COMPACT SF

NEW WORLDS

3/6

JOHN BRUNNER's

latest novel

THE EVIL THAT MEN DO

NEW WORLDS SF

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Contents

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All manuscripts must be double-spaced, typed on quarto paper with a top-sheet containing title, author's name, word-length and author's address. A stamped, addressed envelope must accompany all submissions.

MAKING IT MATTER

A RECENT DISCUSSION at Better Books called 'SF: Does It Matter?' consisted of a panel of five people connected with sf—John Brunner, the writer; Bill Butler, the poet, critic and anthologist; Douglas Hill, journalist and sf critic for *Tribune*; George Hay, anthologist and writer; and the editor of this magazine.

What emerged distinctly from the discussion was not an answer (probably no-one expected one) but an agreement that sf is really an artificial term, used in the semi-artificial division of literature in general; that essentially literature is all one thing and what is good is good and what is bad is bad.

In sf, as in anything else, the real divisions are not general but personal. One speaker at the discussion obviously had a strong prejudice in favour of social satire, another preferred powerful symbolic imagery and metaphysical themes, while another was primarily interested in fiction predicting social and scientific trends as accurately as possible, thus preparing us in advance for future changes. Someone else felt there was a place for the colourful action story, the space opera, that was intelligently and literately written, with adequate characterisation.

If the discussion had been about fiction in general, the respective speakers' preferences would probably have been for Evelyn Waugh, Franz Kafka, Fred Hoyle, possibly, and Neville Shute, perhaps.

It is plain, in fact, that there is a kind of sf to suit any taste. The arguments that periodically rage in the sf world as to what sf should be could be resolved by

the statement: Sf should be everything it can be. To be good it must be written with style, skill and freshness. After that it can be social satire, metaphysical, realistic-predictive, action-adventure, or whatever else it cares to be.

What must be avoided is the sad attempt already made by some writers to earn 'respectability' by writing sf denuded of all its essential qualities, conforming to the conventions of the social novel and producing space-stories that, aside from being set in a spaceship or on Deneb VI, are really stories of manners, not of ideas—and unsatisfactory *because* of their setting.

There *are* two rough divisions in fiction, of course, and all sf should fall into just one of these. There is the social novel and the novel of ideas.

Broadly speaking, the social novel confines itself to observation of the society of its day, analysing human characters who incidentally reflect the broader issues of their times; whereas the novel of ideas seeks to study these broader issues in some depth and uses characters, backgrounds and events selected specifically for this purpose. Where the two successfully combine we often have an outstanding novel—like Grass's *The Tin Drum*, where we find certain elements of the kind usually associated with the fantastic story (an area of popular literature into which much sf falls, where sensational use of the fantastic is included for its own sake—its purpose being to excite the emotions for a little while). These are marked in the central character, a dwarf who spends all his time beating on a tin drum and who, if provoked, can scream at a frequency sufficient to break all the glass in a city. Yet Grass has not included these elements merely from fancy; he has included them to point up his theme and symbolise his views in a specific way, so that you are in little doubt about what he's getting at.

Sf cannot have much influence on the ordinary social novel and a social novel (including much social satire) cannot succeed very satisfactorily in sf trappings.

If it is to retain its character as a literature of ideas, sf must emphasise its fantastic elements rather than rid itself of them, but if it is to be more than just sensational

entertainment, then its writers must make proper use of these elements—for purposes of social satire, metaphysical drama, social/scientific prediction or whatever aspect that is the author's dominant interest.

The constant use of ready-made images and backgrounds supplied by earlier authors—The Post Bomb, The Spaceship Drama, The Alien Invasion, The New Planet, The Space War, The Overcrowded World, The First Contact, etc.—cannot succeed (except rarely, in the hands of a really original writer) to fulfil this purpose because the images have become over-familiar, setting up incoherent associations in the reader's mind so that by using them the author is often confusing rather than emphasising his points. Having become too ordinary to the author, too ordinary to the reader, these images lose their usefulness even on the escapist level. It would surely be better to set a story in present-day London or New York, aboard an ocean liner or aircraft, on a desert-island, during the last War; using familiar images that at least have well-defined, un-ambiguous associations.

It is sometimes possible for an author to study the implications of the appeal of this now-corroded arsenal of symbols and use some of the old images to get new effects, but the danger is that the reader's over-familiarity with them will cause him to miss the point of whatever the author has intended to say, simply because the reader's imagination cannot be stimulated by an over-familiar imaginary background, situation or object.

It is also possible to invest the old images with new life, if the author has a sufficiently developed original imagination. Bradbury did it, in his time, and Cordwainer Smith does it. But here the images are usually used non-naturalistically for sensational and poetic effect —the spaceships are of gold and brass, the astronauts are armoured demigods, the planetary landscapes those of the dream, and the stars are jewels in an outer-spacial tapestry—and any 'serious' theme can be swamped and lost under a profusion of rich and inexact symbolism, just as the theme is lost in an action story of the kind we described last month.

The stock images of an earlier kind of sf, whether

'realistic' or 'poetic' have suffered because of the careless use to which they have been put. The treasury once squandered has now tarnished. Writers must concentrate more on finding fresh images and less on attempts to make their stories 'realistic' (i.e., naturalistic), but they must also make more exact use of these images once found.

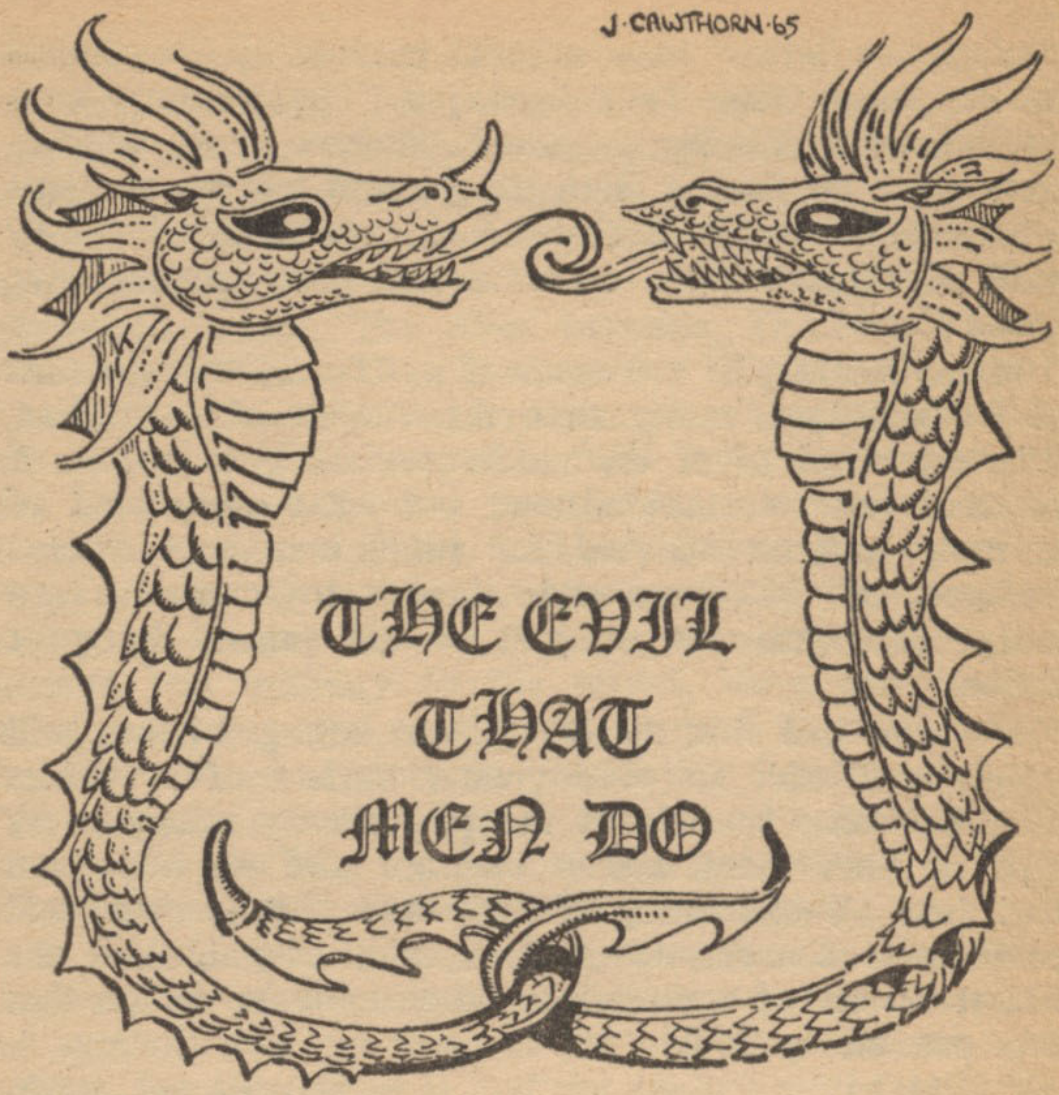
In the recent past too much sf has lacked this stimulus of fresh images, rather than the vitality of new ideas. Whatever kind of sf the reader prefers is a matter of personal taste, not contention; but what every kind of sf must continue to find for itself is a sophisticated freshness of vision and style if it is to 'matter' as an independent genre or as part of the general body of fiction.

We hope that this, the first of our enlarged issues, will supply you with an even greater variety of sf stories than has been possible in the past. Pretty nearly every type of story mentioned is included and we hope you find them all stimulating of their kind. Future issues will continue to concentrate on this policy of publishing the widest variety of speculative and imaginative fiction that it is possible to find.

Michael Moorcock
Langdon Jones

NEXT MONTH

THE ASSASSINATION WEAPON is perhaps J. G. Ballard's finest short story to date. It utilises an individual technique and approach to its subject matter which will probably make it controversial in many respects. It is a splendid combination of powerful, economic writing and highly evocative imagery. It is intense, ironic and stimulating on both an emotional and an intellectual level, taking an imaginative, deeply-felt look at the 'reality' of various modern images. As the focus of the story he takes the images of three assassinated men—Kennedy, Oswald and Malcolm X—and asks not *who* killed them, but *what* killed them and, incidentally, what created them. We are not likely to see a more original sf story in 1966—unless it is also by Ballard. Don't miss NWSF 161 with THE ASSASSINATION WEAPON.



John Brunner's new novel

Part One

one

THE PARTY INVITATION had said eight o'clock. It was twenty past nine when Godfrey Rayner rang the Jacksons' doorbell. He had very nearly not come at all—he didn't know Tom and Eirene Jackson well, it was streaming with rain, and he wasn't in the best mood to enjoy himself.

But, having nothing else in particular to do, he'd compromised and come late to miss the period of suspended animation with which parties generally begin.

The door flew open, and there was Eirene: flush-faced in a topless dress of pink satin. She reminded him of a cone loaded with soft icecream.

"Godfrey!" she enthused. "How wonderful to see you! I was afraid this dreadful weather had kept you away —why you poor thing you're soaked, come inside quickly it's going terribly well and—"

And, and, and . . . Eirene was given to frothing like shaken champagne in front of men. She was also fond of squeezing arms or hands that fell within her reach, a habit Godfrey found infuriating. But he suffered himself to be led into the room where the party was taking place, like a wayward child whose mother had to keep a grip on him in case he was naughty.

Not that many men could entertain Oedipal feelings towards Eirene, of course. She was very pretty in a china-doll fashion, with thick yellow hair and big blue eyes. If she were a little less gushing, if she tried the experiment of being remote, she'd probably acquire an endless string of adoring but hopeless worshippers.

Taking his coat, she handed him over to her husband Tom, to be furnished with a drink. He liked Tom much more than his wife. A thick-set, calm man, he nodded gravely where Eirene would have shrieked, and measured his words with care.

