets? A heavy question. They got junk mail. No cockroaches, though. Haven't seen any cockroaches.

What differences there are, don't amount to much.

I'd like to get away. Escape. I'm lonely. I'd like companionship. I'd like a woman. I'd like to figure out how you organize a journal.

Day 2

A Marchplateau tailor measured me for a suit today. He wrote each of my measurements down in a notebook with dogeared pages. After, he chewed on a pencil and stared at me.

"What'd you learn about me?" I said, thinking he, like all my other captors, was studying me.

"What's new to learn? I'm a tailor. They told me to fit you for a suit. What you're wearing now, small wonder."

Day 3

My new suit is brown, made of a soft material between velvet and chamois. Lapels and pocket linings are darker than the body of the suit. There are epaulets on the jacket shoulder. Like the Mao jacket that came and went so quickly years ago. Maybe there was a Marchplateau Mao.

Frank told me to wear the suit when I have visitors. Anytime else I can select from my own wardrobe. I always sleep in the nude, which I hope annoys some of them.

Day 4

The suit makes me look more like them. They all, men and women, have epaulets on the shoulders of their clothing. Not just jackets and suitcoats. Dresses, shirts, and blouses, too. And raincoats, but then they belong on raincoats. Before they gave me my own suit, I didn't notice their epaulets. Unless my new suit has set a new style.

Some of my visitors stare at me through rectangular glass partitions all along the walls of my cage. Other visitors enter my cage and give me close-up onceovers. A few write stuff down on papers attached to clipboards. But most of them are just sightseeing, I guess.

Anything gives these clowns a thrill. Using the toilet in the corner of the cage makes the outside peeping toms laugh and cheer. I've gotten to like it, even expect it. I wonder if Marchplateau toilets are always in living room corners, if Marchplateau families applaud when one of their number uses it. They must get a lot of laughs from Pampers.

I just realized—that's where prisons keep their toilets, in the corners of cells. Don't like thinking of that.

Frank always sails in here carrying a clipboard, just like the more scholarly of my visitors. On him, though, it looks like a weapon. He's my most frequent visitor. I doubt he's really named Frank. I think the Earthstyle names on Frank and some of the others are meant to make me feel comfortable. Frank is tall and rugged-looking but something of a sophisticate, the sort of intellectual who camps out or climbs the occasional mountain.

"You people enjoy studying me?" I asked him today.

"Some of us. Others don't. They feel we should be studying an outstanding representative of your race, culture, and species. A leader or an achiever."

"You really know how to hurt a guy, Frank."

He looked pleased by that remark. He wrote it down on his clipboard paper.

Later he told me he was working against the termination of the study. The word termination stuck in my throat like a clump of food.

I applied the Heimlich maneuver to my fear and asked what were the odds that the study would be terminated and, if terminated, would the subject of the study also be terminated. He said he didn't know. It was all based on finances and diverted funds.

He won't tell me the purpose of the study. Perhaps Marchplateau wants to invade Earth or maybe they're just doing an objective analysis of alien life. But how could their findings be fruitful? It'd be just like analyzing themselves.

Day 5

This journal's beginning to look like the work of a madman. *Diary of a Madman* by Guy de Treskitte. Anybody reading this might be thinking I'm just a loony in an Earthbound snake pit. Not so, Potso. I am real. Marchplateau is real. Even Earth is real. I was really abducted by aliens. I've probably been listed in the missing-persons column of the *Sunday Daily News*. I am really living in a luxury cage. With a real toilet in the corner, the force of whose flushing could power Indianapolis overnight. I even have my own TV set. There's more violence on Marchplateau TV. Makes it more watchable.

I'm not insane. Up till now my life's been disgustingly normal. Well, I was over thirty and unmarried, but that's hardly deviant nowadays. For God's sake, I was an accountant!

Day 6

Now there's a woman in my cage

with me. What are they up to? She says her name is Daisy. She too was abducted from Earth. She says. They've been keeping her in a separate cage. She says.

Seems like a setup. I don't mind, though. She's terrific in bed, so should I complain? We had a swell time last night. I didn't even mind the Marchplateauians outside the window laughing and cheering.

Still, I'm not sure she's *really* an Earthwoman. Her "memories" of Earth seem convincing, and her English pronunciations are quite good. But then, so are those of the Marchplateaupeople.

"It's only logical to think I'm one of them," she said this morning after I expressed my doubts. "A ringer. I'm not sure about you either, buster. But, look here, I've been too lonely to care about such technicalities."

"If you're a ringer, maybe they're trying to gain further control over me."

"Why would they want *more* control? They got enough already."

"Maybe you're a Marchplateau spy."

"But I'm not. Heck, buster, I'm a social worker from Pittsburgh. Why would they want to play such complicated tricks on a social worker and an accountant?"

"You know, you're fairly sensible. For a ringer."

"So are you, ringer. So let's forget that sort of crap."

But I can't forget it. I want to know if she's a ringer. On the other hand, she does have a long, slim body and she wears her blouses

tantalizingly open, and she has a pretty enough face with a bit too much chin, but who cares about chin when you got love?

Day 7

Frank was surprised that Daisy and I had so many doubts about each other. No tricks were being pulled, he said, it was merely worthwhile to the study to bring us together. We are both Earth-people, he vowed. We said we didn't know how we could possibly believe him.

"Well, how about clues?" he said. "Any clues you can use to identify yourselves to each other—things we Marchplateauians couldn't possibly know, for instance."

"I don't know what you know or don't know," I said.

"Then accept each other on faith."

"Don't know about that, but I'm willing to continue the arrangement until I'm sure."

"Am I just a convenience to you then, Richard?" Daisy said. The odor of feminism was heavy in the air, so I replied: "No, no, Daisy, it's not that at all."

"Okay if it is. I'll bide my time. Or fall in love with a Marchplateauian. Frank's cute."

"I'm taken."

"The cute tall ones always are. You know, Frank, the one thing that really bugs me about Richard is his name. Richard Treskitte. I keep wanting to get myself some soft French cheese and spread it all over him."

"It's a legitimate name," I said,

defensively.

"So you say. At least Daisy Martin has a solid Earth ring to it."

"Too solid, too American pie. The right ring for a ringer. Just the sort of alias a Marchplateauian would dream up. My name'd take too much imagination."

"We have a high degree of imagination," Frank said. "We could easily invent imaginative names."

"But why?" Daisy said. "Why be too good? That'd be a dead giveaway."

"You are both authentic," Frank said. "Believe me, please."

"Methinks the lad protests too much," I said.

"A misquoting of Shakespeare," Frank said.

"You know Shakespeare? Maybe you're the earthling," Daisy said.

"No, we're reading Shakespeare these days. A volume of the bard's work was appropriated on our most recent trip to Earth. Our first printing of the tragedies is a number-one best-seller now. Such wonderful stuff! The language, so rich and melodic, not at all like what you two speak."

"That's a mean-spirited thing to say, Frank," I said.

"I thought it might look good in your journal, Richard."

I wanted to give up right then. What good is keeping a journal if they're going to read it? Are you with me on that, Frank?

Day 8

I wasn't going to write anything more in the journal, then I realized it might be the only record of me

left. It'd preserve me. I want to be preserved. Even in formaldehyde, Frank? That would seem to be your kind of joke. Whoever reads to the end of this sentence will be consumed in instant flames, if he is Frank. All others may proceed.

I told Daisy today I was fond of her. She strolled around the cage, examining furniture, without replying. She touched my genuine leather reading chair. I felt uneasy. I knew she realized it was *my* chair.

"I had a chair like this in my cage, too. It had cigarette holes in its arm. I miss it. I'm glad you're fond of me, Richard."

"I think I'm in love with you."

"You know, your whole decor's better than they stuck me with. Chauvinist Marchplateauian pigs. This is a cheerful cage. Even your TV reception's better. Mine was—"

"Daisy, I said I'm in love with you."

"I heard you. You want me to respond in kind. Okay, Richard Treskitte (you sure about the name?), I love you too."

I rushed to her, intending an embrace.

"Daisy, I'm so—"

"One thing. The truth. I'm not an Earthwoman. You were right, I'm a Marchplateau spy."

I recoiled from her, lost all desire to touch her. She laughed. A lot of scorn in that laugh.

"You fell out of love real quick there, Richard. No, I'm not a spy and not a native and now let's talk about splitting the housekeeping duties. Also, I want you to look

away when I use the toilet.”

“You let all those creeps out there watch you.”

“Can’t do anything about them. It’s scientific for them. For you it’s voyeurism.”

Our viewers outside the glass were staring at us with peculiar interest. I think they suspected a fight brewing. I sulked instead. I think they enjoyed that just as well.

Maybe Daisy was right. Maybe I was just faking the love. I don’t know. If I’m not in love with her now, I think I could eventually fall for her. What do you think, Frank?

Day 9

The English language is sweeping Marchplateau, Frank says. It’s become a second language for most citizens. He said that Marchplateauians tend to top off quickly on fads and that this’d pass. Maybe I’m a fad that’ll soon pass. I must escape. You didn’t read that, Frank.

Day 10

I escaped. *We* escaped.

I found the key to the cage in my suit pocket. Maybe Frank, reading yesterday’s entry, decided to slip it there. I’d say thanks, Frank, but that’d mean we’d been captured again. Or that his successor is reading this. Successor, at the end of this sentence you will be turned into a frog.

At first Daisy didn’t want to go.

“It’s a setup,” she said. “They’ll just reel us in later.”

“So what? Maybe we’ll outwit them.”

“No way.”

“Well, I don’t care if it’s a setup. I’m going.”

“Me too, then, You got a good point there.”

We escaped from the cage and the compound easily. There was nobody anywhere near us.

The compound, we found out, was smack in the middle of a city. With no concept of where to go, we wandered the streets. People passing us paid little attention. We were dressed like them, looked like them. At first we stayed out of their way, walking along the edges of curbs, crossing the street when there were too many people on our side. Most of the passersby seemed to be speaking English. We relaxed a bit.

I noticed very little difference between Earth and Marchplateau. Trees were trees, buildings were architecturally the same, sidewalks were bright green but were made out of cement. I saw several five-wheeled cars but they could have been Japanese.

In a clean shopping center where all of the stores had brown awnings, we found a glitzy store devoted to Earth objects. Its window display seemed kind of random. Toward the front of the window was a pile of Al Jolson records. Then, of course, a selection of Shakespearean plays, plus a Marchplateauian interpretation of his works. There was a bunch of jewelled and nonjewelled barettes, the center one showing a flat plastic smiling dog. Pictures of Lillie Langtry, colored by hand. Videocassettes of kung fu movies. A

lot of other items I can't now recall.

"There don't seem to be any electronic games," Daisy commented.