Drink in hand, Godfrey looked around the room, hoping there was no one there he knew except the host. He was forever in the plight of a musician or conjurer when asked to parties, and hated being compelled to "put on a show" to justify his existence. But it was hard to tell if he did know anyone; Eirene had decided to create a romantic atmosphere, and the only light came from half a dozen bottle-stuck candles. A few couples were dancing to the thumping beat of a recent hit record; others were sitting or standing around in dark corners. About thirty people were present altogether.

"Like me to introduce you around?" Tom inquired. "I don't think you know anyone here, do you?"

"To be honest, I can't tell."

Tom chuckled. "It is pretty murky, isn't it? Wait till

someone opens the kitchen door, then—it'll let in some light and you'll be able to see the faces."

The doorbell rang again, and Eirene squeaked excitedly as she went to answer it. Noticing how Tom glanced after her, he said, "Why don't you go and attend to the people who've just come? Don't worry about me, I'll be okay."

Eirene would have said, "Oh but no! You absolutely must meet—!" Tom nodded without question and moved away.

The record ended. A man who had been dancing separated from his partner and headed for the bar, where Godfrey was standing, to pick up a fresh drink. His smoothly brushed fair hair and rather toothy smile struck a chord in Godfrey's memory, but no name attached itself to the face.

The moment he was close enough to make out features, however, the fair-haired man exclaimed, "Why, hullo! Aren't you Godfrey Rayner?"

"That's right. But I'm afraid I don't—"

"Oh, I wouldn't expect you to remember me. I was one of your subjects at a demonstration you gave a few months ago. The name's Locke, Marcus Locke. I say, it's wonderful to bump into you again like this! You gave me one of the most fascinating experiences of my whole life. I'd always had the idea that hypnotism was sheer charlatanry, or rigged with accomplices to dupe a theatre audience."

He smiled diffidently at Godfrey, and the latter's heart sank. He could read the next question in that smile.

"There's no chance of you—uh—performing tonight, is there? I'd love to watch you work again. I was so thrilled I told everyone about it for weeks afterwards, till they started asking questions I couldn't answer—"

Flipping the pages of his memory, Godfrey at last placed their meeting. He interrupted, "Of course, I found you were an excellent subject, didn't I?"

"So you told me. I wouldn't know, myself."

"Ah . . . Did the 'everybody' you went around telling include Eirene, by any chance?"

Locke frowned. "Not that I can recall. Why?"

"You know what Eirene's like. If she does get to know, she won't let me rest till she's made me perform for her guests. And I'm not a professional entertainer. Hypnotism is too valuable as a psychological tool to be reduced to a parlour trick. Sometimes—like the time we met before—I'm forced into putting on a demonstration, and then I try to dispel the misconceptions people have of hypnotism as—as black magic. But I resent being treated as a cabaret act."

Locke nodded gravely. "I quite understand, so I'll keep my mouth shut. I would have liked to see you perform—I mean, working again, though."

"If you're serious about that, get in touch with me some time. I help out occasionally with research projects at Victoria College, and good subjects are always welcome."

"I—" Locke hesitated. "I found it a bit disturbing, you know. One always hears that people who hypnotise easily are weak-willed, suggestible types, and one doesn't like—"

"It's not true," Godfrey cut in. "Good subjects are usually of rather high intelligence—too intelligent to think they're being bewitched—and have outstanding self-confidence. Generalising wildly, one might say that poor subjects are afraid to put themselves in the hypnotist's hands because they think they may be too weak-willed ever to come back."

Locke said something in reply, but Godfrey hardly noticed, for at that moment someone opened the door to the kitchen, and a shaft of light fell into what had been the darkest corner of the room. In that corner was a girl.

She sat statue-frozen in a deep armchair, one white arm along its side with her slim fingers around a glass of wine. Hair, as black as a raven, was thick around her head, lying soft on her shoulders and pouring halfway down her wide pale forehead. Under delicately arched eyebrows were slumbrous dark eyes with swooping lashes; her mouth was very slightly open, as though she had caught her full lower lip on one sharp tooth. She wore a plain black dress, without jewellery, and because she

was wearing it Godfrey could not tell if it was a cheap department-store rag or a Parisian inspiration.

Yet she was sitting alone and talking to no one.

The kitchen door shut; darkness fell and someone came to pour ice clinking into a bowl on the bar. But the picture of her remained in Godfrey's mind. He was shaken. He was hardly a susceptible man, having reached his present age of thirty without seriously considering marriage, but that brief glimpse had made him feel an excitable seventeen again.

Belatedly, he realised Locke was waiting for him to say something, and he covered as best he could his lapse of attention. "I'm sorry! I was trying to remember—you're a critic, aren't you?"

Locke, whom the polite deception apparently hadn't fooled, smiled. "Been promoted, actually. I'm editing the review section of the *Commentator* these days . . . She is gorgeous, isn't she?"

Godfrey gave an embarrassed grin. "Yes, she is. Who is she?"

"She works in Eirene's office, I believe. Cantrell, Cantry —some such name. I never met her before."

"Why on earth is she being left to herself that way?"

Locke shrugged. "Seems to be an Ice Queen, as you might say. She can't or won't dance; she won't strike up a conversation with anybody—and all the eligible men in the room have had a go by now. Eirene says that's how she is all the time. Myself, I think it must be more than simple shyness. If my wife weren't here I'd happily try and find out what it actually is . . ."

He parodied a ludicrous expression of disappointment and crossed the floor to rejoin his wife.

Godfrey stayed where he was. Now the room was completely in candlelight again, he could make out nothing of the girl except a pale blur that was her face. But he could visualise clearly the expression he'd caught in the brief shaft of brilliance. Locke was probably right. A shy person would show tension at a party like this —signs of trying to pluck up courage, pleasure at being helped to relax. Instead, the lovely features had displayed

—what? Boredom? Worse than that: absolute and total lack of interest.

Well, he had nothing to lose by following the example of all the other men who'd approached her. He turned to refill his glass, and was on the point of heading for the dark corner when Eirene's voice rang out shrilly, laden with doom.

"Godfrey! You never told me you were a *hypnotist*! Oh, you must show us how it's done!"

two

UNLUCKILY, THAT WAS the exact moment when the last record on the player came to an end, and everyone in the room heard the cry. Heads turned to see who was being addressed.

Eirene came scurrying up to catch at Godfrey's arm and gaze at him with her most melting expression. Like a snowman on a warm day.

"Please, Godfrey! It would absolutely *make* the evening!"

Godfrey directed a furious glance at Marcus Locke who spread his hands as though to disclaim responsibility.

"I'm sorry," he said curtly.

"Oh, *Godfrey*! why not? I'm sure everyone would love—"

"I'm not a conjurer. And hypnotism isn't a form of cheap entertainment."

"Oh, come now," said a red-faced man Godfrey didn't know. "I've seen some wonderful tricks done with hypnotism when I was in India. There was a chappie in a bazaar at—"

"I object to being classed as a bazaar wallah," Godfrey said, and the face turned from red to scarlet.

Eirene rounded on the man. "I think that's very rude of you, Peter!" she scolded. "No wonder Godfrey won't perform if that's the attitude people have toward his—his ability."

"Oh, please do it for us! It would be so interesting!" A chorus of demands went up.

Oh, *blast* Eirene! Now he had no choice but to collect his coat and go home. He'd promised himself faithfully that he would never again—

And then he checked. To his astonishment, this had finally thawed the apathy of the black-haired girl sitting alone. She was leaning forward with almost an eager look, but still too timid to add her pleas to the continuing babble.

"All right," Godfrey sighed. "I warn you, you may have to sit in dead silence for anything up to an hour, but if that's what you want . . ."

They did. Everyone sat down; one of the unattached men seized the chance to perch on the arm of the girl's chair, and Godfrey reflected with grim satisfaction that since it was capped with plain wood he was going to be uncomfortable soon.

While Eirene was arranging chairs for volunteer subjects, Locke came over with an apologetic expression. "I'm frightfully sorry," he murmured. "But my wife asked who I was talking to, and Eirene must have overheard my answer."

"It's a bit late now," Godfrey shrugged. "Will you act as a subject again? These conditions don't make for easy working, and I'd like to have one person lined up who'll respond."

"Yes, of course I will—it's the least I can do."

Godfrey turned. Tom Jackson, his host, was standing at his elbow with a troubled look.

"Godfrey," he whispered, "there's nothing dangerous in what you're going to do, is there?"

"Not if people do exactly as I tell them." The assurance didn't lighten Tom's expression noticeably. "Look, could you organise some quiet background music for me? Something with lots of sentimental strings is best. It covers up distracting noises during the induction. I'll signal when I want it turned on or off."

"All ready, Godfrey!" Eirene was back, clutching at his hand again and waving at the semicircle of chairs she had arranged. "Will that do?"

"Yes, fine. Now be a good girl and sit down somewhere—"

"But I want to be hypnotised!" Eirene tried to look like a child cheated of a promised sweet.

"All right, if you like. But wait till I call for volunteers, okay?" Godfrey took from his pocket the notebook he carried everywhere—he never relied on memory alone, but invariably listed all the commands he gave under hypnosis which would have to be erased before awakening, and all posthypnotic commands with the signal designed to key them.

Then, pencil in hand, he took station before the audience. He gave a last glance in the direction of the black-haired girl, who was intently waiting for him to start, and then surveyed the rest of the room. Everyone looked puzzled, and he knew why. One of his most valuable assets was his appearance. The stereotype hypnotist has flashing eyes and a sinister face, dresses in a flapping cloak and is eccentric, if not mad. It helped to dispel mistaken ideas when people saw before them a youngish man, brown-haired, neither thin nor plump, clean-shaven, in all outward respects unremarkable. Only his voice, in which he had cultivated a level, soothing quality because it was his chief instrument, seemed exceptional.

"I'm here under protest," he said. A silly blonde at the back giggled; her escort hushed her, looking irritated. "Hypnotism has a lot in common with dynamite. In capable hands it's safe and useful, and in the hands of a careless amateur it's dangerous. Most people get their idea of hypnotism from old wives' tales and irresponsible stage performers—or they used to, before stage performers were banned in Britain— so I always have to start by clearing up false impressions.

"I'm not a professional, but I think I'm a little more than an amateur. I've studied this subject since I was in my teens, and I've taken part in research programmes where hypnotism is put to its proper use—as a key to the human mind. I don't think you'd ask a psychoanalyst who came to a party to put the host on the couch for your

amusement. Now you know why I don't like showing off at parties.

"What I am willing to do is show you that there's no magic involved in hypnotism. Almost anyone could become a hypnotist, just as very nearly everyone can be hypnotised. But people who respond really well are rare, so don't expect a display of scientific miracles. Now: who would like to—?"

Eirene exploded to her feet. Locke followed, as unconcerned as if he had just agreed to dance with his wife. Four others—two men and two women—joined them hesitantly. Another man, who had drunk a good deal, Godfrey sent firmly but politely back to his place.

He ran a few tests—sway-test, hand-clasping—and then told them to sit down on the waiting chairs. He already knew by now what sort of response he would get. Marcus Locke he expected to react as before; Eirene was too eager for something to happen and wouldn't relax properly. The other two men were also over-tense, but one of the girls looked promising: a redhead named Sylvia.

"Absolute silence, please," he reminded the watchers, and signalled to Tom to start the music.

He judged that ten minutes spent on the induction was a maximum in front of this audience. Accordingly he measured his repeated commands to relax, hear only his voice, relax, drift away, and so on, to that limit. Marcus went out quickly; the watchers gasped in startled unison when Godfrey lifted his right arm and stroked it rigid with a swift pass of his hand. When he tried the same with Eirene he could see the muscles of her neck lumping with strain and realised she was consciously keeping the arm raised. He lowered it and gave her more commands, but without much hope of success.

After the ten minutes, Marcus and Sylvia were in deep trance, one of the other men had not responded at all, and the rest were under very lightly. He gestured for Tom to turn down the music, planning to concentrate exclusively on the two best subjects. It would do the others no harm to remain in a light doze and be woken up together

at the end—in fact, they would probably be refreshed by the rest.

From the corner of the room came a whispered, "I say!"

It was the man perched on the arm of the chair where the black-haired girl sat. He was beckoning excitedly. Something not uncommon had happened—the girl, obviously a first-class subject, had responded to commands not meant for her, and now sat with eyes closed, oblivious of the world. Well, that would have to be seen to. Godfrey left his row of volunteers with a quick order to rest for a while and went to investigate.

"Is she all right?" demanded the man on the chair-arm nervously. Godfrey nodded.

"It's a regular occurrence, this. That's why stage performances are too dangerous. What's her name, do you know?"

The man shook his head. Someone volunteered the information that her first name was Fay. Godfrey nodded thanks and bent his head close to hers.

"Fay! Fay, can you hear me?"

Without opening her eyes, she licked her lips and gave a nod

"How do you feel, Fay? Sleepy?"

Her full-lipped mouth worked for a moment before the words came. When they did, they rang with sudden frightening intensity. "Oh! Oh, I'm so *afraid*!"

Godfrey masked his alarm. "There's no need to be afraid," he murmured gently. "You're going to be all right!"

The girl shook her head; storm-waves tossed the black sea of her hair. "No! I can see the pit under the castle where the white dragon has his lair—I can feel arms around me like ropes covered with wet mud, rough and slimy. There's nothing left for me but—"

"When I count to three," interrupted Godfrey, "you'll fall into a deep, deep natural sleep. Without any dreams. You'll sleep for a few minutes, just a few minutes, and then you'll wake up comfortable and rested and relaxed and perfectly calm and happy, calm and happy . . . Can you hear me, Fay?"

The girl nodded, but a tear was forming under her right eyelid. It broke loose and trickled down her cheek.

"One! Two! Three!" said Godfrey sharply. "And you're asleep."

There was a sigh of restrained amazement from the watchers. The girl relaxed visibly, letting her head loll to one side and curling up almost like a kitten. Godfrey snatched at her wineglass to save it spilling over; he was sweating.

"I'll come back when I'm through with the others," he muttered. "Keep an eye on her. If she starts crying or talking in her sleep, get me back right away. Okay?"

The man on the arm of the chair nodded and swallowed with nervous loudness. Someone at the back of the room cracked, "That's a hell of a good cure for insomnia you have there!" The tension dissipated in forced chuckles.

"There's an object lesson for you all," Godfrey said loudly. "That sort of thing has happened in theatres and people have panicked because of it. And it puts the wind up amateurs because they don't know how to deal with it. Hypnotism looks easy, and it is. But so is setting light to gunpowder."

Some of the watchers shifted uncomfortably.

"You can move now if you want to, and talk quietly, but don't make any sudden loud noises. I'm going to show you a couple of comparatively harmless tricks with the help of Marcus and Sylvia here. There are plenty of others not so harmless. Telling someone in trance that he feels sad, for example—if the command isn't erased properly, he can go around in a fit of depression for weeks, and there have been suicides because of it. And telling a subject to get drunk off a glass of water, too: leaving that one in force makes you behave like a chronic alcoholic. All right, here we go."

He wheeled around. "Marcus! Don't you find it warm in here? Anyone would think it was the middle of July! In fact, it's getting very hot—hot and muggy like a Turkish bath!"

There were giggles as Marcus obligingly responded: mopping his face, fanning himself, taking off his jacket

and loosening his tie. Sylvia also began to fidget on her chair.

When Marcus was unbuttoning his shirt, Godfrey told him he was quite comfortable now, and switched his aim. "Sylvia, isn't it peculiar the way Marcus is acting? After all, it's not warm in here at all. There are draughts everywhere. It's positively chilly!"

Sylvia was wearing a topless dress with a flimsy nylon stole. She pulled the latter around her as if it were a thick woollen shawl. Soon, under further prompting, she was stamping her feet and blowing on her hands to the accompaniment of the audience's laughter.

Godfrey let the paradox continue for a moment, and then restored the subjective temperature of both of them to normal. He was on the point of inducing a further demonstration when he saw that Eirene, very lightly in trance, was moving her lips a little.

He bent close to her. "What is it, Eirene?" he asked softly.

"The white dragon," Eirene said clearly. "It's coming out of its lair."

Godfrey shot a glance at the black-haired girl. She was sitting curled up as he had left her, breathing deeply and regularly. This was interesting! He moved back five or six feet and whispered a few words, hoping Eirene would register and repeat them, but he had no success. The moment of the phenomenon had passed.

Cases of hyperacute hearing were one of the minor fascinations of research into hypnosis. If Eirene were co-operative, it might be worth following this up—she was in so shallow a trance he wouldn't have expected her to do anything but doze. He scribbled a cryptic note to himself: *Eir. J.—audit, hyperaesth. 1018 p.m. ???*

It was hardly worth inducing posthypnotic commands, he decided; the audience had probably not expected more than an amusing interlude, and he'd given them that. He woke all the subjects up. They yawned, stretched, rose to their feet. He asked them each in turn if they were all right, and on being assured they felt fine, crossed to check on the black-haired girl.

"Wake up!" he whispered. "You're all right now."

The girl moved, opened her eyes—which he could now see were violet—and stared at his face at though she had never seen a human being before. Then, abruptly and terrifyingly, she burst into tears.

three

"I HAD A CASE of auditory hyperaesthesia at a party on Saturday night," Godfrey told Dr. Laszlo when they were lunching together the following Monday.

Large, slow-spoken, nearly bald, Laszlo made a hur-umphing noise as he lowered his tankard of beer. He had come from Hungary during the thirties, a refugee from the Fascist government of Admiral Horthy, and had so far adopted the customs of his new country as to insist on lunching daily in a pub.

"You were putting on a party show, eh?" he grunted. "Do you still indulge in this—this unethical frippery?"

Godfrey flushed. "I was driven into a corner. It's like being a musician. People insist on them performing at parties who'd never pay to attend one of their concerts."

"Hm! Yes, it is like forever carrying a piano on the back. Since I began to research in hypnosis, it has happened to me, even to me, Laszlo!" The doctor gulped down another huge swig of beer and set the tankard down with a thump. "This hyperacuity of hearing—is the subject available?"

"I imagine she could be. But she's an empty-headed kind of woman. The only reason I mentioned it is because she didn't respond well to the induction, and in such a light trance she still managed to overhear a mere whisper in the far corner."

"Yah-hah." Laszlo bit the end of a large cigar. "You are sure you explain it correctly?"

"I don't see any alternative. Chance is ruled out, I think. The speaker was a girl who'd gone into trance accidentally—must be a first-rate subject, but she didn't volunteer. She showed signs of distress, and when I asked what the matter was I found I'd tapped some fantasy

or other, with a nightmare quality. I put her into a normal sleep, then woke her up when I'd finished the demonstration, and she had a violent abreaction. Cried for two or three minutes. But that seemed to drain the whole thing out of her mind; later, she was quite cheerful and more forthcoming than she'd been earlier. She's neurotically shy and withdrawn, I'm told, but she became a lot more relaxed and even smiled a few times."

"You made sure she was taken home safely?"

"Oh yes. A couple of the guests drove her all the way."

"Good. It is risky to leave someone like that wandering on the streets at night. But as to the phenomenon: did you get it to repeat?"

"I tried, and didn't manage it. I'm quite sure, though, that's what it must have been. It was so extraordinary—"

Laszlo finished puffing the cigar into life. "And what exactly was said?" he demanded out of a grey smoke-cloud.

"Something about a white dragon coming from its lair."

The effect of the remark on Laszlo was spectacular. The Hungarian coughed, choked, swallowed smoke and began to choke again, finally seizing his tankard and hurling the last of his beer down his throat as though to extinguish a fire in his chest. When he regained his composure he fixed Godfrey with steely eyes through the thick lenses of his glasses.

"Godfrey, you would not pull my leg, hm?"

"You think I'm joking? Why in the world—?"

"Because," said Laszlo heavily, "if indeed you have a case of auditory hyperaesthesia at this party of yours, I have a very much bigger one in Wickingham Prison."

Not giving Godfrey the chance to ask for explanations, he subsided into grumbling puzzlement, waving his empty tankard vaguely in the direction of a passing waitress.

The reference to the prison was clear enough. Not content with the work he'd been engaged on since Godfrey first met him—lecturing and conducting research at Victoria College, and serving two afternoons a week as consulting psychiatrist to a free clinic—Laszlo had lately

taken up the study of the effect of confinement on the human personality; he'd confided to Godfrey that he hoped hypnosis might provide a usable tool for the reform of suitable criminals.

But what connected Wickingham Prison with white dragons?

Godfrey waited as patiently as he could. He knew Laszlo too well to think he could prod him into speaking sooner than he felt inclined. At length, as though the second pint of beer had lubricated his voice, the Hungarian started to elucidate.

"The name of Alan Rogers—does that mean anything to you? He was given seven years' jail for certain sadistic acts that nearly resulted in the death of his partner. The Sunday newspapers had their mouths full of water over the case."

"I believe . . . yes, I remember. Didn't they unsuccessfully plead insanity?"

"Of course. But a fool of a government psychologist played on the jury's emotions. Naturally the man needed psychiatric help, not to be thrown for years in a cell with two other men."

Godfrey was thinking deeply. "It must be some time ago, surely. So I presume he's near the end of his sentence."

"Precisely so, which is why finally someone gets to see him with half an understanding of such matters—myself. They took him to be a 'model prisoner' "—fine scorn rang in the phrase—"because he was quiet like a mouse and never made any trouble, and he comes due for release with remission for good conduct. A stimulating prospect, hm, to any normal person? Except that this Rogers is of course not normal, and shows no enthusiasm, and at long long last they realise he ought to be examined by a psychologist. Not to care when he is released from jail? *This* they notice!

"And what do I find?" Laszlo sat back, gesturing expansively with his cigar. "I find he can escape from prison whenever he wants to!"

Godfrey gazed blankly.

"It was by the merest chance I discovered the truth,"

the doctor went on. Knowing Laszlo's painstaking methods, Godfrey was inclined not to believe that, but he let it pass. "It was when I noticed how he spent the time after he got bored with my questioning. He is in the habit of fixing his eyes on any bright thing and relapsing into trance."

"Autohypnosis!" Godfrey snapped.

"Correct, my young friend. And how does this relate to what you have said? Thus: the fantasy to which he retreats is one where he dwells in a castle overlooking a pit where a white dragon lives."

"What an incredible coincidence!" Godfrey exclaimed.

"You think now it is a chance resemblance?"

"What else can—? Oh: just a moment." Godfrey's mind churned. "A common source, perhaps?"

Laszlo rubbed his chin. "I think it likely, don't you? And if so, I should love to know that source; equipped with the raw material for his fantasy, I might be able to crack it and fit him to return to a normal life. Who is this girl?"

"Her name is Fay Cantrip. Apart from that, all I know about her is that she works in the same office as my hostess on Saturday—she lives in East London somewhere, but wasn't born here—and owing to this neurotic shyness I mentioned she has practically no friends."

"So shy, yet she came to a party?"

"The first ever. Eirene—the hostess—has been trying to persuade her to come for ages, she told me, and this was the first success."

"If she yields once, she will yield again. Human beings lose their resistance as metals do, with flexing and bending. Bring her to see me, Godfrey—or if you cannot I will go to see her. I smell a scent, and like a good dog I will not be put off it."

He looked at his watch. "Now I must go. We see you again next week, yes?"

"Of course."

"When do you make up your mind to do serious work, hm?"

Godfrey shrugged. "Sooner or later I guess I'll have to."

"Sooner, please! And remember whenever you decide I will arrange it all for you. Make you respectable, hm?"

Yes, sooner or later . . . He couldn't go on indefinitely trading on Laszlo's goodwill. It had secured him tolerated status at the college ever since Laszlo, launching his first research programme, had advertised for competent hypnotists with detailed notes of their past cases. But this wouldn't last him for ever. Now, any reasonably intelligent student could tackle most of the work he was doing.