"Maybe they forgot to steal batteries."

We discovered you could ride in Marchplateau buses without paying. Since our feet were aching, we took a few joyrides. We rode by many signs, stores, and objects that were obviously influenced by their thefts of Earth culture. I wondered if some of the Earth items derived from their study of Daisy and me. I hoped so.

As we got off a bus, a group of people surrounded us and suggested we come with them. We thought we were caught for sure, but the people turned out to be dissidents who had recognized us. They took us to an apartment where we could stay the night. I was glad of that, I couldn't have rode or walked much more. They said the apartment was safe for only a day and we'd have to be on our own again after that. They said a massive search for us had been launched. They apologized for not being more helpful. I told them they'd been quite helpful.

The fed us well, just like back at the compound. Everybody on Marchplateau seems concerned that we eat well. They tried to explain their politics, but I was too tired to comprehend and not very interested anyway. Earth politics, Marchplateau politics, all the same to me.

They left us alone in a bedroom. Daisy fell asleep and I've been writing in the journal ever since. I'm

in a quandary. I can't tell if Daisy is a real Earth woman, if Marchplateau's a setup. I only know who I am. I want to know more than that. Knowing who you are's not enough. You have to know someone else. I don't like being disturbed like this. These guys have screwed me up good. Even if I get back to Earth I'm not going to be the same guy I was. I'm going to think a lot about my experiences here. I'm going to think a lot of what a creep I've been, trusting in everything I saw, believing everything was real and somehow worthwhile so long as I accepted it. Now, even if I accept such things, I won't know if they're real. Worse, if they're real, I won't know whether or not to accept them. I'm really tired, I guess, to be worrying about stuff like this. I almost hope you're reading this, Frank, even though I devoutly hope you explode when you finish this sentence.

Day 11

The dissidents took us to a downtown spot and dropped us off. Their vehicle was a kind of van, again with five wheels. They acted strangely, whispered a lot to each other. I thought I heard the word sabotage a couple of times. When they said goodbye, they also said they were sorry they couldn't do more for us. Daisy asked if we could join them. Three of them answered no very quickly.

"I want to touch something and know what I'm touching is real," Daisy said after we'd walked for a

while.

"I know what you mean. It'd even be nice to feel pain."

"I don't want to go that far, lover."

We walked around the city like sightseers on the last day of their trip, too bleary-eyed to be as interested as they feel they should be. Nobody in the streets paid us much attention. At midday we had lunch, having found out from our rescuers that restaurants in the city were subsidized by the government for the convenience of the citizens, and that lunches were free. Halfway through a rather good meal I realized that perhaps the essential difference between Earth and Marchplateau was that on Marchplateau there is such a thing as a free lunch.

After some aimless post-lunch strolling, we turned a corner onto what appeared to be a darker street. It was a moment before I realized that the darkness was caused by the smoke clogging the street ahead of us. People scurried left and right, emerging from the smokescreen like apparitions. Daisy and I broke into a run, glad to have something to investigate. A few steps later we discovered that the smoke was coming from the windows of a burning building.

"What is it? What's happening?" I hollered to a passerby.

"It's the orphanage. The orphanage's on fire. The children, they're trapped. It's awful."

"Where's the fire department?"

"I don't know. I heard—heard there's been a terrible crash on the

boulevard. A pileup. Several fire-trucks involved. Some say sabotage. But I don't know."

I thought of our dissidents and wondered if setting fire to an orphanage was their idea of a good protest.

"Why are you running away?" I grabbed the man's arm to keep him from running further up the street. "Why isn't anybody doing anything? Why is everybody running away?"

"Let me go. I don't want to die."

"You're out here, not in there. What are you afraid of?"

"The orphanage, it's built—the building next to it, that's the munitions works, the explosives factory. It could go up any minute. Let me go."

I let him go. Like almost all the people around us, he scampered to some safe place.

Thicker smoke was now pouring out of the orphanage's windows. Flames licked at the buildings on both sides of it. There was no sign indicating which of these buildings was the explosives factory. I could hear the children's faint frightened screams.

"Why doesn't anybody do something?" Daisy said.

"They are. They're running away."

"But the children. Listen to the children."

I knew I had to do something and wondered why my legs seemed suddenly made of lead.

"Daisy," I said, "get to a safe place. I'm going in there."

I didn't wait for her response. I

started running toward the burning orphanage. I guess I shouldn't have been surprised that Daisy ran there with me. I suspect she'll always do the ornery thing.

We were shoulder to shoulder as we pushed through the orphanage's massive front doors. Inside, there was a lobby presenting few obstacles to us. The fire was in the upper stories of the building. None of it had reached the lobby yet. A few wisps of smoke seeped from between elevator doors, crept down the main staircase. It all looked no worse than people just out of sight sneaking cigarettes.

I began taking the steps of the main staircase three and four at a time. Daisy kept pace. By the second floor the smoke had become heavier and the children's screams louder.

"Can you figure out where they are, the children?" I screamed to Daisy.

"The next floor, I think. Toward the front."

As we reached the top of the next staircase, flames licked at our ankles for the last few steps. The third floor corridor was nightmarish, fire all around us. The edges of the hall rug were smoldering. Corridor furniture seemed decorated by tiny wisps of flame. A landscape on the wall depicted a calm Marchplateauian country town just as it was catching fire.

"All the sounds seem to be coming from there," Daisy shouted, pointing down the corridor. As if the fire had heard her, it sent new massive flames across the hallway.

Daisy and I went into a running crouch and, holding our breaths, began zigzagging down the hall toward the sound of the children's screams.

We got through the main body of flames and into a pocket of clearer air. At least it was breathable. We were near the end of the corridor. A window in front of us revealed an almost empty street down below, empty except for a small party of onlookers who perhaps didn't know that the building next door was an explosives factory. I wondered briefly if I should call out to them. Then I realized they were standing there calmly, listening to children scream, and I knew I really didn't care whether or not they went up with us.

The screams came from both sides of us. We simultaneously realized there were two groups in two facing rooms. I nodded toward one, and Daisy started toward it while I went to the other. I grabbed for the doorknob, a goldplated object which itself seemed to have a distorted miniature fire going on just beneath its surface. As I touched it, I knew a split second ahead that it was a stupid move. The metal was hot from the fire and it burned the three fingertips of mine that made contact with it. I quickly pulled my hand away from the knob. I felt the pain, I know, but I was able to ignore it. I started heaving myself against the door. I had no idea how one batters down a door with one's shoulders, having seen only padded actors on

the screen thrust themselves at what undoubtedly were plywood doors. This door just might have been made of plywood, for it gave before my first heave. It didn't quite open but I'd nearly split it down the middle.

I looked back briefly at Daisy, her hand wrapped in cloth, opening her door by its knob. It occurred to me that I could have thought of that, but I had no time to change plans and was in fact in the middle of flying at the door again. It gave way this time and I stumbled into the smoke-filled room.

Coughing, I called out to the children. They began screaming louder and I located them in a corner of the room, untouched as yet by the fire. They huddled together, like refugees in a war photograph, their faces smudged, their eyes teary, their voices hoarse. They were little kids, all of them, not a single one more than four or five years old. Quieting them down with a shout, I instructed them to link hands. They responded quickly, obviously used to discipline. I grabbed the smallest child, a tiny girl, and held her in my left arm. With my free hand, I took the hand of the tallest boy and led all of them across the burning smoky room.

In the hall we met with Daisy and her group of kids. Somehow we managed to get ourselves down the corridor, just narrowly avoiding the threatening flames, then raced down the stairs to the lobby and the street. Outside, the smoke had become nearly as thick as it had been inside the orphanage. I

went into a choking fit from the lack of fresh air that I'd been anticipating in the rush downstairs.

Herding the children in front of us, we ran across the street and found fresher air. Suddenly people materialized from nowhere to help us with the children. As we reached the sidewalk, there was a sudden clangor of bells and sirens, followed quickly by a long parade of firetrucks careening around the nearest corner and coming to comical silent-movie stops in front of the orphanage. I stared at them incredulously. So did Daisy.

"It's almost as if they were just waiting there, just around the corner," Daisy said angrily.

"Would they just wait there and let children burn?" I asked.

She shrugged. I didn't want to think about it. Out of breath, my lungs aching, my legs ready to collapse from trembling, my fingers beginning to throb with intense pain where they'd been burned, I felt really good. After days of confinement and our short time of fruitless wandering, after years of safe living before my abduction, I felt good. We'd acted heroically, Daisy and I. I'd never expected to act heroically. Ever. I always thought I'd stay inside living quarters, behind desks, in my vehicles, in other people's vehicles, on public transportation, anywhere where I wouldn't even see the threat of danger at a distance, much less participate in it. I always knew I wouldn't go to war, I never thought I'd run into a burning building. I should have been like

the Marchplateauians I'd seen in the street. I should have been running away.

All of a sudden I felt frightened. I had really done it, hadn't I? I thought. Even as I thought it, I noticed the children seemed to be disappearing, taken over by the suddenly-appearing adults who were now taking charge, who were taking the charge away from us. I hadn't even looked closely at any one of the children, had no idea what they had looked like, cannot now remember a single detail of a young face. It was like watching the accomplishment itself vanish right in front of my eyes.

I turned around and looked back at the orphanage. Streams of water were pouring into it from the fire-trucks. Firemen had the situation well in hand. A crowd was beginning to gather on our side of the street.

"Nobody seems afraid of the explosives factory now," I remarked to Daisy.

"Maybe there never was any danger."

"I'm beginning to wonder."

"I think we've been used."

"I know. This whole thing could easily have been staged. But the fire itself was real. I felt it."

"Such things can be staged, too."

"I suppose so."

A fireman came to the crowd and began to force the front line backwards.

"The factory can still go up!" he shouted. "There's still danger!"

"You think he overheard us?" I asked Daisy.

"It's like we're the ones he's trying to convince."

"Let's get out of here."

"I'll go for that."

After we'd walked a few steps, a well-groomed pretty woman came up to us, said she was from a newspaper and had pictures of us as heroes and would we grant her an interview. Daisy told her to get lost. She said newspeople never get lost. Daisy told her to learn. She stayed with us a while longer, asking incessant questions to which we didn't respond, then did manage to get lost.

"But why would they stage something like that, even for us?" I said after the newswoman had left.

"I haven't a notion."

"Staged or not, they were placing children in danger."

"Maybe it wasn't that dangerous. Maybe they weren't children. Maybe none of it was real. Maybe they used simulacrum or holographs with substance. Maybe the fire was a special effect."

"It burned my fingers."

"No, it didn't."

"What do you mean? Look!"