Alternate weeks, he edited a journal of technical abstracts—checking proofs, reading the copy for press, and so on—and financed himself for the whole month, spending the rest of his time with Laszlo. He must settle for one or the other: either take a medical degree, with its long years of study, or revert to being a hobbyist pure and simple.

Laszlo had long since promised to sponsor him in an application for a State grant and find him a place at a medical school; moreover, he could never go back to regarding hypnotism as a mere hobby. Yet somehow he kept putting off the choice, putting it off . . .

Now, again, he seized the chance to shelve the problem for the afternoon and let the mystery of the castle with the white dragon occupy him instead. Not that he got any further towards a solution there: he'd suggested a common source to Laszlo because nothing else rationally accounted for the coincidence, but what kind of a source could it be? A strange one, to link a criminal sadist with a shy, country-born girl!

And possibly Eirene too, come to think of it. For she hadn't repeated what Fay said word for word; she'd, as it were, taken the statement a step further.

Any way he looked at it, he had to work through Eirene. He would have preferred not to—certainly he could never accept another invitation of hers for fear of being put on display again—but the first thing he planned to do on returning to his small apartment that evening was to call her up.

She saved him the trouble. As he came in the phone uttered its raucous ring, and her voice—almost equally shrill—filled his ear when he answered.

"Godfrey, I just had to tell you how delighted we all were with the show you put on for us at the party!" she clamoured. "Of course, I *did* hope you'd make me do something amusing . . . !"

"I'm afraid you aren't a very good subject," Godfrey muttered.

"Really? Well, I suppose that's reassuring—they do say it's a matter of will, and suggestibility, don't they?"

He didn't disillusion her. He wanted to get the worst of her pent-up chatter out of the way so he could ask about Fay.

"By the way," she continued rapidly, "I must tell you—it's so funny. You've made a conquest and you'll never guess who!"

"For Tom's sake I hope it isn't you."

She giggled archly. "Of course not! It's Fay—Fay Cantrip!"

"Good lord," Godfrey said inadequately. Delighted with the impact she'd made, Eirene rattled on.

"I was absolutely amazed when she started to ask about you in the office today. I just couldn't stop her, and you know what a mouse she's always been, so . . . She *says* she wants to ask you lots of questions about hypnotism, and of course that may be true, but it is the first time I've known her take an interest in a man, while all the other girls in the office can hardly talk about anything else, so the poor child feels dreadfully left out . . . So I did a terrible thing. I do hope you won't mind."

"So do I. What was it?"

"Well, I gave her your address, and it was only afterwards I thought I should have asked first, just in case she turns out to be a nuisance . . . But she'll probably only write to you, not actually come calling. She's so timid I think her own shadow frightens her. But I did feel I ought to warn you."

"Well, as it happens I did rather want to get in touch with her—"

"Oh, Godfrey, I'm so glad! I've tried and tried to get her to make friends with people, and you'd think all the men at least would—*you* know. But she's so peculiar after this weird childhood she had. She lived all alone with her mother in some decrepit mansion in the West Country, and her mother was—well—a bit touched in the head, and kept her cooped up without any friends, and if it hadn't been for an old school chum of mine who's married to a doctor down there she'd have been absolutely alone in the world because she has no relatives and her mother left her nothing but debts—"

"Oh, stop acting like a marriage bureau, Eirene!" Godfrey told her crossly. "As it happens, my chief at Victoria College wants to ask her about something rather unusual she said on Saturday night. It's in connection with a case of his."

Eirene gave a deflated sigh. "I might have known. You're a hard nut, Mr. Rayner—one of these confirmed bachelor types. Well, anyway: you can always get hold of her through my firm if she doesn't contact you after all."

The doorbell sounded. Godfrey heaved a sigh of relief and used it as an excuse to disengage himself from the phone. He went to answer.

And she *had* come.

four

WHEN HE CAME home, it had been only spitting with rain. Now there was a steady downpour, and her cheap plastic raincape glistened under the nearest streetlight. She stood with her feet close together and held her black purse before her with both hands.

"Mr.—Mr. Rayner," she said in a tremulous voice.

"And you're Fay Cantrip. Eirene told me you might be calling. Do come in." He stood back, but she hesitated.

"Are you sure I'm not disturbing—?"

"Not at all. Anyhow, do I look bad-mannered enough

to turn somebody back into the street when it's raining so hard?".

Taking as firm a grip on herself as she already had on her purse, she entered and allowed him to take her cape and hang it up. She talked in a low voice as though to steady herself.

"I'm awfully sorry to bother you like this, I know it's dreadfully forward of me to call on you when I'm a complete stranger, but I'm really in the most appalling trouble and you're the only person I know who might perhaps be able to—"

His mind practised in picking out significant words, Godfrey noted the old-fashioned term "forward". If the account Eirene had given of the girl's background was accurate, not one of her typical exaggerations, some of Fay's trouble might be due to simple anachronism: a juvenile overdose of Victorian novels, for example. This guess was supported by her further hesitation at the door of his sitting-room.

"I—I oughtn't really to be doing this—I mean . . ."

"You probably mean I'm a big bad hypnotist who puts young girls under the influence and does them wrong," Godfrey suggested in as sarcastic a voice as he could manage. He gave a broad grin, and was rewarded with the flicker of a smile. But she was plainly relieved to find nothing more dangerous to virtue in the room than a large, rather shabby leather armchair in which she consented to sit down.

"Coffee?" Godfrey asked, and she relaxed further. Relief at not being plied with drink? He plugged in the electric perculator and switched it on.

He took a chair facing her, offered a cigarette which as he expected was refused, and leaned back, crossing his legs. "I'm glad to see you, as a matter of fact," he said. "I wanted to get in touch with you and find out if you were all right."

"After what happened on Saturday? Oh yes, thank you. Mr. and Mrs. Locke took me all the way home, and I went straight to bed."

"No further trouble? No more depression?"

"Only what I usually have. And that's what I want to ask you about."

He studied her thoughtfully. She was sitting tensely in the exact middle of the chair. Indicative. She wore a rather prim navy-blue suit and a black jumper. By way of make-up, only lipstick, and that inexpertly applied. She was apparently living on the borderline of poverty, for her shoes were scuffed despite attempts to make them good with polish, her handbag—though new—was poor-quality plastic, and the brooch which was her one attempt to brighten this rather dismal ensemble was too obviously cheap and sparkly.

Nonetheless, this was an attractive girl, with such luminous eyes, lustrous hair, and slender legs.

"I'm not a doctor, you know," Godfrey said at length. "And I doubt if I can advise you to do more than go to one."

"But you're a hypnotist!" she interupted eagerly. "And I promise I wouldn't have bothered you unless I was sure it was something you might know about."

"Then fire ahead."

She drew up her lower lip under her teeth like a child asked a difficult question in class. She didn't meet his eyes—hadn't done so since her arrival—but looked sidelong at the floor. "What I mainly want to know is this. Can you hypnotise a person by remote control? Because that's what seems to be happening to me."

Godfrey thought wryly of his instant diagnosis: too many Victorian novels. This fitted nicely. Hypnotism at a distance, by some kind of telepathy, belonged with Mesmer and his "magnetic fluid".

"The short answer is no," he said. "But I'm not going to give you the short answer straight away. Explain a bit more, and don't worry about making it a long story."

She looked excessively grateful for the permission. "I expect it will be rather long. I've never told anyone before, but after what happened at the party . . . Well, it began years ago, really. I don't know if anyone's told you about me—Eirene, perhaps?"

"She said you were alone in the world except for the

wife of a doctor, who helped you when your mother died."

"That's right! Mrs. Eustace was very kind to me. We met when—when mother fell ill for the last time. She taught me to type, and wrote to Eirene and asked if she could find me a job . . . It was *awful* when I first came to London! People can hardly believe this, but I was never allowed to go to school, and I never had any friends of my own age, so it was just as though I'd come out of a convent. I'd hardly ever been in a car, and I'd been to the cinema about twice, and I hadn't seen television until mother was ill and Mrs. Eustace had a nurse come in and insisted on my going to her house for the evening—as a break . . .

"You see, Daddy was killed in the war—in Africa. Afterwards Mummy hated the outside world and tried to shut it out. We didn't have radio, or even newspapers; sometimes she had books sent from London, but they were always old or historical ones. Daddy had bought this rambling old house with a huge garden—it was the old manor house of a village miles from anywhere, called Market Barnabas—because he thought it would be safe from air-raids, do you see? And that was where I lived till—till Mummy went."

"But when the war ended?"

"It didn't make any difference! We kept on in the same way. By then"—her voice dropped to a hushed whisper—"I think Mummy must have been *deranged*."

"But surely *someone* must have taken an interest in all this?" Godfrey was groping. "School attendance officers, for instance?"

"I said people find it hard to believe, didn't I?" She bit her lip again. "Sometimes I do too, but—it did happen."

"Yes, of course. Go on."

"Well . . . Mummy wouldn't let me play with the children of the village—there weren't many, anyhow—because they might be dirty, or put nasty ideas in my head. Then when I was nine or ten she stopped being able to take me out—not that she ever had taken me out

much—although she wasn't ill enough to let me call a doctor till right at the end."

Piece by piece came the whole story: the lonely, intelligent girl haunting the closed-off wings of the old house, the wilderness of its neglected garden, trapped among cobwebs and weeds. Her only escape was through reading. So . . . she populated the silence around her with imaginary friends.

"When I was quite little, they all came out of *Alice*: the White Rabbit, the fawn that forgot its name. I acted out my pretend-adventures, talking to the air, taking someone else's side against myself in a game. Then, one day, I made a marvellous discovery. I found I could just sit and stare at something, and I could really feel I'd gone into another world. Sometimes I'd daydream for hours and hours."

Godfrey wanted to snap his fingers. Instead, since the coffee was ready, he got up and poured two cupfuls. Another astonishing coincidence! Maybe this girl generated them!

"What was it like, this 'other world'?" he encouraged.

"I—I can't describe it very easily. It was *extreme,* that's one important thing. For instance, all mountains were tremendously high and terribly steep. The forests were almost impenetrable, and wild beasts lurked behind every tree. And the people were like characters out of legend—*very* tall, *very* strong, *very* wise. Not all of them were pleasant. There were witches and ogres and giants. But sometimes"—she gave a self-conscious laugh—"there were handsome knights who came to rescue me."

"It doesn't sound so frightening," Godfrey commented.

"Oh, to begin with it wasn't. It was wonderful. Even after I found I couldn't control my adventures, after they began to seem as though they were really happening in some other place that I could go to by thinking about it."

"That's not quite clear," Godfrey put in.

"Not to me, either. But, you see, first there were things —ideas—in the adventures which I couldn't have invented

for myself. Things I'd never heard about, like . . ." She took a deep breath. "Like what men and women do together. I'm sure no one ever told me all about that! How could I have known what a boy looked like? Yet I—I checked in a medical book later, and—"

She swallowed hard. "But that's not all. When I came to London and realised I could live my own life in the real world, I tried to stop this daydreaming. And I couldn't. Even though it's likely to cost me my job. Even though I desperately want to now that the things happening there are so *horrible*."

She uttered the last word as though she had bitten a fruit and seen too late that there were maggots crawling in it.

Godfrey said musingly, "Was it one of the horrible things that you saw on Saturday night?"

"Yes. And that's what made me wonder if someone might be—be forcing me to go off. I'd never realised before that someone else could start it happening."

By this time, Godfrey was sure of the explanation, and was getting anxious to question her about Laszlo's problem, the source of the "white dragon". However, Laszlo was methodical beyond belief, and he felt it wise to cover every single point against later interrogation.

"What do you do when you want to go off, as you put it?"

"I don't *want* to—not any more," she corrected him gently. "I just *have* to. Well . . . would it be all right if I told you? If I show you, I'm afraid it may work while I'm demonstrating."

"Tell me, then."