"Richard, the hot doorknob singed your skin, not the actual fire which, you must admit, for all its sound and fury, kept missing contact with us. All of it, Richard, all of it could be the result of a highly-sophisticated technology. After all, their technology managed to carry us across space from Earth and keep us in a rather comfortable and well-constructed zoo."

"I don't know what to—"

I was interrupted by the sound of an immense explosion. We'd traveled about four blocks in a straight line from the scene of the fire. Looking back, we saw a large mushroom cloud of smoke rising from the sites of the buildings that had been the orphanage and the supposed explosives factory and whatever was next to each of them. We stood and stared at the disaster for several minutes. When the smoke had cleared and we'd walked closer, we couldn't see any bodies. The only debris not belonging to the buildings was a mangled fire vehicle. I asked a woman passerby if anybody'd been hurt. She said no, fortunately the firemen had gotten everybody out of the way just in time.

"Evidently the firemen got themselves out of the way, too," Daisy muttered.

"Yes, they did," the woman said blandly and left us.

"Staging," Daisy said.

"I don't know," I said. "Pretty elaborate for that."

"How do we know what's elaborate for them?"

"If you remember, I don't even know if you're one of their elaborations."

"I'm not. And I'm beginning to believe you're not, either."

We walked the streets for a long while, then found the hotel we're in now. Daisy's fallen asleep. Her snores are quite earthlike. I'm beginning to believe in her, too.

Perhaps the fire was staged. Perhaps they hired orphan actors, firemen actors, crowd extras, pass-

ersby with bit parts, and put it all on for us. On Earth movie people never care about blowing up city streets if the light is right. Still, I recalled my own bravery. Our bravery. That was authentic. At least that was authentic. I think I can sleep comfortably with that. Or wake up Daisy and—no, sleep.

Day 13

I condemn Marchplateau. And you with it, Frank. I'll spend the rest of my days trying to escape. I will not join your club.

Daisy and I awoke this morning with the same thoughts. We were tired of aimlessly walking Marchplateauian streets. With its emotionally-comatose citizens and their indifference to the suffering of children, Marchplateau seemed to offer us no real escape. There was no purpose in staying away from the zoo. We'd return. We'd turn ourselves in to Frank and make the best of our luxury-cage lives, eating the good food, living the good life.

Finding the way back was easy. I remembered each step I'd ever taken on Marchplateau. I could almost see my earlier footprints walking toward me.

Nobody stopped us as we entered the grounds nor, as on the city streets, did anybody there pay us much attention. A couple of Marchplateauians nodded to us as if we were people they saw every day—co-workers or familiar tradesmen. Many others rushed by us, with papers and scientific devices on their omnipresent clip-

boards.

"Everything looks about the same," Daisy said. "Everybody busy busy busy."

"I thought they'd be busy trying to locate us. They don't even seem to notice us. Either that, or they haven't noticed yet that we left."

"They do seem to take things in stride."

We came around the turning in the path that led to our Marchplateau home. It had been painted since we'd left. A bright eye-hurting red. Something in the paint must have been luminous, for rays seemed to shoot off the building's surface in all directions. People still massed in front of the cage's viewing windows, still walked the grounds around it. Several official types were still making their shorthand notations on their clip-boarded papers. As we approached our building I said to Daisy:

"I feel insulted. They've turned our place into an eyesore. I'm going to give Frank the what-for for that. God, I hope they haven't painted the inside in the same way."

"Relax, it's probably some new kind of test."

People, both scientists and viewers, glanced up at us as we neared the building, but nobody seemed startled or in any way impressed by the fugitives' return. Most just gave us the eye, then returned to what they were doing, staring at the viewing window or making notations.

"Hi there," I said to nobody in particular, and nobody in particular responded. "We're back," I said

to a passing scientist.

"Good for you," he answered, then looked us over and asked: "Who are you?"

"Who are we?"

"Yes, do you have a job here? I'm sorry, there are so many personnel changes I can't keep up with—"

"We're a personnel change all right. We escaped. We belong in there. Put us back."

The man, and a few others, stared at us, then started to laugh.

"They're street-clowns," a woman said. "I must say that's one of the more annoying customs we've imported. And where's your makeup anyway?"

"We're not street-clowns. We're Richard and Daisy."

After a pause, while everyone stared dispassionately at us, the scientist said:

"Well, what kind of act *do* you do?"

"We're the earthlings."

"Another pause, another laugh.

"Good show," the woman said. "Now that's more the kind of joke I can react to."

"No. We really are the earthlings. We've come back. Your planet is like a steady diet of nitrates and we want our cages back."

The woman sighed.

"I must say, this custom of aping the earthlings has gone too far, much too far. Why don't we steal some beings from some other place? I am really getting tired of being besieged by Earth material wherever I go. Earth trinkets, Earth customs, Earth languages,

our people pretending to be earthlings . . .”

“What do you mean, pretending? We’re the main attraction. Your people’ve been coming to this, this zoo for weeks, just to see us. We’re famous. We’re Richard and Daisy. We capitulate.”

“I thought the earthling’s names were Jonathan and Mermina,” a man at the viewing window said.

“That’s right,” the scientist said.

“My name was never Jonathan,” I said.

“And I certainly wouldn’t want to be called Mermina,” Daisy said. “That’s not even a proper Earth name. She must be a ringer.”

“We know *you’re* not Jonathan and Mermina,” the woman said. “*They’re* in there.”

She pointed toward the cage. Daisy and I, after looking startled at each other, approached the viewing window. Marchplateauians parted before our advance, leaving us a clear path.

“You look first,” Daisy whispered.

I saw Jonathan looking back at me, his rather stupid eyes wide open with curiosity. He was just as interested in me as I was in him. Daisy came to my side.

“We’ve been replaced,” she said.

Jonathan stuck out his tongue at us, then—in the European style of obscene gesture—flicked the back of his hand at us across the bottom of his chin. Turning, he walked away from the window arrogantly. Mermina, a tiny pretty woman who’d been standing back, whispered something to him.

“I want to see Frank,” I said to the nearest official-looking person. At first he pretended not to understand me, then he made a signal to a subaltern. In a moment Frank came out of a side door of the bright-red building.

“What can I do for you folks?” he said amiably.

“In there,” I said, pointing to the cage. “We have first rights. We belong in the cage. We’re the earthlings. We have seniority.”

Frank sighed.

“This Marchplateau fad for earthlings has gone quite too far,” he said. “And now a new trend: the identification of two of our own with the Earth people to such an extent that they—”

“What do you mean, *identification*? What are you pulling, Frank? Quit jerking me around!”

Frank’s face grew sad and he addressed the onlookers:

“See how well they pick up the phrases, the manners . . . ah, pity.”

A sympathetic murmur went through the crowd.

“We are the earthlings,” I said, talking to the crowd myself. My voice, I’m afraid was whiny. “Rather, we *were* the earthlings. Before those interlopers. Some of you must’ve seen us.”

Looking at their blank stares, I felt like a madman. I felt lost in a nightmare. I felt beaten. I shrugged and turned back to Frank.

“All right, Frank, you win. We’re whatever you say we are. Just give us a cage to lie down in. I’m bushed.”

“Oh, we can’t do that. It would

interfere with the project. I wouldn't want to disturb Jonathan and Mermina."

"Well, you're sure as hell *disturbing* Richard and Daisy. Look, we have no place to go, Frank. No way of functioning on Marchplateau. No identity here, no usefulness. No place to go, Frank!"

My voice was desperate. I expected Frank to say something in officialese or to tell us to go our own way, but I had to beg someone and he was the only Marchplateauian I knew by name.

"Come with me," he said amiably.

"Really?"

"Your complete identification with the earthlings has made you forget that any Marchplateau citizen who needs help, or a job, or *anything* from another citizen will receive his request from him."

"Anything?"

"Anything?"

"Frank, it would give me great pleasure if you'd cut your throat from ear to ear with the sharp end of your clipboard."

I kind of wish he'd done that. What he did was take us to an office and let us sit down on overstuffed chairs.

"Good to see you again, Richard," he said. "You too, Daisy."

"Then you *do* know us," I said.

"How could I forget you?"

"You faked it pretty well out there."

"We don't like to confuse our visitors. They're quite happy with Jonathan and Mermina. Our attendance here has doubled in the

short time since we installed them in your place. Everyone here is quite pleased. Our study is progressing by leaps and bounds. We're very happy. You did us a favor by your escape."

"And you knew it beforehand. You planted the damn key in my pocket, Frank!"

"Did I? I don't remember."

"I thought it was an act of compassion, you son of a bitch!"

"Why aren't we as good as this Jonathan and Mermina?" Daisy said.

"Oh, don't feel insulted," Frank said. "It is just a matter of supply and demand when you come down to it. Jonathan and Mermina are more open, outgoing people than either of you. We receive a lot from them. With you two, the supply had been exhausted and demand was quickly diminishing."

"Supply of what?" Daisy asked.

"Demand for what?"

"For Earth. We crave Earth here. As much as we can get. You must have noticed. We observe you, then go out and do like you. We enjoy being like you. You earthers are pretty hotshot stuff, multi-leveled in talent, ability, character, personality. You're volatile, lovable, emotionally varied, sometimes emotionally extreme. You're intelligent, inventive, infuriating, inimitable. We love your traits. We love your cleverness. We love you. We love to watch you, whatever you do. You had quite an audience out there yesterday at that fire, you two. It was quite a kick."

"Then the fire *was* faked!" I

yelled.

"Was it? I don't know that it was. We have fires here. There are a lot of dissatisfied people here who don't like what the rest of us are doing, who especially don't like the work done here, and they often set fires deliberately. They took their revolutionary attitudes from a pair of your young people whom we abducted from Earth a decade or so ago. The ranks of the dissidents have declined in recent years, and they've become noticeably listless and inactive recently. Still, your presence among them might have excited them to return to former ways. I was informed the fire was due to arson. On the other hand, I suppose it could have been faked. We do that sort of thing, too."

"Then, if I understand you correctly, Frank, we're just templates of cultural influence for you and your people," Daisy said.

"You could put it that way, Daisy. You two were quite good for us, very popular for a long while, and you really outdid yourselves yesterday. But now, Jonathan and Mermina have the stage, as it were. It's their turn. You people can now enjoy the kind of freedom we Marchplateauians enjoy. Your life is no longer in a cage. You are in the open air. It's wonderful, really. I envy you."

"The hell with all that, Frank!" I shouted. "I don't want to be free on Marchplateau. I'd prefer the cage! If you're through with us, take us back home. Take us to Earth."