"It's very simple. I sit and stare at something bright. Sometimes I sit down to supper when I get home in the evening, and find I'm looking at the reflection of the light in the bowl of a spoon. Next thing I know, it's midnight and my supper is all cold and nasty. I have to eat it anyway, of course."

There was something indescribably pathetic about that.

Exactly as he'd anticipated, Godfrey told himself. Autohypnosis and no doubt about it.

"Well, I can assure you of one thing," he said. "No-

body's hypnotising you by 'remote control'. You're doing it yourself."

"But I don't *want* to do it!" she cried.

"Even so, it's true. Do you know about posthypnotic commands?"

She shook her head.

"Suppose I'd told Marcus on Saturday that after he woke up he'd put his tongue out at me every time I turned my back. He'd have done it; he'd have been hideously embarrassed, but he'd have been unable to help it. In exactly the same way, you've subconsciously ordered yourself to stare at bright objects and go into trance. Now you can't avoid it."

"So it's all in my own mind?"

"Yes, but don't let that frighten you. It can be put right if you're willing to have it done. It'll be a longish job—if you've been reinforcing the command for years on end, it'll have gone deep. But," he concluded, guessing at her unspoken fear, "it's not something inherited from your mother."

He scribbled on a leaf torn from his notebook. "Here's your answer if you want to try it. Dr. Laszlo is my chief at Victoria College. Tuesday and Thursday he goes to a clinic in Halfway Street. It's under the Health Service, so it's free. How about seeing him tomorrow? I'm sure he'll fit you in."

For the sake of asking about white dragons, he glossed silently.

She took the paper and licked her lips. "All right," she said doubtfully. "Do you want to give him my name?"

"I know it already—Fay Cantrip."

"Well—no. I'm really called Emily after my grandmother. But all the Emilies I ever read about were swooning misses or old maids with tempers like lemon juice. So when I found out what Cantrip means—it's a sort of magic spell—and when it began to seem that my imaginary adventures were among real people no one else could see, I started to call myself what the Scots call people with second sight."

"So your name isn't Fay F-A-Y," said Godfrey, "It's—"

"That's right. It's *Fey*."

five

AT HIS OFFICE the following morning, after several failures Godfrey finally managed to reach Laszlo by phone and inform him of what had developed.

"Good, Godfrey! Splendid!" the voice boomed in his ear. "Are you sure she will really come, or will she be too timid?"

"I *hope* she'll show up," Godfrey answered cautiously. "My impression last night was that desperation was uncovering her shyness. And I dropped a hint to Eirene Jackson to make sure she wasn't too scared to ask for time off from her job today."

"Excellent. But if she does not come you will have to take me to her. This ridiculous business of the man Rogers in Wickingham Prison and our Miss Cantry—"

"Cantrip."

"—in London," continued Laszlo unperturbed, "spoiled my good night's sleep. I ache, I *thirst* for the explanation! What more account did she give of herself? I must know to guide my questioning."

Godfrey summarised as thoroughly as he could the remainder of what he had learned from Fey. That really was a fitting name she'd chosen for herself, he reflected.

"Poor child!" said Laszlo when he had heard the tale to an end. "Like a female Kaspar Hauser, eh? And said to be so beautiful also—a waste, an unspeakable shame! If the case progresses it will be necessary to go and visit the doctor and his wife who befriended the girl so cruelly misused."

"I don't want to seem captious," Godfrey cut in, "but aren't you running a long way ahead? You seem to be making an awful lot out of a chance remark shared between two unconnected—"

"Chance? Godfrey, you are failing to use your wits again! Though I grant you have not met Alan Rogers. It is not the 'white dragon' which links these two; it is that they both reached the same, rare, solution to a similar problem. For a long time I have been interested

in the effects of captivity on the intelligent individual. It has puzzled me sometimes that more such people do not resort to autohypnotic fantasies. The phenomenon is common enough for two short stories to have been brought to my attention: one about an American prison, one about some totalitarian country, where prisoners did discover this way of escape. Yet Rogers has been the first I personally encounter.

"And hard on the heels of this man, another case—your girl-friend. I must know all the facts, Godfrey: what did she wish for by contrast with the real world, the same as Rogers, something else completely . . . ?"

"Presumably. I mean—"

"Godfrey, one of these days I will cure you of presuming and suchlike lazy expedients! In fact, I should begin this afternoon. You can escape the tyranny of your office for an hour or two?"

"I—I probably could," Godfrey admitted. "We're well ahead with the month's issue. Do you think it's necessary? Because I'd rather not get involved."

"Ah-hah!" crowed Laszlo delightedly. "I see, I see—here's my so-English and not-susceptible Godfrey wishing to avoid an entanglement with a pretty girl he would rather meet on the social level."

"Well . . ."

"Don't argue. When I say I'm right, I know I'm right. But there will be time for socialising later, my boy. Today the problem is to relieve the poor girl of her addiction. For that is how I see it: she uses a habit-forming drug, not so? And since she has poured out her heart to you, this makes you that much less of a stranger. It will help to overcome her shyness if I have you with me."

"But I don't want to be made to do it—I want to be made to *stop* doing it!" said Fey, setting her small jaw at a mutinous angle. She looked around the rather bare office of the clinic; there was a desk, the three chairs, a wastebasket, a clock on the wall, and a dark green file cabinet. The walls were painted cream, and the cream had soured with age. The effect was sterile and depressing.

"Ah," mused Laszlo, tapping a pencil on the desk blotter. "This is because you are frightened of the things that will happen to you in your—your 'other world'?"

"Yes!"

"But it was not always so? Once, you used to desire this escape more than anything?"

"Well—yes."

"What was it like then, before it became horrible?"

She gave an uncertain glance at Godfrey. "I—I told Mr. Rayner about that last night . . ."

"But would you rather not that I heard directly?" Laszlo suggested. "Then we may be sure the description is correct."

"Oh—very well." She gazed past him at the wall, and a trace of wistfulness came into her expression. "I think I must have started by taking the real places around me —the garden, the disused wings of the house, the village —and making them more like the let's-pretend places I'd invented when I was very small. I went on from there to add places taken from books; I read much more than was good for me, having so little else to do. I'd never seen a forest, so I pictured it as being like the overgrown parts of the garden, all tangled and impassable, except that there were trees instead of brambles and thorn-bushes. And I'd never seen mountains, to I made them as steep as the cliffs I'd seen in the books. *That* sort of thing."

"And the people you met in the other world?"

"Same sort of thing."

"Yet, even in these early days, there were—ah—inconsistencies which you found alarming, hm? You mentioned one such to Mr. Rayner last night."

Fey blushed and looked down at her feet, but nodded.

"I see. Then when was it the visions became so horrible as to make you wish to stop?"

"I—I'm not sure. Quite recently, perhaps within the past year. Before, I'd been able to wander to all kinds of places; now, there seems to be nothing but the great castle, the pit where the white dragon lives, and—and almost nothing else. And it's become so *evil*!"

Laszlo had the air of a bridge-player about to pro-

duce a fourteenth trump. He said, "And how about the Emissaries—the Emissaries with the eight long arms?"

The words were meaningless to Godfrey, but they had an extraordinary effect on Fey. For seconds she was frozen, her eyes large and round and fixed on Laszlo. Then she stretched out her left arm dramatically, the first and fourth fingers extended, the others and the thumb clenched. It was a gesture Godfrey had heard about but never seen.

It was supposed to ward off the Evil Eye.

In astonished silence they waited for her to drop the arm. At last she did so, freezing herself to calmness by sheer willpower. Through trembling lips she forced out, "How—how do you *know*?"

Laszlo didn't, Godfrey could tell that from their long acquaintance. But he masked the truth with professional thoroughness, forced a reassuring smile, and went off on a different tack.

"Miss Cantrip, does the name of Alan Rogers mean anything to you?"

"N-no. Why? Does he—?"

"One second." Laszlo raised his hand. "There was much about him in the newspapers four years, five years ago."

Fey shook her head. "Mummy was—was still alive then. We didn't have newspapers."

"Ah, I had forgotten for the moment. But did you not see occasional newspapers—perhaps those used to wrap groceries?"

"I—I may have done. But Mummy didn't like to look at the papers. She always put them on the fire if they got into the house like that."

Laszlo grunted. Then for at least half a minute he contemplated her intently, making her so uncomfortable that she could stand it no longer.

"Can you help me?" she whispered.

"Hm? Oh yes! We can give symptomatic relief straight away, in fact, although that in itself will delay the ultimate cure. Do you know what the technical term 'regression' means?" And on her negative: "Godfrey, be so good as to explain!"

"Why—why, it's one of the more spectacular things you can do with hypnosis. You can persuade the subject that he or she is back at an earlier age, perhaps back to childhood. The process is seldom perfect—someone who's been told he's three years old again may still be able to tell the time, for instance. But if he's asked to write his name, it will look as though he's just learning, and if he tries to draw a picture it will probably be a mere scribble."

"Vivid, if inexact," commented Laszlo. "You see here the way to relieve your trouble, Miss Cantrip? We shall try to take you back to some age when the dreaming was more pleasant and the posthypnotic command to indulge in it less powerful. And we shall work forward from there. It will take time, and patience, and perseverance. But if you wish it—"

"I do!" Fey said fervently.

"Perfect. Godfrey, you will undertake this, hm?"

Godfrey could hardly believe his ears. What had come over Laszlo? This was therapy, and it was incredibly unethical to suggest that he should attend to it rather than a qualified psychologist.

But he knew better than to argue while Fey was present. A glance at her, anyway, revealed her eyes were on him beseechingly. He gave a miserable nod for the sake of appearances.

"Good, then! There is a room at my disposal here in the evenings, and I will make the necessary arrangements for you to use it. For now, I regret that others have a claim on my time, and someone is probably waiting impatiently to see me. Miss Cantrip, it's been a pleasure to meet you and I look forward to the next occasion."

The moment she had gone, Godfrey rounded on Laszlo. "What's the idea of backing me into a corner like this?" he snapped.

The eyes were steely behind the thick glasses. "I give you rope, Godfrey. I give you rope enough to hang me too if it turns out wrong. For too long you have wobbled and hesitated. I have come to doubt my original judgment of you, to say that I have not seen the real Godfrey,

only an impression of him. Yet I remember also the good work you have done for me at the college, careful, often invaluable . . .

"Godfrey, I want you to make me see that I was right at the beginning. I believe you are equipped to do such a job as I offer now. True, it is therapy, and to have this known would damage my reputation, perhaps ruin my career, so I will disclaim as much knowledge of it as I can. But here is your chance to prove yourself. For too long you've been a dilettante—it's as though a part-time physicist were to be let play with a cyclotron two weeks out of four!"

Godfrey was sweating. He recognised the truth of Laszlo's charges. Even so, he continued to object.

"Doc, I said I didn't want to get involved. You must know what effect that girl has on me—the first glimpse I caught, I shook in my shoes from the impact!"

"You worry about professional involvement with a pretty girl? But, Godfrey, you are not a professional, are you?" Laszlo paused, scowling, to let that sink in, then resumed: "Oh, I see your fears clearly enough. You're thinking, 'But if she likes me will she not think I persuaded her to like me against her real feelings? Will she care for me honestly, or will I unconsciously hypnotise her into doing so?' Godfrey, that is a human problem for human beings to solve, and it must be faced.

"But there is one more reason, too, why I think you should do it. You are a level-headed person; you've led a good normal life. Half this poor girl's trouble is that she has not. To have a nice young man around her will set much right that is now wrong—of its own accord, I believe."

Godfrey waited long moments before replying. At last he said, "All right. But I'll make two conditions."

"Let me hear them."

"First, don't make me start on the job till after the weekend. I want to hire a car and go up to this village where she comes from, and fill in some background. And second, I want to meet this man Rogers at Wickingham Prison."