"Oh, we couldn't do that. We

don't want to become known on your planet. It would spoil the study. Your scientific people might find some way to intervene. We have, after all, been abducting people from your planet for many years. Your history is becoming our history, your culture our culture. Oh, no, we can't possibly—"

"Damn it, Frank, you can't do this to us! I demand you give us proper treatment, I demand—"

"Oh, Richard, stow it! Can it. Throw in the towel. Take a walk. Hit the road. Stop and smell the roses. Wake up and smell the coffee. How is that for a command of Earth idiom?"

"Frank, you can't—"

"All right, I'll give you a good opportunity. You can stay here, here in the compound. We even have a spare cage you can use. You won't be on exhibit, but it's livable. You can even be useful. You can work closely with Jonathan and Mermina and any other earthlings we bring back here. It might be useful for us to introduce you two at a key point in these studies. How about it?"

I haggled with him for a while longer. So did Daisy. But we finally agreed to his plan. My one satisfaction is that by working here I can do my bit to make Frank's life miserable.

They assigned Daisy and I nice quarters, almost as nice as our old cage. I can at least watch Marchplateauian TV here. Some of it is videotaped from Earth.

"They seem to assume we'll stay together," Daisy said as she en-

tered the cage.

"If you want otherwise, you can tell them otherwise," I said.

"No! No, I don't want otherwise. We Earth-types have to stick together. And we can help Jonathan and Mermina."

"Don't be silly. They'll never believe we're from Earth. They'll think we're just two more Marchplateauians out to confuse them. I for one will tell them I am from Marchplateau. Maybe they're not even from Earth anyway. Maybe they're ringers, Marchplateauians pretending to be Earth captives."

"I don't think so, but you could be right. We have to try to help them anyway."

"All right, I'll try. But I don't know if I'd believe in us now."

Daisy faded into a sulk, but she'll be okay. She's right, in a way. We do need to stay together, for our sanity or something.

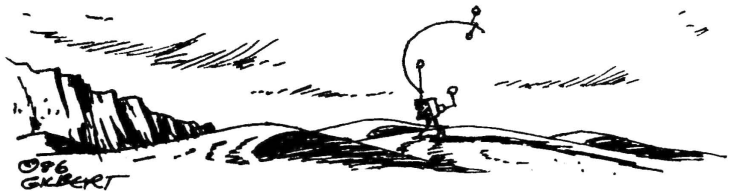
Tomorrow I'll turn this journal over to Frank. Let him indulge his clinical interest to his heart's content. Is your heart content, Frank? I hope it explodes when you reach the last sentence.

I don't know what Frank will do with this journal. It really doesn't matter, I suppose. I would like it if he took it to Earth and left it there, my message in a bottle sent across a galaxy.

So, if anybody on Earth is reading this, I would appreciate it if you would contact anyone you know in authority and tell him or her that Richard Treskitte and Daisy Martin are trapped on the planet of Marchplateau to which they were abducted some time ago. They would like to return to Earth. I doubt if it would do any good, but we'd appreciate the effort.

Thank you.

Over to you, Frank.



SAMURAI FUGUE

by JESSICA AMANDA SALMONSON

art: Tim Kirk

Now I intend to tell you (and you'll be glad to hear) the tale of Pim, dim Pim, who everyone said was slow, *although*: she passed the college entry exams and maintained a stable, respectable, though not at all remarkable grade point average.

The singular reason that Pim seemed dim and failed the second grade, and later the seventh, was that she was obsessed, possessed, and crippled by a dear, precious love of film.

When little, she would steal money from mummy's purse and run away to the theater to watch serials and cartoons and coming attractions and advertisements and double or triple features, covering a space of time from matinee to final show—by which hour her mummy would have noticed that Pim, or if not Pim then the money, was missing from the house. Then would a policeman fetch her home, for she was always precisely where presumed.

As years passed, the serials no longer played; and later, the cartoons were all but foregone; the trailers and the ads grew ever shorter; and finally, progress was such that theaters showed not two, never three, but only one major feature. Yet the theater owners had not yet devised a manner by which to make the same amount of money by showing nothing at all, so Pim was not upset.

She would go everyday when she had the money, and she had the money because she collected and returned soda pop bottles, until the returnables vanished from the face of the planet along with the giant condor and the black footed ferret, at which point she began to collect old tires and pieces of aluminum (especially empty beer cans) to be recycled for a pretty penny. Pim became known as "the scavenger." In college, this industry guaranteed an addition to her "regular" income (the money poppa sent for tuition,



books, and expenses). So she could afford to see a million movies. Her goal in life had been to see a million movies, but her goal was soon to change.

In college, Pim's life had settled into a fairly routine going: School and study, scavenging, and going to the movies. It was easy to apportion her time for each, because she had done away with most of the frivolities like friendships, boys, or regular meals (except popcorn). She kept no pets and had no hobbies or other untoward expense or time-consuming passion (save the main one named above).

She was studying a foreign language, and taking an extra class in filmmaking—the former so that someday she could make a living for herself, and the latter so there'd be a reason for doing so.

Pim was not persnickety about the quality of the films she saw. Oh, she knew the good ones from the bad ones all right; but it happened that she could enjoy the bad ones too. She remembered all the casts, all the directors. She understood everything the actors and the directors intended to convey; and she understood what they managed to convey *instead*. Moreover, she understood the actors and directors themselves, which scared the daylight out of the only director she had ever managed to talk to, a rather overblown Scandinavian who didn't like being seen through one bit. He ran away from Pim flailing his arms in the air, shouting in a dry old voice that he would never lecture in America

again and why didn't everyone realize all women, but especially American women, were evil witches.

She went through phases of favorites (everyone does); war films, old Hollywood dance comedies, Tarzan, spaghetti westerns, horse porno, and anything at all with Marjorie Main. She had phases for directors too: Azner, Renoir, Hawks, Woody Allen—no one too eclectic, for films were meant to be entertaining, not difficult.

Even her first masturbatory experience was in a theater (in this, she *was* quite slow, being all of seventeen at the time), fantasizing herself tucked neatly in the sheets twixt Bogey and the Babe.

As her tastes ran in phases, so did her personality perform acrobatic metamorphoses. Mummy liked to tell the story of the time a lady in the supermarket became convinced that Pim was really Shirley Temple (irrespective of the fact that by then Shirley Temple was mummy's age), but that was years ago. When Pim learned to masturbate, for the longest while she strutted around like a drag queen being Mae West. Later she became more subtle and talked like Katharine Hepburn, until she overheard someone say it was affected, at which point she became a sincere, intense Greta Garbo. Shortly after moving to the dormitory, she became Sean Connery, but poppa came to visit and for two months afterward she didn't get her usual check in the mail, until she went screaming home for a weekend

being Sue Lyon and after that everything was fine.

In brief, Pim's life had been one long, slow, sedate stare at a silver screen.

Two things altered Pim's cozy lifestyle. One of these was the discovery of *chambara*, or, to use a vulgar term, samurai films. Without much lessening of the other types of films she saw, she yet began to pay especial attention to *chambara*, and often drove far-and-wide (gathering aluminum and old tires along the roadsides as she went) to attend any such film which might be playing on some other campus or in a farther city.

The other thing to change Pim was her foreign language studies. She had chosen Japanese partly because she was herself one-quarter Japanese. (Her Japanese-American grandfather disappeared in a POW camp in Washington state; but the government apologized by giving back the property they'd taken away, which had to be sold for a ridiculously low price. Now, there was a big department store on that downtown block, and mummy occasionally went there and lamented how they *might* have been rich if only . . .) Well, actually, Pim had chosen that language because a career counselor pointed out that more and more medical, scientific, and technical papers were published in Japanese and she could be assured a fairly secure if entirely boring job in translation, which was a sight more than could be said for the students of any other foreign language.

It might not at first be obvious how these two events—learning Japanese, and watching samurai films—changed Pim's life. The thing is, you must understand, that learning Japanese completely changed her method of viewing *chambara* movies, and thereby changed her attitude about all movies everywhere, which by association changed her attitudes about life in general which was itself one overlong film in need of editing.

In an American film, Pim would, naturally, *listen* to the characters speak their lines. In, say, a French or German film, she *read* what the characters were saying, in the form of subtitles. But with *chambara*, as she learned Japanese, she began to do both at once! It was an amazing effect, especially since the subtitles generally told a slightly different story than the spoken dialogue conveyed.

Hearing and reading are two very different acts. The samurai films she watched began to take on certain aspects of a fugue, that is, a composition with two or more themes enunciated simultaneously. It was like listening to two very different songs at the same time, yet without a single note of discord.

Pim was overwhelmed. She felt that she was watching two films at once. Such heaven! Such joy!

Thus had she discovered there was really no pleasure quite the equal of watching samurai killing peasants, evil lords, and each other.

It was glorious.

It was rare.

The words at the bottom of the screen; the words from the mouths of the players. . . . they gave her two distinct, separate understandings of the same film. And though the two interpretations might contradict, they were yet, somehow, both, *right*.

This awakened her to the realization that there were actually *more* than two simultaneous stories being told in any given film. She did not mean the intellectual, subjective manipulation of literal, allegoric, symbolic or figurative levels. She meant that each film, in an objective fashion, was in reality a large number of films made all at the same time.

She'd already noted the interpretation accessible through the subtitles, and the one accessible through the words and intonation of the actors. Additionally, there was the story which the director intended, often at odds with what the actors *or* subtitles suggested. Plus, there was the story the script writer originally intended, some of which might remain. Atop all this, there was a whole other interpretation to be achieved through the social context outside the film, which was especially poignant in films made in a Japanese social context and viewed in an American social context. That made, let's see, how many films she was watching at once? Five! The subtitled one, the spoken/acted one, the directed one, the scripted one, and the one of social context. Of course, even

in bad films, these all blended into a smooth, unblurred image devoid of chaos. But for someone who had become atuned to the various overlays, the actual complexity of every movie big and small was, in a word, captivating.

She'd been watching *Sword of Doom* when she had these revelations. The film ended with a suddenly frozen frame, the warrior caught in eternal combat. But to Pim it seemed that the samurai hadn't stopped at all, that the film was still going on and on and on, and the cruel hero was still killing, and killing, and killing—killing on nearly half a dozen levels—and she was mesmerized by the gory beauty of his every motion. The theater's janitor poked her in the shoulder and asked, "Are you asleep, Miss?"

"Shh!" said Pim sharply.

"But Miss . . ."

"Shush! I'm watching the movie."

"But, but, it's been over for half an hour . . ."

Still she wouldn't move, and the management had to throw her out bodily. As she staggered out into the night, she realized there was a *sixth* context for the film: the values brought to the movie by the production studio itself, that is, the financial *point* of the entire venture, which in extreme cases overshadowed an entire product and in every case had some influence.

The next day, she returned to the same theater to watch *Sword of Doom* two more times, and they threw her out again. The manager,

who himself was Japanese and had a delicious accent, asked, "Don't you know this is a bad movie? Don't come tomorrow, please."

For the first time since the seventh grade, Pim's grades began to fall below their average. She spent almost all her study hours attempting to produce, for her film class, the perfect short subject for her personal purposes: a samurai fugue. Which reminded her of a *seventh* interpretation for a film: orchestral interpretation. A good soundtrack could tell a story all by itself!

It was clear that she could not hope to bring these various levels for understanding or interpretation to a film if she were the one and only creator, filling all the roles of actor, director, scripter, subtitler, purveyor of social context, musical composer, studio manager, and choreographer. (That's eight! She hadn't thought of the interpretation through choreography before, which is very important especially in a samurai film, with the precise ballet of violence.)

Pim made her actor's costume out of aluminum cans—and a fairly convincing suit of armor it became. She obtained a samurai sword, or close approximation, for an extravagant sum at a pawn shop in the Asian district. All other filming necessities were accessible through the school. But there was still only her *her*. How could she hope to have eight films in one with a single person's input? The answer was inspired: She would multiply her personality.

It was complicated at first, deciding what her personalities ought to be. The choreographer would be a sadistic faggot. The director was a tyrant. The script writer was a dilettante convinced his every word was golden, outraged by every alteration. The subtitles were by a well meaning Japanese woman who didn't really understand English at all (though she had a degree from Kyoto University stating otherwise), but since her own father was descended from the samurai class, she took her duty seriously. The musical score was by a frustrated old nincompoop who had wanted to be another Bach but instead composed for B-grade films. The actor was an egotistical but otherwise fine, serious artist. The owner of the studio was a miser, who wanted successes, not art. Oh! There was *another* context for the film she hadn't perceived before: the *film editor's* perspective. Very well: The editor's persona would be: complete idiot.

There was still the interpretation of social context outside the film itself. Hmm. That could be difficult. Ah! She had it: The social context was that everyone in the whole world was stark raving insane, including the nine people responsible for the film, but especially the tenth person who was the entire audience (this would be Pim herself, so no specially devised personality was necessitated).

Considerable thought and imagination had gone into creating the various personalities who would

provide their own unique overlay and interpretation to the one-reel, one-actor chambara feature being made by the people mentioned above. But curiously, Pim utterly forgot that she had invented these people, although each in turn appeared when needed to perform his or her required tasks.

Since an audience was not yet needed (because the film wasn't finished), the personality that was the original Pim had not been called upon (this left more time for the others to complete the film, for it would have been difficult for them to work while she was gone to the movies). Pim effectively ceased to exist. Therefore, she didn't show up at her classes, or take calls from home, or answer anyone who called her by name.

Occasionally, the hard-driving director or the artistic actor or the miserly studio owner would obtain cryptic communications which were obviously intended for someone they didn't know. Thus Pim was never informed beforehand that she was being expelled from school for nonattendance and bad grade point average. However, the studio owner was indignant to find himself, one day, refused access to his studio, which a crazy man calling himself a fine arts professor claimed belonged to the college and was for the use of students only. The actor was upset to hear about this, as was the choreographer, and especially the film editor whose job was soon to commence. The script and score writers weren't as concerned about all

of this, as their jobs were completed.

The film progressed, somehow, and with the aid of the studio's owner-manager (who figured he was kept out for failing to pay the rent), the film editor gained access to the dark rooms at night, and began to perform his finishing chores like the true idiot he was. The director argued to save key scenes which really did have to be spliced back in.

When Pim reappeared as herself, she was slightly disoriented. She found herself in the viewing studio of the college, which was presently devoid of any other persons. She did not have the slightest notion that, for the past month, she hadn't existed, or that at that very moment her mummy and poppa were driving six hundred miles up the coast to get their poor sick daughter and take her to a nice private hospital, or, as Thurber might have termed it, the booby hatch.

None of this was part of her knowledge when the movie started. She was not even aware that this was the film she'd set out to make for a class in which she was no longer officially enrolled.

Since the film editor and subtitler had slaved through the night, it was presently time for morning classes to begin. Pim's film instructor wandered into the viewing room at one point, and Pim said hello; but he scurried out again, apparently not wishing to see this particular film today.

She absorbed the film's nine levels (or had they grown to fif-

teen?), comprehending all of them completely, becoming enmeshed within the most perfectly conceived movie that had ever assaulted her heightened senses. It was the sad story of the last samurai, a young man, who had killed every human being in the world and now was all alone. She wept. She laughed. She shook with terror. She was swept away in ecstasy. A truly wonderful achievement! She gave the film a standing ovation.

Afterward, the actor himself made an appearance, for this was, after all, the world premiere of the most important *chambara* movie since *Seven Samurai*, destined to win at Cannes, at the Asian Film Festival, at Toronto, New York, Chicago International...and Gosh!, Gee!, he had worn his costume, which without the camera tricks appeared to be made out of old tires and tin cans, and he had a cute samurai pony tail (was that his real hair so long?).

It was about this time that mummy and poppa and the film instructor and a policeman and two gentlemen in white jackets appeared in the doorway of the viewing studio. They approached slowly. They were talking to the actor in English, but he only knew Japanese. They seemed to be very cajoling as they surrounded the *chambara* star.

Six or nine personalities chat-

tered in her brain, trying to explain the situation to her, to him, to each other, with going-on-a-dozen different interpretations regarding every innuendo. Life was a fugue, but something here *was* in discord. As the six cajoling people surrounded Pim, she suddenly realized that she'd been transported into some terrible place in time. It was no longer 17th Century Japan, where she had studied fencing like all good boys of her samurai class. She had somehow been sent forward in time to a frightful land where all the people were monstrous and insane (insanity had been, after all, the outside social context of the film).

Pim, the mighty samurai, carved through the monstrous, insane people of this future place. Blood sprayed all around. She screamed a samurai oath, and thanked the Shinto gods that she had survived this awful battle. Then the samurai youth left the corpse-strewn stage, trailing blood with her sword, and went out, out, out into the horrifying world.

When they came for her, she was eating popcorn and watching the latest Clint Eastwood, which she thought a comforting movie because it seemed to have only one very shallow level to it and therefore didn't stress her sensitivities. She never understood what the doctor meant when he said, Pim, your movie has won eight awards.

NIGHT KINGS

by ROGER ZELAZNY

art: Mike Symes

It began like any other night, but this one had a special feeling to it. The moon came up full and splendid above the skyline, and its light spread like spilled buttermilk among the canyons of the city. The remains of the day's storm exhaled mists which fled wraith-like across the pavements. But it wasn't just the moon and the fog. Something had been building for several weeks now. My sleep had been troubled. And business was too good.

I had been trying unsuccessfully to watch a late movie and drink one entire cup of coffee without its growing cold. But customers kept arriving, browsers lingered and the phone rang regularly. I let my assistant, Vic, handle as much of it as he could but people kept turning up at the counter—never during a commercial.

"Yes, sir? What can I do for you?" I asked a middle-aged man with a slight tic at the left corner of his mouth.

"Do you carry sharpened stakes?" he inquired.

"Yes. Would you prefer the regular or the fire-hardened?"

"The fire-hardened, I guess."

"How many?"

"One. No, better make it two."

"There's a dollar off if you take three."

"Okay, make it three."

"Give you a real good price on a dozen."

"No, three should do it."

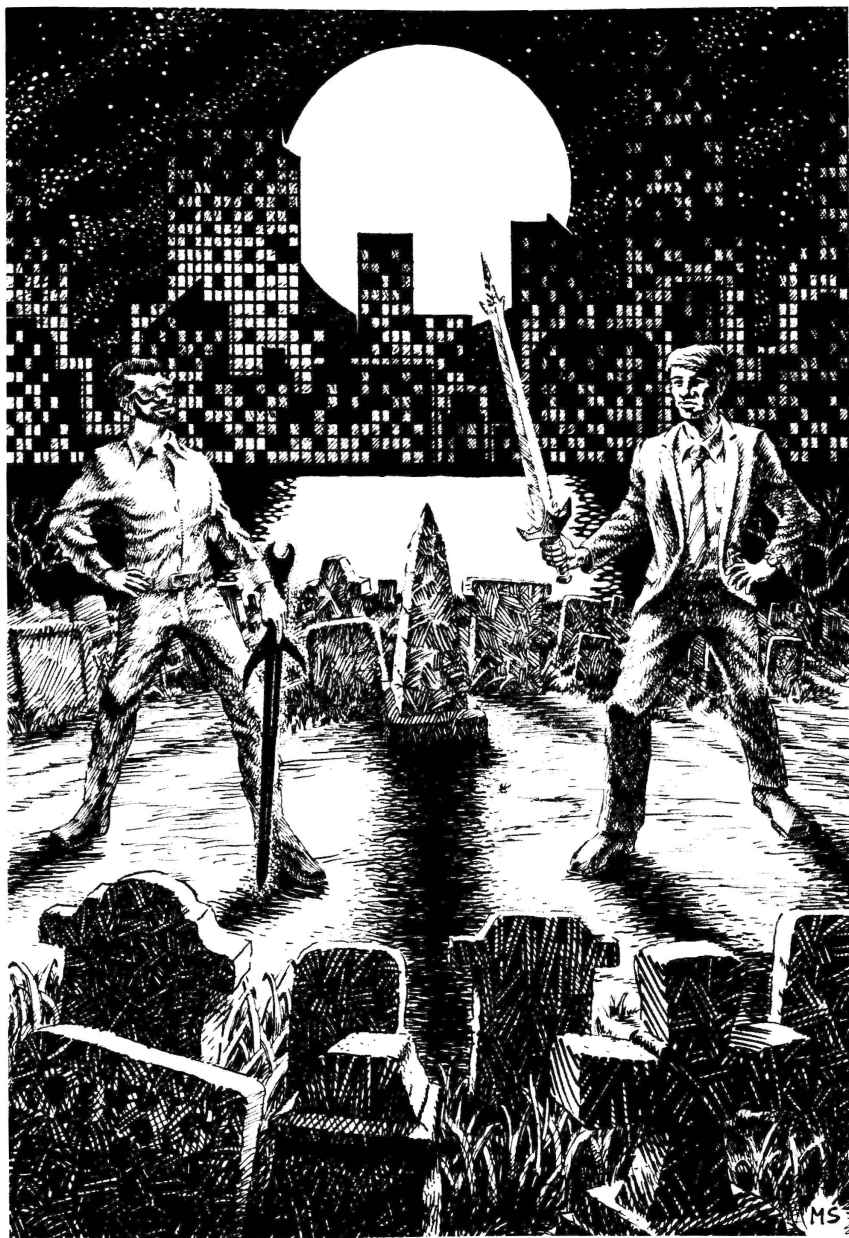
"All right."