"The second condition is good," Laszlo nodded. "To

provide a standard of comparison—or more, of contrast. As to the first, though . . . I would say it's better to learn something of her before making your trip to the country. Your questions will be more to the point, so. Still, here I am directing you when I have specifically said you are to take charge—think about that, and call me here at five-thirty to say which you finally decide is better, to make the trip first, or see the girl again.

"And now I really must have in the patient who is waiting!"

(Concluded next month)

1

THE LIGHT OF the sky could be seen dimly through the small slits in the ceiling of the Great Chamber.

The Great Clock worked.

The Pendulum swung slowly in its giant arc and with every tick, the whole Clock shuddered. The Great Wheel, rose above the rest of the Clock mechanism in a great and static arc and the Fast Wheel whirled, humming, its sound rising above the noises made by the workings of the Clock. The other wheels turned at their various speeds, some smoothly, while some advanced one notch with every tick of the Clock. Pins engaged, wedges dropped, springs uncoiled. On the floor was thrown a shadow of wheels which formed an abstract pattern.

And the man sleeping naked on the pallet at the Posterior Wall stirred a little.

2

He was awakened by the whistle of the clock within the Clock.

It was fixed on one wall of the Great Chamber. It was made of wood and the sound of its ticking was lost in the constant sounds of the Great Clock. It was powered by a

weight on a long chain, the other end of the chain having a metal loop through which projected the end of a lever coming through the wall. At this moment the lever, powered in some way by the Great Clock, was lowering itself smoothly, pulling down the free end of chain and winding up the clock. Below the clock, projecting upwards from the floor was a four-foot metal flue pipe. The whistle was coming from this, a deafening note that was calling him to his duties. He covered his ears against the raucous sound. Eventually the note began to drop in volume and pitch, for a second broke down the octave to its fundamental, and then became quiet except for the hiss of escaping air. Behind the wooden wall could be heard intensive creaking as the giant bellows exhausted themselves.

The Clock ticked.

It was a thunderous sound, and it shook his body there on the pallet. It was a sound composed of a million sounds, some too high, others too low to be heard. But the high sounds irritated the ear-drums and the low ones stirred the bowels. The sounds that could be heard were a million. Metallic and wooden, high and low, muffled and clear, they all combined in a shattering rumble that made thought impossible. The tick was composed primarily of four separate sounds that peaked at intervals of about half a second. At the end of each tick, a creak from somewhere high in the building ran up the scale to silence.

When the echoes had died away he could hear the other sounds of the Clock. The whole Chamber was alive with noise. There were creakings all around; cogs met with metallic clashes; wooden parts knocked hollowly. From high in the Chamber on the opposite side to his pallet the Fast Wheel hummed loudly.

He opened his eyes. Light was filtering in dimly through the two tiny slits in the ceiling of the Great Chamber. He could see the black outlines of the Great Wheel where it vaulted overhead, partly obscured by a supporting column. He groaned, then sat up on the pallet, looking across towards the clock on the wall. The clock was made entirely of wood, and only one hand pointed towards the irregular marks scored around the edge of the dial. The irregular

marks indicated the times at which he had to perform his duties; they extended three-quarters round the face. When the hand reached the marks, the bellows, now filling slowly behind the wall, would drop a short distance and the metal flue pipe would give a short call. The hand was about five degrees from the first mark, and this gave him a short while to eat his breakfast. He wondered dully if there was a little man inside the wall-clock, just getting up, ready for his day's work maintaining the mechanism.

The Clock ticked.

When the floor had stopped vibrating, he got up and walked across the Great Chamber. Dust rose in acrid clouds about him, making him sneeze. He urinated in the corner, lifting his nose against the sharp smells that arose from the intersection of the walls that he always used for this purpose. Then he turned and walked back past the pile of bones in the other corner, skulls like large pieces of yellow putty, twigs of ribs, half buried by dust, and made his way to the door on the far side of the Chamber, moving among the bronzed supports of the Clock mechanism as he did so. He arrived at the low arched door and turned the iron handle, pushing open the wooden slab with effort.

The Clock ticked.

Now he was in the Small Chamber. The room was about nine feet long by seven wide, and was lined by wooden planks. The whole of the left hand side of the Small Chamber was covered by a mass of wheels, thousand upon thousand, interlocking in frightening complexity. He had never tried to work out their arrangement and purpose; he just knew that they were an integral part of the workings of the Great Clock. The wheels were plain-rimmed—not cogged—and were of silver metal. They varied in size from about four feet down to one inch, and were all turning at varied rates. They whirred and clicked softly as they worked. The sounds of the Clock were muffled here in the Small Chamber, with the door closed, and only the tick was still just as disturbing, as disruptive to logical thought.

The Clock ticked.

He watched the chains from the wheels disappearing through the myriad holes in the wooden walls at either end

of the Chamber. Some of the wheels were partly obscured, with just a tiny segment of their arc appearing through the space between the ceiling and the left hand wall. Once, he had wondered whether he saw all the wheels or whether in fact there were more, many more, stretching away upwards and downwards.

The rest of the room was taken up mainly by the only compromise to his welfare, apart from the pallet in the Great Chamber. There was a wooden table and a small wooden chair. On the table were three objects, all of metal, a plate, a spoon and a heavy goblet. At the far end of the Chamber by the cupboard set into the wall were two silver faucets. Above the faucets were two wheels of iron, to which worn wooden handles were attached.

The Clock ticked.

He walked across the Chamber and picked the plate off the table. He placed it on the floor below the nearer of the faucets. He stood up and began to turn the wheeled handle. A white mash poured out of the wide mouth of the faucet and slopped into the plate. After he had turned the handle about ten complete revolutions there was a click, the handle spun free and no more mash came from the mouth. He picked up the plate and carried it back to the table, burying the spoon upright in the mash. Then he repeated the performance with the goblet and the other faucet, and filled the vessel with cold water.

The Clock ticked.

He settled down listlessly and began to spoon the mash into his mouth. It was completely tasteless, but he accepted it as he accepted everything else. The Clock ticked five times before he had finished his meal. He left half the mash and inverted the plate over the primitive drain in the floor. Rotting food from previous meals still remained, and at one time the stench would have appalled him.

A short, sharp blast from the pipe informed him that it was time for his duties to start. There was a lot of work in front of him. A vague memory floated into his mind of when he used to eat all the mash and still have a little time to relax quietly before starting his work. Now he toyed with his food, and needed less.

The Clock ticked and dispersed the thought.

He walked with heavy steps over to the cupboard and opened the door. Inside were his tools. To the left was a rack of hammers for testing the wheels. They ranged in size from a tiny hammer all of metal, the head of which was about the size of the first joint of his little finger, to a giant sledge-hammer with a large iron head and a thick wooden shaft, which was used for testing the Great Wheel. The trolley was just as he had left it the previous night. Everything was just as he had left it. The trolley was made of black cracked wood with iron wheels. On it was a giant drum with an opened top. A great faucet extended down from the top of the cupboard above the drum, and now the container was filled with yellow sweetly-smelling grease. Every night it was the same.

The Clock ticked.

On a shelf on the right was a can, below yet another, small, faucet, and the can was now filled by the dark translucent beauty of thin oil. He lifted the hammers from the rack and slowly placed them on the trolley beside the drum. He lifted down the oil can and placed that on the rack designed for the purpose.

He grasped the pulling rail, and began to heave the trolley backwards out of the cupboard. His body strained with the effort. Surely, at one time it had all been easier . . .

The Clock ticked.

The trolley was finally right out of the cupboard, and he walked round it, so that he would be able to push it from the back. Before he started pushing, he suddenly realised that he had forgotten to move the table out of the way. He sighed deeply and walked back to the table, folding up the legs and resting it on its side against the walls.

"Getting old . . ." he muttered, ". . . getting old . . ." Those were the first words he had spoken in a long time, and his voice sounded thin and weak. He pushed the trolley through the Small Chamber, past the whirring wheels. His last duty of the day would be to oil those wheels. He realised that he had forgotten to open the door, opened it, and pushed the trolley into the Great Chamber. He stopped the trolley at the point where he always stopped it.

The Clock ticked.

He went up to the nearer of the wheels. It was a large wheel, about five feet in diameter. Most of the wheel could be seen clearly, unobscured by other mechanism, and the black metal was pitted, as if by age. He selected the correct hammer, a large one, weighing several pounds, and swung it into contact with the edge of the wheel. The wheel shivered, and rang like a gong. Satisfied, he placed the hammer back on the trolley, and pushed it on a little further. On he went, wheel after wheel. Some of the wheels boomed hollowly, others tinkled like tiny bells. Never had they done otherwise.

When he came to the first supporting column, he selected the second largest hammer. The column was of a diameter of about a foot, and it was made of a golden metal, either copper or brass. Later these columns would have to be cleaned.

The Clock ticked exactly at the moment he swung the hammer. But after the sounds had died away, the column still reverberated with a shrill brightness. Now he had come to the Fast Wheel. There was a wooden ladder set against its supports, and he picked up the oil can and began to mount the ladder.

The Fast Wheel was different from most of the others. It was difficult to observe, owing to its rate of travel, but the lack of fuzziness at the edges indicated that it possessed no cogs. It appeared to be a double wheel, having two rims, its spokes tapering inwards to the single hub. It was driven by a taut chain which was an insubstantial blur that stretched to a hole in the Anterior Wall, opposite his pallet. The ladder vibrated with the wheel's motion, and air fanned his face strongly as he climbed upwards. The wheel ran in oil, and a reservoir arched above it with two ducts that fell past its eighteen inch radius to the hub. The hum of the wheel was almost intolerable at this closeness.

The Clock ticked and for a couple of seconds drowned the hum of the Fast Wheel.

He poured half the contents of the oil can into the reservoir, then quickly descended the ladder. Now there was just the Great Wheel and then four smaller cogs over the other side of the mechanism. He picked the largest

hammer from the trolley and dragged it across the floor. The Great Wheel was only exposed at one point, and then only about a foot of its surface. This was about the nearest it was possible for him to get to the Anterior Wall. The Great Wheel was about a foot thick and was constructed of matt black metal; a foot from where it disappeared into the space between the floor and the Anterior Wall the other mechanism of the Clock terminated. He dragged the hammer into a convenient position and tensed the muscles of his arms and stomach.

The Clock ticked.

He swung in an imaginary back stroke, the hammer not moving, then, reaching as far back as he could and starting to swing forward, transformed the stroke into actuality by dragging the hammer along the floor towards the wheel. The head lifted just before the hammer came into contact with the black metal. It hit, and his stomach was churned by the deep vibration of the Great Wheel. Along with the almost sub-sonic fundamental, an upper partial screamed briefly. The sounds almost made him vomit, but he checked this and instead coughed the dust from his throat. During the time when his duties always seemed to be much easier and quicker, and he had time to spare, he had watched the twenty-foot Great Wheel very carefully for long periods, and had never seen it move a fraction of an inch.

The Clock ticked as he walked away.

He went to his trolley and plunged his hands into the drum, withdrawing two gobs of grease. He went up to Great Wheel again and slapped the grease into the reservoir at its side. There would be more points to grease later in the day.

Now there were just the other four cogs to test, and then it would be time to check the Meter.

The flue pipe blew piercingly.

Shock raced through his body, and the grunt he made was lost in the sounds of the Clock. *Had he been so slow?* He never remembered having a job unfinished when the time came to begin the next. He looked unbelievingly at the clock on the wall; the hand stood unquestionably at the second of the scored marks.

For a moment he was lost; his knees trembled and his body shook. What should he do? Should he finish his job or hurry to check the Meter? Normally he liked checking the Meter; there was rarely any need to make an adjustment, the pointer always resting at the zero position. This meant that he would have at least fifteen minutes to himself. But now he was in an agony of uselessness, for the first time being faced with a decision. A thought began to bubble up through his shocked mind, and forced itself into consciousness for a fraction of a second.

WHY?

The Clock ticked, dissolving the thought in a torrent of sound.

He decided to check the Meter. He could always come back and sound the remaining four wheels; it would mean losing a little of the precious spare time, but that didn't matter.

He wiped his greasy hands on his thighs and walked across to the Posterior Wall and the little panel behind which lay the Meter. He pulled aside the wooden panel with effort, and then groaned in dismay. The Meter read at minus two.

He was plunged into panic; an adjustment would have to be made. When would he have time to sound the remaining four wheels? He would have to hurry. He pulled aside the adjacent panel with trembling hands. He stepped inside the lift and began to turn the large wheeled handle. The Great Chamber was lost to view as the lift began to travel down the shaft. Little light filtered down the Chamber, but he was able to see the joints in the wood of the shaft. Going down, he was fighting the counterweight and the work was much more difficult. He wished that he was coming up, the adjustment having been made.

After what seemed like hours, the dim light of the Pendulum Well travelled up the open front of the lift and he stopped.

The Clock ticked, very slightly muffled at this depth.

He clambered out of the lift and then finally stood upright in the Pendulum Well. The Well was vast. It stretched up and up, many times his own height, and the top was marked by a light rectangle where the mouth of the Well

met the lighter Great Chamber at the very front of the Clock. Cogs jutted blackly above, and the tall cylinder of the Pendulum Rod inclined itself gracefully and slowly towards one side of the Well. Once he had wondered on the unusual nature of the Escapement Mechanism. The Escapement itself appeared to be almost independent of the Pendulum, its action only being triggered by the Pendulum's motion. The Pendulum swung freely for almost its whole arc, and the Escapement Lever only inclined at the extremes of its swing. At the top the Escapement Lever quivered, preparing for its giant pivoting movement, and its sound came to him like a clanking of great chains. The Pendulum had a wide arc, about forty-five degrees, and at the moment it was reaching the peak of its swing. The Pendulum was so vast that at this point of its swing it scarcely seemed to be moving. It was only when the Bob was whistling past his head at the bottom of its swing that he could really appreciate how fast it was moving.

At the top of the Clock the Escapement quivered again. The Pendulum had slowed now and seemed to be poised impossibly, hanging without movement, a vast distance from him. There was a rumble and, with a screech of metal, the Escapement Lever roused itself and began to pivot its great weight. With a shattering crash, it fell heavily into its new position.

And the Clock ticked.

Now the Pendulum was moving back again, increasing speed second by second.

The walls of the Pendulum Well were, like the Small Chamber, lined by planks of wood, although black. The sounds of the Clock came to him here with a wooden consistency as they were reflected and diffused by the Well. On the near side of the Well, iron rungs were set into the wall, which would enable him to reach the giant bulk of the Weight. He glanced up, and his gaze met the dark shadow that loomed overhead. He stepped forward into the path of the rapidly approaching Pendulum Bob, which would pass about a foot above his head. At the far end of the Well was another ladder which led up to a platform far above, which would enable him to meet the Bob as it

rose up to the top of its swing, and from which he would step on to the Bob to carry out the adjustment.

From its highest point, above the Escapement Mechanism, to a point about one sixth of the way down the Well, the Pendulum Rod consisted of a cylinder of shining golden metal, probably brass, with a diameter of about four feet. From there to the Bob, a distance at least fifty feet, it was made up of a frame of several smaller tubes of various coloured metals, probably some kind of temperature compensation. The Bob itself was a ten-foot lens of grey metal, tapering at the edges to knife-blade-thinness. As the Pendulum rushed through the air, eddies formed on alternate sides like the ripples running along a flag, setting the Pendulum, as it rode the turbulence, into vibration.

And the Pendulum sang.

A deep, clear ringing vibration filled the Well, like an organ note, but with a chiming quality that continued instead of fading. He felt the vibration through the soles of his feet as he stood there on the wooden floor. He kept his mouth slightly slack, for if his teeth touched together they would buzz unpleasantly with a higher version of the same note.

The Bob was now rushing down upon him, and with a sudden gust of air, it was past him and away, climbing rapidly towards the peak of its swing.

With a shock he realised that there was no time to stand here watching. There were still four wheels left unsounded. He turned, and began to climb the nearer ladder. There was a catwalk leading round the Well past the Weight, and he always came this way to check on the Weight as he passed. After a long time of climbing the iron rungs he eventually arrived at the catwalk. The Weight was a vast bulk to his rear; he was fortunate that he had come down at this time, for often the Weight was further towards the floor, or too high, which necessitated painful manoeuvring on the rungs.

He turned and looked at the Weight. It was a block of black metal, about two feet deep and four feet high, and it stretched the width of the Well. It was supported by thin wire, which branched out from a single strand far up the

Well and culminated in hundreds of strands spread out in an angular delta. At the top of the Weight was a complex of cogs, the largest of which was about six inches across, the smallest about half an inch, and some of them were revolving quite rapidly. The fine wire passed up and down in the complex of wheels, circling some of them. These grooved wheels turned as the wire moved round them, and the vast Weight was lowering itself, so slowly that its motion could scarcely be seen.

The Clock ticked.

He glanced at the Pendulum, now at the fullest extent of its swing at the far end of the Well. He would be able to get to the platform in one-and-a-half strokes, by which time the Bob would be in the correct position for him to mount it. He began to move along the catwalk, his bare feet pattering on the wooden planks. There was no safety rail and he kept close to the wall, as he was now about twenty feet from the floor. As the Pendulum overtook him on its way back, the Bob dropped to far below his level, and then began to climb past him.

The Clock ticked before he reached the corner of the Well.

Past the corner he went, and he walked across the width of the Well, a distance of only about thirty feet. The platform projected out from the wall, and he stood out on it, waiting for the Bob to arrive. There was a long, thin chain hanging beside him, that stretched up into the mechanism of the Escapement. He guessed that his weight was computed by the strain on the platform, and pulling the iron ring at the end of the chain caused some kind of weight compensation to be applied to the Pendulum, so that his weight on the Pendulum for one whole swing had no effect on the accuracy of the Clock. The Bob was now at the bottom of its return swing and was rising, apparently slowly, towards him. Mounting the Pendulum was a difficult feat, one that had caused him trouble in the early days. The early days? He brushed aside the distracting thought; he must concentrate on mounting the Pendulum. The difficulty was in the apparent motion of the Bob. When one stood in the centre of the Well at the bottom, at the higher points of its swing the Pendulum scarcely

seemed to be moving, while at its centre its true speed could be appreciated. Here, at the high point of its swing, the same illusion occurred, but was made more complex by the fact that the Pendulum *did* actually slow at this point of its arc.

The apparent speed of the Bob was increasing rapidly as it approached him. His muscles tensed as its bulk loomed up towards him. He slipped his hand into the iron ring, and pulled the chain downwards. Then, as the Bob was almost on him it suddenly appeared to slow. Now he could see the corresponding platform that jutted out from the Bob. He watched the platform and nothing else. The edges of the two platforms came smoothly together. There was a pause. He swiftly stepped across on to the other surface. There was a brass rail on the inside of the platform with a strap looped from it. With fumbling fingers he hurriedly buckled the strap about his waist and pulled it tight, just as the Pendulum began to move downwards.

And the Clock ticked, shaking the Pendulum.

He looked over his shoulder and watched the other platform and the catwalk moving rapidly upwards and away from him. Faster the acceleration became, and he felt his stomach lift within him as it became yet faster. The air rushed past his face, and he tried to draw his attention from the distressing physical sensations. The bulk of his body, tiny though it was in relation to the Bob, disturbed the flow of the air, breaking the current into smaller eddies. As the new vibration tried to impose itself on the old, the Pendulum groaned with tearing dissonance. Then, abruptly, the note broke up to its second partial, and the sound was now bright, ringing and intense. As the Bob began to level out, his stomach felt a little more normal, and he squatted down to make the adjustment. The platform on which he was squatting was slung at the lowest part of the Bob, and hung down below. At the very lowest point of the Bob was fitted the Adjustment Weight, for making the incredibly small adjustments to the frequency of the Pendulum's swing. A piece of thin metal rod was fixed from the Bob, hanging downwards. This rod was scored across at regular intervals, about a quarter

of an inch apart, and attached about halfway down was a small weight, of about an ounce, with a sprung clip that attached to one of the grooves in the rod. The Meter had read minus two; this meant that the weight had to be slid two spaces upwards. Obviously the Clock was running slow by an infinitesimal amount, and this adjustment would correct its running. As he put out his hand the Pendulum began to rise on its upward swing, and his arm felt heavy and approached the weight much lower than it should have done.

He paused as the nausea gripped him again. After a few seconds the feeling began to diminish as the Pendulum reached its high point. He knew better than to attempt to adjust the weight at this moment.

The Clock ticked, vibrating the Pendulum, and almost throwing him on to his back. He gripped the brass rail and waited for the wrenching of his stomach as he fell in the sweeping arc. The Pendulum began to move downwards. The adjustment would have to be made this time; he knew that he would be incapable of standing more than one complete swing of the Pendulum. Air rushed past him as he dropped with the Bob and he gritted his teeth against the sickness that rose inside. At least the new high note of the Pendulum did not buzz in his head as would have done the fundamental. As the Pendulum levelled out, he reached out and grasped the weight. He pushed upwards, and the weight moved up slowly with a double click. He tested it with a light pull, and then sighed with relief and began to stand, fighting the downward push caused by the upward motion of the Bob.

At the top of the swing he stepped on to the platform before the tick of the Clock commenced its vibration. His legs were shaking as he began to climb down the iron rungs.

As he walked across the floor of the Well his mind was feverishly calculating. Would he still have time to sound the wheels before his next task? He clambered down the narrow tunnel into the lift. His next task was the Winding, and he tried not to think of this. It was a task that took about an hour of his time every day, and left him a weak, trembling old man. Even so, he still sometimes wondered

how it was that such a comparatively small amount of energy could sustain the vast mechanism all about him. From his fuddled memory he vaguely recalled that on similar occasions, the whistle had blown shortly after he had arrived in the Great Chamber.

As the lift arrived at the top of its shaft, the Clock ticked, the sound of it jangling afterwards in his ears, contrasting with the comparative quiet of the Pendulum Well. Here, the sounds were all about him again; the grinding of the cogs, the humming of the Fast Wheel; the oil smells and the sharp tang of metal were in his nostrils again. His trolley was there, as he had left it. He began to walk across the floor, dust rising in clouds about him as he moved. He reached the trolley and grasped his hammer, ready for sounding the next wheel. and he used a small hammer that could comfortably be held in one hand. He swung the hammer and struck the wheel.

The whistle screamed, drowning all other sounds. He groaned out loud. The whistle stopped, and he stood there, hammer in hand, wanting to strike the wheel again. Why could not the whistle have blown one second later? At least he would have been able to hear this wheel. He almost swung at the wheel again, but he could not; it was time for the Winding. He felt tears springing to his eyes at the unfairness of it all. He was old, and tired . . . He walked across to the Posterior Wall and slid open the panel that led to the Winding Room.

The Clock ticked.

This was only a small room and it was lined with planks like the others. It was completely featureless save for the Winding Handle which was set into the far wall and projected out into the room. He stepped inside and grasped the Handle. He put his weight on to it and it gradually moved downwards, a rachet clicking rapidly somewhere behind the wall. When the Handle was at its lowest extent, he slightly released the pressure and it rose up under his hands to its original position. He pressed down again. He would wind until the whistle blew again, a period he estimated to be about an hour, but a very long hour indeed. After the Winding he would be allowed a short time from

his labour for lunch. Perhaps he could sound the remaining wheels in his lunch time?

The Clock ticked.

This would mean that he would miss his mash. He didn't mind about that too much; what really worried him was that he would miss his valuable rest period. The handle rose under his hands to its highest position. He was worried about the afternoon; how could he work if he missed his rest? He was weak enough now. He pressed down the handle. Sweat was beginning to run down his forehead; he felt terrible. Surely, at one time he had not felt so weak and tired. At one time?

At what time? For a second he was distracted from his task.

He slipped.