I stooped and pulled out the carton. Damn. Only two left. I had to pry open another box. At least Vic had kept an eye on the level and brought a second carton up from the stockroom. The boy was learning.

"Anything else?" I asked as I wrapped them.

"Yes," the man said. "I need a good mallet."

"We carry three different kinds, at different prices. The best is a weighted—"



"I'll take the best."

"Very good."

I got him one from beneath the adjacent counter.

"Will this be cash, check, or credit card?"

"Do you take Mastercharge?"

"Yes."

He withdrew his wallet, opened it.

"Oh, I also want a pound of garlic," he said as he withdrew the card and handed it to me.

I called to Vic, who was free just then, to fetch the garlic while I wrote up the order.

"Thank you," the man said several minutes later, as he turned and headed for the door, his parcel beneath his arm.

"Good night, good luck," I said, and sounds of distant traffic reached me as the door opened, grew faint when it closed.

I sighed and picked up my coffee cup. I returned to my seat before the television set. Shit. A dental adhesive commercial had just come on. I waited it out, and then there was Betty Davis...Moments later, I heard a throat-clearing sound at my back. Turning, I beheld a tall, dark-haired, dark-mustached man in a beige coat. He was scowling.

"What can I do for you?" I asked him.

"I need some silver bullets," he said.

"What caliber?"

"Thirty-aught-six. Let me have two boxes."

"Coming up."

When he left I walked back to

the john and dumped out my coffee. I refilled the cup with fresh brew from the pot on the counter.

On my way back to the comfortable corner of the shop I was halted by a leather-garbed youth with a pink punk haircut. He stood staring up at the tall, narrow, sealed case high upon the wall.

"Hey Pops, how much is it?" he asked me.

"It's not for sale," I said. "It's strictly a display item."

He dug a massive wad of bills from his side pocket and extended it, his dreamy gaze never leaving the bright thing that hung above.

"I've got to have a magic sword," he said softly.

"Sorry. I can sell you a Tibetan illusion-destroying dagger, but the sword is strictly for looking at here."

He turned suddenly to face me.

"If you should ever change your mind..."

"I won't."

He shrugged then and walked away, passing out into the night.

As I rounded the corner into the front of the shop, Vic fixed me with his gaze and covered the mouthpiece of the phone with the palm of his hand.

"Boss," he told me, "this lady says there's a Chinese demon visits her every night and—"

"Tell her to come by and we'll sell her a bedside temple dog."

"Right."

I took a sip of coffee and made by way back toward my chair as Vic finished the conversation and hung up. A small red-haired

woman who had been staring into one of the display cases near the front chose that moment to approach me.

"Pardon me," she said. "Do you carry aconite?"

"Yes, I do—" I began, and then I heard the sound—a sharp *thunk*, as if someone had thrown a rock against my back door.

I had a strong feeling as to what it might be.

"Excuse me," I said, "Vic, would you take care of this lady?"

"Sure thing."

Vic came over then, tall and rugged-looking, and she smiled.

I turned away and passed through the rear of the shop and into the back room. I unlocked the heavy door that let upon the alley and drew it open. As I suspected, there was no one in sight.

I studied the ground. A bat lay twitching feebly near a puddle. I stopped and touched it lightly.

"Okay," I said. "Okay, I'm here. It's all right."

I went back inside then, leaving the door open. As I headed for the refrigerator I called out, "Leo, I give you permission to enter. This one time. This one room and no farther."

A minute later he staggered in. He wore a dark, shabby suit and his shirtfront was dirty. His hair was windblown and straggly and there was a lump on his forehead. He raised a trembling hand.

"Have you got some?" he asked.

"Yeah, here."

I passed him the bottle I had already opened and he took a long

drink, then he slowly seated himself in a chair beside the small table. I went back and closed the door, then sat down across from him with my cup of coffee. I gave him a minute for several more swallows and a chance to collect himself.

"Can't even hit a vein right," he muttered, raising the bottle a final time.

Then he put it down, ran his hands through his hair, rubbed his eyes and fixed me with a baleful gaze.

"I can give you the locations of three who've just moved to town," he said. "What's it worth?"

"Another bottle," I said.

"For three? Hell! I could have brought the information in one at a time and—"

"I don't actively seek out your kind," I told him. "I just provide others with what they need to take care of themselves. I do like having this sort of information, though..."

"I need six bottles."

I shook my head.

"Leo, you take that much and you know what'll happen? You won't make it back and—"

"I want six bottles."

"I don't want to give them to you."

He massaged his temples.

"Okay," he said then. "Supposing I had a piece of important information that affected you personally? A really important piece of information?"

"How important?"

"Like life and death."

"Come on, Leo. You know me,

but you don't know me that well. There's not much in this world or any other—"

He said the name.

"What?"

He repeated it, but my stomach was already tightening.

"Six bottles," he said.

"Okay. What do you know?"

He looked at the refrigerator. I got up and went to it. I got them out and bagged each one separately. Then I put all of them into a larger brown bag. I brought it over and set it on the floor beside his chair. He didn't even glance downward. He just shook his head.

"If I'm going to lose my connection this is the way I want it," he stated.

I nodded.

"Tell me now."

"The Man came to town a couple of weeks ago," he said. "He's been looking around. He found you. And tonight's the night. You get hit."

"Where is he?"

"Right now? I don't know. He's coming, though. He called a meeting. Summoned everyone to All Saints across the river. Told us he was going to take you out and make it safe for us, that this was going to be his territory. Told everyone to get busy and keep you busy."

He glanced at the small barred window high on the rear wall.

"I'd better be going," he said then.

I got up and let him out. I watched him stagger away into the fog.

Tonight might well be the night

for him too. Hemoholic. A small percentage of them get that way. One neck is never enough. After a while they get so they can't fly straight, and they start waking up in the wrong coffins. Then one morning they just don't make it back to bed in time. I had a vision of Leo sprawled dessicated on a park bench, brown bag clutched to his chest with bony fingers, the first light of day streaming about him.

I locked the door and returned to the shop. It's a cold world out there.

"... horns of the bull for *malocchio*," I heard Vic saying. "That's right. You're welcome. Good-bye."

I kept going, up to the front door. I locked it and switched off the light. I hung the CLOSED sign in the window.

"What is it?" Vic asked me.

"Turn off the phone."

He did.

Then, "Remember when I told you about the old days?" I said.

"Back when you bound the adversary?"

"Yup. And before that."

"Back when he bound you?"

"Yup. You know, one of these days one of us will win—completely."

"What are you getting at?"

"He's free again and he's coming and I think he's very strong. You may leave now if you wish."

"Are you kidding? You trained me. I'll meet him this time."

I shook my head.

"You're not ready. But if anything happens to me... If I

lose... Then the job is yours if you'll have it."

"I told you a long time ago, back when I came to work for you—"

"I know. But you haven't finished your apprenticeship and this is sooner than I'd thought it would be. I have to give you a chance to back out."

"Well, I won't."

"Okay, you've been warned. Go unplug the coffee pot and turn out the lights in back while I close down the register."

The room seemed to brighten a bit after he left and I glanced up. It was an effect of diffused moonlight through a full wall of fog which now pressed against the windows. It hadn't been there moments ago.

I counted the receipts and put the money into the bag. I got out the tape.

There was a pounding on the door just as Vic returned. We both looked in that direction.

It was a very young woman, her long blonde hair stirred by the wind. She had on a light trench coat and she kept looking back over her shoulder as she hammered on the panel and the pane.

"It's an emergency!" she called out. "I see you in there! Please!"

We both crossed to the door. I unlocked it and opened it.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

She stared at me. She made no effort to enter. Then she shifted her gaze to Vic and she smiled slightly. Her eyes were green and her teeth were perfect.

"You are the proprietor," she

said to me.

"I am."

"And this...?"

"My assistant—Vic."

"We didn't know you had an assistant."

"Oh," I said. "And you are...?"

"His assistant," she replied.

"Give me his message."

"I can do better than that," she answered. "I am here to take you to him."

She was almost laughing now, and her eyes were harder than I had thought at first. But I had to try.

"You don't have to serve him," I said.

She sobered suddenly.

"You don't understand," she told me. "I have no choice. You don't know what he saved me from. I owe him."

"And he'll have it all back, and more. You can leave him."

"Like I said, I have no choice."

"Yes, you do. You can quit the business right now."

"How?"

I extended my hand and she looked at it.

"Take my hand," I said.

She continued to stare. Then, almost timidly, she raised hers. Slowly, she reached toward mine...

Then she laughed and jerked hers back.

"You almost had me there. Hypnosis, wasn't it?"

"No," I said.

"Well, you won't trick me again."

She turned and swept her left arm backward. The fog opened, forming a gleaming tunnel.

"He awaits you at the other end."

"He can wait a moment longer then," I told her, "Vic, stay here."

I turned and walked back through the shop. I halted before the case which hung high upon the wall. For a moment I just stared. I could see it so clearly, shining there in the dark. Then I raised the small metal hammer which hung on the chain beside it and I struck.

The glass shattered. I struck twice again and shards kept falling upon the floor. I let go the hammer. It bounced several times against the wall.

Carefully then I reached inside and wrapped my hand about the hilt. The dreaded familiar feeling flowed through me. How long had it been . . . ?

I withdrew it from the case and held it up before me, my ancient strength returning, filling me once again. I had hoped that the last time would indeed be the last time, but these things have a way of dragging on.

When I returned to the storefront the lady's eyes widened and she drew back a pace.

"All right, Miss," I said. "Lead on."

"Her name is Sabrina," Vic told me.

"Oh? What else have you learned?"

"We will be transported to All Saints Cemetery, across the river."

She smiled at him, then turned toward the tunnel. She stepped into it and I followed her.

It felt like one of those moving walkways the larger airports have.

I could tell that every step I took bore me much farther than a single pace. Sabrina strode resolutely ahead, not looking back. Behind me, I heard Vic cough once, the sound heavily muffled within the gleaming, almost plastic-seeming walls.

There was darkness at the end of the tunnel, and a figure waited, even darker, within it.

There was no fog in the place where we emerged, only clear moonlight from amid a field of stars, strong enough to cause the tombstones and monuments to cast shadows. One of these fell between us, a long line of separating darkness, in the cleared area where we stood.

He had not changed so much as I felt I had. He was still taller, leaner and better-looking. He motioned Sabrina off to his right. I sent Vic to the side, also. When he grinned his teeth flashed, and he raised his blade—so black as to be almost invisible within its faint outlining nimbus of orange light—and he saluted me casually with it. I returned the gesture.

"I wasn't certain that you would come," he said.

I shrugged.

"One place is as good as another," I replied.

"I make you the same offer I did before," he stated. "to avoid the nastiness. A divided realm. It may be the best you can hope for."

"Never," I responded.

He sighed.

"You are stubborn."

"And you are persistent."

"If that's a virtue, I'm sorry. But there it is."

"Where'd you find Sabrina?"

"In the gutter. She has real talent. She's learning fast. I see that you have an apprentice now, also. Do you know what this means?"

"Yes, we're getting old, too old for this sort of nonsense."

"You could retire, brother."

"So could you."

He laughed.

"And we could both stagger off arm in arm to that special Valhalla reserved for the likes of us."

"I could think of worse fates," I said.

"Good, I'm glad to hear that. I think it means you're getting soft."

"I guess we'll be finding out very soon."

A series of small movements caught my gaze, and I looked past him. Dog-like forms and bat-like forms and snake-like forms were arriving and settling and moving into position in a huge encircling mass all around us, like spectators coming into a stadium.

"I take it we're waiting for your audience to be seated," I said, and he smiled again.

"Your audience, too," he replied. "Who knows but that even you may have a few fans out there?"

I smiled back at him.

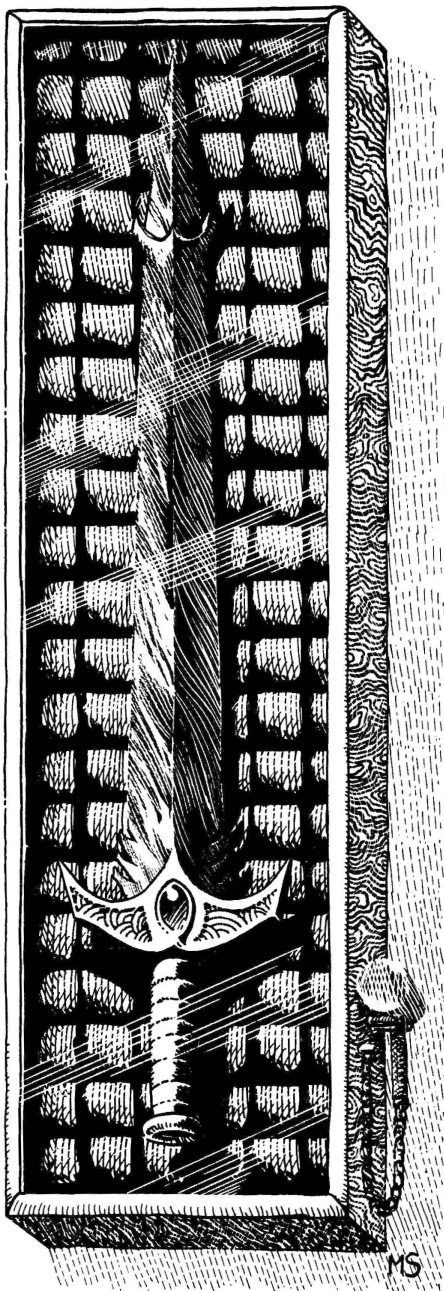
"It's late," he said softly.

"Long past the chimes of midnight."

"Are they really worth it?" he asked then, a sudden serious look upon his face.

"Yes," I replied.

He laughed.



"Of course you have to say that."

"Of course."

"Let's get on with it."

He raised the blade of darkness high above his head and an unearthly silence poured across the land.

"Ashtaroth, Beelzebub, Asmodeus, Belial, Leviathan . . ." he began.

I raised my own weapon.

"Newton, Descartes, Faraday, Maxwell, Fermi . . ." I said.

"Lucifer Rofocale," he intoned, "Hecate, Behemoth, Put Satanus, Ariaston . . ."

"Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Rodin, Maillol, Moore . . ." I continued.

The world seemed to swim about us, and this place was suddenly outside of space and time.

"Mephisto!" he cried out.

"Legion! Lilith! Ianoda! Eblis!"

"Homer, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, Cervantes," I went on.

He struck and I parried the blow and struck one of my own to be parried in turn myself. He continued his chanting and increased the tempo of his attack. I did the same.

After the first several minutes I could see that we were still fairly evenly matched. That meant it would drag on, and on. I tried some tricks I had almost forgotten I knew. But he remembered. He had a few, too, but something in me recalled them also.

We began to move even faster.

The blows seemed to come from every direction, but my blade was there, ready for them when they fell. His had a way of doing the

same thing. It became a dance within a cage of shifting metal, row upon row of glowing eyes staring at us across the field of the dead. Vic and Sabrina stood side by side yet seemed oblivious of each other in their concentration upon the conflict.

I hate to say that it was exhilarating, but it was. Finally, to face once again the embodiment of everything I had fought across the years. To have total victory suddenly lie but a stroke away, if but the right stroke might be found . . .

I redoubled my efforts and actually bore him back several paces. But he recovered quickly and stood his ground then. A sigh rose up from beyond the monuments.

"You can still surprise me," he muttered through clenched teeth, slashing back with a deadly attack of his own. "When will this ever end?"

"How's a legend to know?" I replied, giving ground and striking again.

Our blades fed us the forces we had come to represent and we fought on, and on.

He came close, very close, on several occasions. But each time I was able to spin away at the last moment and counter-attack. Twice, I thought that I had him and each time he narrowly avoided me and came on with renewed vigor.

He cursed, he laughed, and I probably did the same. The moon dropped down and sparklets of dew became visible upon the grass. The creatures sometimes shifted about, but their eyes never left us.

Vic and Sabrina exchanged several whispered conversations without looking at each other.

I swung a head-cut, but he parried and riposted to my chest. I stopped it and tried for his chest, but he parried . . .

A breeze sprang up and the perspiration on my brow seemed suddenly cooler. I slipped once on the damp ground and he failed to take advantage of my imbalance. Was he finally tiring?

I tried pressing him once more, and he seemed a bit slower. Was I now gaining an edge or was it a trick on his part, to lull me?

I nicked his biceps. The barest touch. A scratch. Nothing real in the way of an injury, but I felt my confidence rising. I tried again, mustering all of my speed in a fresh burst of enthusiasm.

A bright line appeared across his shirtfront.

He cursed again and swung wildly. As I parried it I realized that the sky was lightening in the east. That meant I had to hurry. There are rules by which even we are bound.

I spun through my most elaborate attack yet, but he was able to stop it. I tried again, and again. Each time he seemed weaker, and on that last one I had seen a look of pain upon his face. A restlessness came over our gallery then, and I felt that the final sands were about to descend the hourglass.

I struck again, and this time I connected solidly. I felt the edge of my weapon grate against bone as it cut into his left shoulder.

He howled and dropped to his knees as I drew back for the death blow.

In the distance a cock crowed, and I heard him laugh.

"Close, brother! Close! But not good enough," he said. "Sabrina! To me! Now!"

She took a step toward him, turned toward Vic, then back to my fallen nemesis. She rushed to him and embraced him as he began to fade.

Aufwiedersehen!" he called to me, and they both were gone.

With a great rustling rush then, like blown leaves, our audience departed, flapping through the sky, flashing along the ground, slithering into holes, as the sun cut its way above the horizon.

I leaned upon my blade. In a little while Vic came up to me.

"Will we ever see them again?" he asked.

"Of course."

I began walking toward what I saw to be the distant gate.

"Now what?" he said.

"I'm going home and get a good day's sleep," I told him. "Might even take a little vacation. Business is going to be slow for a while."

We crossed the hallowed earth and exited onto a sidestreet.

The Light Fantastic

Book Reviews by Orson Scott Card

(continued from page 29)

cept to promise that there will be more books in the series, and you'll be cheating yourself if you don't buy **LIAVEK**, read it in order, and see what can be done with a shared world whose contributors didn't roll up their characters with D&D dice.

Robin McKinley edited **IMAGINARY LANDS**, a traditional anthology with some decidedly non-traditional stories. McKinley's own "The Stone Fey" is a haunting story of a girl who loves an unloving man; Jane Yolen's "Evian Steel" is a strong treatment of the coming-of-age theme; there are other good tales. For me, the standout is Peter Dickinson's "Flight," though I know some of you will say it reads like a historical essay. That's because it is a historical essay. It just happens to be a brilliant, unforgettable one. (Other readers have praised "Paper Dragons," by James Blaylock. I can't tell you why, because I found it unreadable—but it ended up as a Nebula Award finalist. Maybe you'll like it better than I did. If you do, don't write to me to explain why it's good. I've read it twice, and I don't ever want to think about it again.)

Jane Yolen has long been known for writing jewel-like fairy tales—something most writers are smart enough not to attempt. Jane was too ignorant to know that good fairy tales, like folklore, have to grow out of years of retellings. So she wrote some anyway, and they were beautiful and original and powerful and true, and I fell in love with her work. (I also fell in love with **her**, a woman who, incredibly enough, manages to be Mom and Iconoclast at the same time.)

Most of her short works have been published in young adult books; **DRAGONFIELD** for the first time collects her short fiction for an adult fantasy audience. The title story has never been published before, and is worth the price of the book. But you can also read "The Girl Who Cried Flowers," "The Hundredth Dove," "The Five Points of Roguery," "Dream Weaver"—aw, hell, buy the book. I can't describe these stories. Some of them are so short and densely packed that my synopsis would be longer than the tale itself.

Contemporary poetry has long shown every sign of being dead—T.S.

Eliot and Ezra Pound killed it, and a thousand self-indulgent, incomprehensible, undisciplined, and untalented poets buried it. But ah!—something rises from the ashes! There are actually poets working today who are clear, who know how to make their language sing, who can stir your heart with their language. Let me recommend two of them who are working occasionally within the fantasy field today. Bruce Boston's collection **ALCHEMICAL TEXTS** passes my first test of poetry: Does it have music, power, and meaning when it is read aloud? Yes, it does, with climaxes and closures that sometimes left me gasping.

Charles de Lint, poet, and Donna Gordon, artist, have collaborated on **THE CALENDAR OF THE TREES**, in which lovely iconic engravings are linked, month by month, with the enigmatic declarations of the trees: "Hazel am I and I / hoard knowledge / like a salmon in / a sheltered pool . . ." This chapbook is beautifully printed on fine paper, and is only available in a severely limited edition.

Both **ALCHEMICAL TEXTS** and **THE CALENDAR OF THE TREES** work by cumulative effect. You should read them in order, and you should read them aloud—at least in a whisper—so you can hear the music and the rhythms of the words. Each poem contains echoes of the ones before, and they build into a beautiful whole. You won't find these little books on your bookstore shelves; you have to order them. They may just remind you of what poetry can be when it's alive.

Next Time

Next time—if there is a next time (it all depends on how many copies of **this** issue are sold, so if you want more of **IF**, make your friends buy their own copies)—I'll review Sheri Tepper's

True Game series, which is science fiction that feels like fantasy, or maybe fantasy with sci-fi underpinnings. Whatever it is, I like it a lot, and there's a lot of it to review. Eight volumes so far. I'll also talk about her best work to date, **MARIANNE, THE MAGUS, AND THE MANTICORE**. And, of course, whatever I manage to read between now and then. If all else fails, I can go back and talk about some hardcover novels that will be coming out in paperback about the time my review comes out—maybe **THE POSTMAN** or **HUMAN ERROR**. We'll see.

Books Reviewed

Bruce Boston **ALCHEMICAL TEXTS** [Ocean View Press, PO Box 4198, Mountain View, CA 94040, 16pp, \$3.00]

Steven Brust **BROKEDOWN PALACE** [Ace, 270pp, \$2.95]

Perry A. Chapdelaine, Sr., Tony Chapdelaine, & George Hay, ed. **THE JOHN W. CAMPBELL LETTERS, vol. 1** [AC Projects, Inc., Rt. 4, Box 137, Franklin, TN 37064, 610pp, \$5.95]

Charles de Lint **THE CALENDAR OF THE TREES** [Triskell Press, PO Box 9480, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1G 3V2, 32pp]

Philip K. Dick **RADIO FREE ALBEMUTH** [Arbor House, 214pp, \$14.95]

David Drake **BRIDGEHEAD** [Tor, 279pp, \$3.50]

M. Coleman Easton **ISKIIR** [Popular Library/Questar, 259pp, \$3.50]

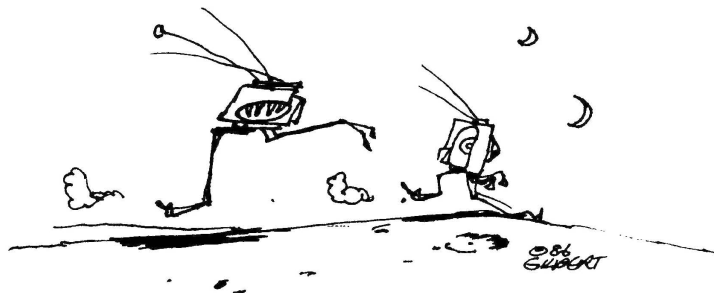
Gregory Frost **TAIN** [Ace, 378pp, \$3.50]

William Gibson **BURNING CHROME** [Arbor House, 170pp, \$14.95]

David Hartwell **AGE OF WONDERS** [McGraw-Hill, 224pp, \$3.95]

Robert Holdstock **MYTHAGO WOOD** [Arbor House, 252pp, \$14.95]
 James Patrick Kelly & John Kessel **FREEDOM BEACH** [Bluejay, 259pp, \$8.95]
 Megan Lindholm **WIZARD OF THE PIGEONS** [Ace, 214pp, \$3.75]
 Robin McKinley, ed. **IMAGINARY LANDS** [Ace, 230pp, \$2.95]
 Mike Resnick **SANTIAGO: A MYTH OF THE FAR FUTURE** [Tor, 376pp, \$3.50]
 Carter Scholz **CUTS** [Chris Drumm Booklet #20, PO Box 445, Polk City, IA 50226, 55pp, \$2.50; write for catalog of other booklets]
 Will Shetterly **WITCH BLOOD** [Ace, 197pp, \$2.95]

Will Shetterly & Emma Bull, ed. **LIAVEK** [Ace, 274pp, \$2.95]
 Brad Strickland **TO STAND BENEATH THE SUN** [Signet, 256pp, \$2.50]
 Paul Williams **ONLY APPARENTLY REAL: THE WORLD OF PHILIP K. DICK** [Arbor House, 169pp, \$7.95]
 Christopher Winn **LEGAL DAISY SPACING: THE BUILD-A-PLANET OF OFFICIAL WORLD IMPROVEMENTS** [Random House, 123pp, \$7.95]
 Jane Yolen **DRAGONFIELD AND OTHER STORIES** [Ace, 241pp, \$2.95]



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SF CALENDAR

For information regarding a convention in this listing, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to the address given.

August 28-September 1. CONFEDERATION, the 44th World SF Convention. Location: Hyatt Regency, Atlanta Hilton Hotels, Mariott Marquis, Atlanta GA. Guests include: Ray Bradbury, Terry Carr, Bob Shaw. For info, write to: ConFederation, Suite 1986, 3277 Roswell Rd., Atlanta GA 30305.

September 5-7. BOREAL '86. Municipal Congress Centre, Longueuil PQ Canada. Bernard Tremblay, 1862 Rue Marnier, Longueuil PQ J4K 4T4, Canada.

September 5-7. COPPERCON 6. Safari Hotel, Scottsdale AZ. James P. Hogan. CopperCon, Box 11743, Phoenix AZ 85061. (602) 968-5673.

September 19-21. MOSCON VIII. Cavanaugh's Motor Inn, Moscow ID. Dean Ing, Michael Goodwin, Bryce Walton. Moscon 8, Box 85211, Moscow ID 83843.

September 19-21. EARTHCON VI. Holiday Inn-Independence, Cleveland OH. Gordon R. Dickson, C.J. Cherry. EarthCon, Box 5641, Cleveland OH 44101.

September 26-28. DEEPSOUTHCON 24. Galt House Hotel, Louisville KY. David Hartwell, Ann Layman Chancellor, Alex Schomburg, Somtow Sucharitkul. L&N Deepsouthcon, Box 58009, Louisville KY 40258.

September 27-28. VALLEY CON 11. Ramada Inn, Moorhead MN. Wilson Tucker, Robert Vardeman, Cooki Lumsden & Dave Hayward. Valley Con 11, P.O. Box 7202, Fargo ND 58111.

October 3-5. CONTRADICTION 6. Hotel Niagara, Niagara Falls NY. George R.R. Martin. Contradiction, 1356 Niagara Ave., Niagara Falls NY 14305.

October 3-5. JAFCON. Quality Inn Center, Salt Lake City UT. Roger Zelazny, Chris Claremont, Paul E. Zimmer. Jafcon, Box 510232, Salt Lake City UT 84151.

October 4-5. ENCOUNTER 10. Hilton Inn East, Wichita KS. Fritz Leiber, Gene Roddenberry. FANdom, Box 1675, Wichita KS 67201.

October 10-12. CONCLAVE XI. Hilton, Plymouth MI. Greg Bear, Joan and Joanne Hall. Waldo & Magic Inc., Box 2915, Ann Arbor MI 48106.

October 10-12. Armadillocon 8. Sheraton Crest, Austin TX. William Gibson, Debbie Notkin, Lewis Shiner. Armadillocon, Box 9612, Austin TX 78766.

October 10-12. NONCON 9. Regency Motor Inn, Edmonton Alberta. Judith Merril, Ken Maddin, Dolores Booker. NonCon 9, Box 4506, Edmonton Alberta T6E 4T7, Canada.

October 10-12. ROVACon 11. Salem High School, Salem Va. Alan Dean Foster, Walter Koenig, Hal Clement, Richard Pini, M.A. Foster, Kelly Freas. RoVaCon 11, Box 117, Salem VA 24153. (703) 389-9400.

October 11-12. OCTOCON V. El Rancho Tropicana Hotel, Santa Rosa CA. Frederick Pohl, James Gurney, Lucy Buss, David Gerrold, James P. Hogan, Jerry Pournelle. Spellbinder Inc., Box 1824, Santa Rosa CA 95402.

October 17-19. CONTACT '86. Ramada Inn, Evansville IN. David R. Palmer, Timothy Zahn, Roger Reynolds. Contact '86, c/o RCSFA, Box 3894, Evansville IN 47737.

*October 24-26. CON*STELLATION V.* Andromeda Hilton, Huntsville AL. Orson Scott Card, Ron & Val Lakey Lindahn, Rusty Hevelin, Marta Randall. Con*Stellation V, Box 4857, Huntsville AL 35815.

October 24-26. ICON XI. Longbranch Motor Inn, Cedar Rapids IA. Robert Asprin, Phil Foglio. Icon XI, Box 525, Iowa City IA 52244.

October 31-November 2. NECRONOMICON '86. Airport Holiday Inn, Tampa FL. Frederick Pohl. Stonehill SF Assoc., Box 2076, Riverview FL 33569.

October 30-November 2. 12th WORLD FANTASY CONVENTION. Biltmore Plaza, Providence RI. Ramsey Campbell, Charles L. Grant, P.K. Potter. 12th World Fantasy Convention, Box 3251, Darrington Branch PO. Pawtucket RI 02861.

November 7-9. SCI CON 8. Sheraton Beach Inn, Virginia Beach VA. C.J. Cherryh, Mike Kaluta, Marty Gear, Allen Wold. Sci Con 8, Box 9434, Hampton VA 23670.

November 7-9. ORYCON '86. Red Lion Inn, Lloyd Center, Portland OR. Edward Bryant, Jessica Amanda Salmonson, George R.R. Martin. Orycon '86, Box 5703, Portland OR 97228. (503) 283-0802, 774-7592.

November 8-10. TUSCON 13. Executive Inn, Tucson AZ. Verner Vinge, Hilde Arthurs, Bruce D. Arthurs, James Corrick. Tuscon 13, Box 26822, Tucson AZ 85726.

November 14-16. WINDYCON XIII. Hyatt Regency Woodfield, Schaumburg IL. Harry Harrison, Donald & Elsie Wollheim, Arlin Robins, Marta Randall. Windycon XIII, Box 432, Chicago IL 60690.

November 14-16. PHILCON 1986. Philadelphia PA. Isaac Asimov, Frederick Pohl, Michael Whelan. PSFS, Box 8303, Philadelphia PA 19101.

November 15-16. STAR TREK PLATINUM ANNIVERSARY CONVENTION. Boston Park Plaza Hotel, Boston MA. Gene Roddenberry, Robert Wise, Nicholas Meyer, George Takei, Robin Curtis, Diane Duane. Platinum Anniversary Convention, Box 6838, Broad & Walter P.O., Boston MA 02102.

November 28-30. LOSCON 13. Hilton, Pasadena CA. John Brunner, Bruce & Elayne Pelz. LASFS Inc., 11513 Burbank Blvd., N Hollywood CA 91601. (818) 760-9232.

November 28-30. CONTEX 4. Houston TX. L. Sprague & Catherine de Camp, Pat Breeding, Carolyn Cooper. Context, c/o Friends of Fandom, Box 772473. Houston TX 77215.

November 28-30. DARKOVER GRAND COUNCIL MEETING. Radisson Hotel, Wilmington DE. Anne McCaffrey. Darkover Grand Council Meeting, Box 8113, Silver Spring MD 20907.

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