His foot went from under him and he fell forward, towards the handle. His hands slid from it and it swung up, catching him under the chin and throwing him backwards on to the floor.

Lights flashed under his eyelids and his head buzzed, cutting out all other sound. When he came to himself he found that he was standing in the Great Chamber, swaying slightly.

WHERE WAS HE?

For the first time his routine had been upset. The blow had jogged his mind from its well-worn paths. He realised that all the events of that day had conspired to open his senses to this apocalypse.

He looked about himself in amazement.

All was as it had been; the Fast Wheel hummed to itself and the cogs moved round at their various speeds.

But now the Clock mechanism looked alien and frightening to him as he regarded it with eyes unclouded by time.

How had he got here?

The stench of his own excrement arose from the corner of the Great Chamber, mixed with the acrid tang of the metal that surrounded him.

His head moved from side to side as he tried to see everything at once.

The Clock ticked, unexpectedly, causing him to clap his hands to his ears.

He had been so frightened; what had forced him to carry out these awful duties that had wasted so much of his life? He walked across to the far end of the Great Chamber and looked at the bones in the corner. He could see about four complete skeletons among the crumbling fragments of many others. They were all supported on a billowing pile of dust that came from innumerable others. Were these the bones of the others, who, before him, had tended the Clock? Did they, one day, suddenly know that their time was up, and did they, obeying a dim and contrived instinct, slowly, painfully drag themselves over to the pile and quietly lie upon it? And then did the next person come here and immediately settle into his ritual of duties, ignoring the twitching bundle in the corner, and later the odour of its corruption?

He walked back to his pallet and sat on it, burying his face in his hands. When *he* came to the Clock, was there a body in the corner? Did he sit in the Small Chamber eating his mash whilst the air was full of the taint of death?

What was his life before he came here?

Who was he?

He could not remember. Nor could he remember how long he had been here. He felt round the back of his head; his hair was hanging down almost to his shoulders. He estimated from this that he had been inside the Clock for a whole year of his life. He remembered something else. His age. He was twenty-five years old.

Twenty-five?

Then why was he so weak and tired?

Something wrong made a shudder crawl its way down his back. His hands had been registering something for some time, and now he consciously accepted their message. His hands told him that the skin hung loose and wrinkled round his face. His hands told him that his features were covered by wrinkled and flaccid parchment.

He sat up on the pallet in fear. He suddenly pulled out a little clump of hair, bringing tears to his eyes. But the tears did not obscure his vision completely enough for him not to see that the hair was snowy white. He looked up in agony.

"I'm old!"

The Clock ticked.

"I'm old . . ."

He looked down at his body. It was the body of an old, old man.

He slowly stood and then staggered to one of the supporting columns. He embraced the column, resting his cheek against the golden surface. His hand stroked the smooth metal of the column's surface, almost as if he were caressing a woman. He giggled.

"Look at me," he muttered to the Clock. "Look what you've done to me!"

The Fast Wheel hummed; the cogs turned.

"You've taken my life! I was young when I came here a year ago! Young! What have you done?"

His voice had become high and quavering and was swallowed in the sounds of the Clock.

"Oh God!" he said, and slumped against the column. He stayed there a long time, thinking. He was going to have his revenge. The Clock would run down, with no-one to wind it. It would die, without him.

The Clock ticked, and he pushed his shoulders from the column, standing erect. He began to walk round the Great Chamber, putting out his hand here, stroking a wheel there. He blew a million kisses to the Fast Wheel and ran his flat hand gently over the surface of the Great Wheel. Wheedling, coquettish, he minced extravagantly through the Great Chamber, quietly talking to the Clock.

"Why?" he said. "Why? I've given you my life; what have you given in return? You have taken eighty years from me—what have you done with them? Are they stored safely away in a cupboard? If I searched long enough, could I find them, stacked on a shelf? Could I put out my hands and slip them on, like clothes? Eh? Why did you steal them?"

His muttering suddenly became ominous in tone.

"I'll fix you; I won't even give you the pleasure of running quietly down, as you would have done with me. Oh no, my friend, you shall die violently; I'll show you no quarter."

He moved across to the trolley. He painfully lifted off the largest of the hammers and dragged it to the floor. A

wheel of moderate size, about four feet across, was quite near to him. With all his strength he swung the hammer in a low arc and relaxed only as it smashed into the wheel. The giant hammer broke off one of the cogs completely, and bent part of the wheel at an impossible angle. He dropped the hammer, and, filled with emotion, crammed his fists against his opened mouth.

The Clock ticked.

He found that he was weeping; why, he didn't understand.

The cog turned slowly, the damaged section moving nearer to its inevitable interaction with another wheel. He screwed up his eyes, and felt the warm tears running freely down his face.

"I've killed you," he said. He stood, thin, bleached and naked, paralysed and sobbing. Something would happen soon.

The damaged section interacted.

The wrecked cog spun suddenly and rapidly before its teeth engaged again. A shower of sparks flew out, burning his flesh. He started, both at the pain and at the sheer noise of that dreadful contact. At the threshold of his hearing, far below the other sounds of the Clock, he could hear the buckling of metal, the scraping of part on part. The other wheel buckled and spun in its turn. A spring burst from somewhere behind the wheel and scattered metal splinters all over the Chamber. Strange smells were in the air; the death-smells of the Clock.

A trail of damage was running across the mechanism of the Clock like an earthquake fissure running across land. It could not be seen, and outwardly practically everything was normal, but his ears could hear the changes in what had been familiar sounds. The grinding and destruction spreading like a canker could be heard clearly enough.

The Clock ticked, and even the tick sounded slightly weaker.

Louder and louder came the sounds of invisible destruction. He stood, still weeping, shaking as if with fever. The changed sounds of the Clock plunged him into a new and unfamiliar world.

A different sound made him look up. Above him the

Fast Wheel was running eccentrically. It was wavering from side to side in its supports, oil spurting from its reservoirs. As it spun, it whined, jarringly.

Abruptly it broke free of its supports and, still whining, it dropped to the floor. It screamed as it hit the floor and was covered by the roaring flame of its friction. And then it was gone, only the hint of a bright streak in the air indicating its trajectory. It smashed into the far wall, scattering dust from the bones as the wooden wall dissolved into splintering wreckage.

An ululation came from the Small Chamber. Inside, the mass of wheels screamed as they were tortured by the new disorder spreading through their myriad ranks. The Clock shook in its ague, shivering itself to death. Suddenly through the open door of the Small Chamber came the wheels, thousands of them. The Great Chamber was full of smooth silver wheels, some broken and flying through the air, others rolling lazily.

The Clock ticked, gratingly, and then screamed again. The Escapement Mechanism jammed rigid, but the Pendulum wanted to continue its swing. It did, bending its great four-foot-diameter column in a grotesque shape.

Dust was everywhere, flying metal whistled about his ears. As the sound became unbelievable the destruction became complete.

His last sight was of light streaming brightly in as the whole Clock collapsed in a mass of falling wood and metal cogs.

3

And it was everybody else's last sight, too. They may, for a brief period, have seen their world freezing itself in grotesque lack of activity. They may have seen water, solidifying in its fall to complete immobility; they may have seen stones falling through air that was like treacle, finally coming to rest above the ground; they may even have seen their own faces beginning to register terror, but never completing the expression. . . .

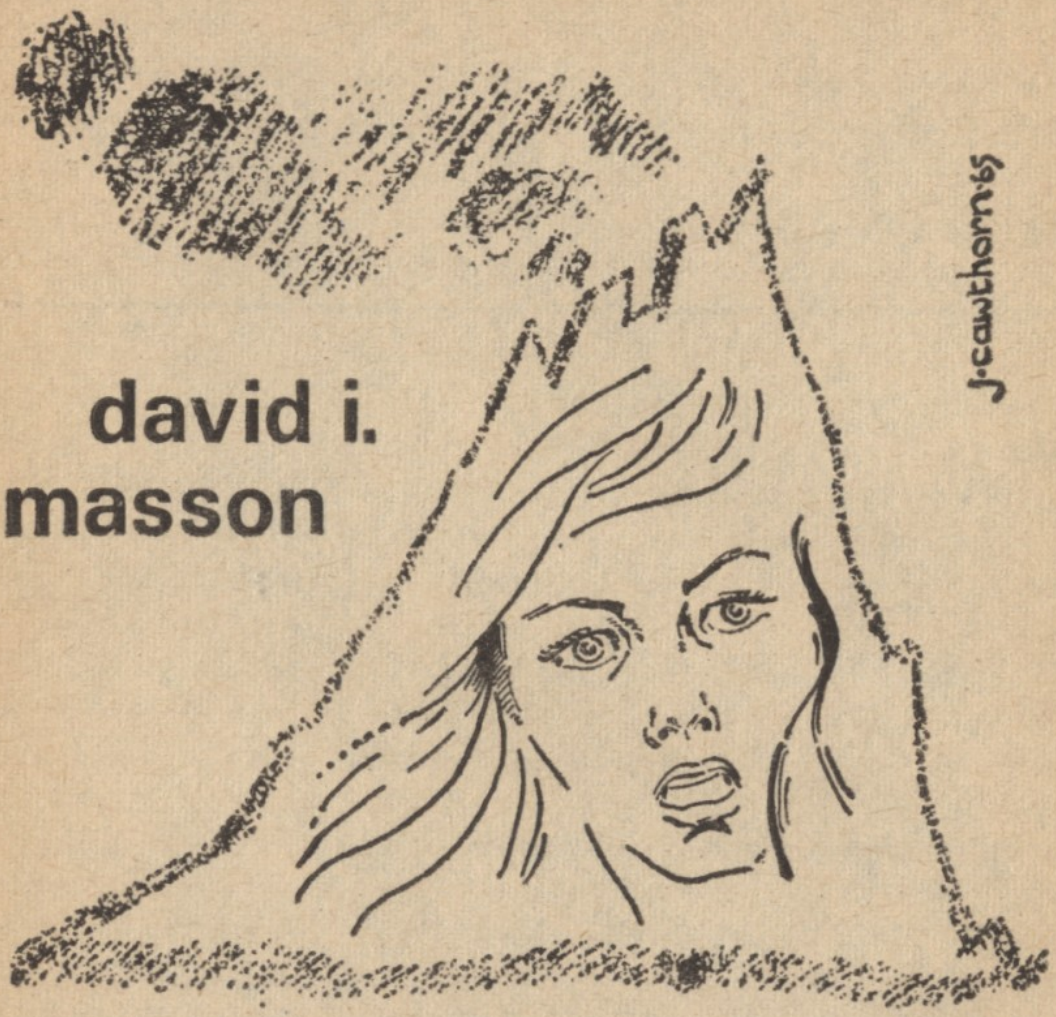
But after that, there was no time to see anything.

Bill Butler

From ONE

This morning I burned
The last remaining
uncollected dinosaur;
The others are displayed
in museum cases.
My ferns burned yesterday
with the giant wing
of a pteranodon;
Soon I will be heated only
by coals
From butterflies
I will sit warmed
beside a bonfire
Of thrushes.

BILL BUTLER



psychosmosis

"ONE HAS SUCCUMBED in the house by Thorn Thicket, Little Ness," said Tan, rapidly and shamefacedly, meeting the chunky fellow on the edge of the swamp where Ness had been trapping for some days.

"One of their old ones?"

"No, no, it is the one who was the wife of Kemm; she had a sudden illness."

"Ah," breathed Ness, "then we shall have two new namings—or are the wife of Nant and the second daughter of Big Ness already named again?"

"No—it happened an hour ago. You are in time to hear."

"This was a troublesome death, then—but we shall have fun at the naming-feasts."

Little Ness found that he was breathing rather quickly. It had been on the tip of his tongue to ask Tan casually "And how is—?", for he was interested in Big Ness's nubile younger daughter. A narrow escape.

The house of Kemm and his parents and old aunts was carefully by-passed by everyone. It had a black cloth stuck on two stakes across its entrance. Nant and Big Ness had seen the way things were going for a day or two and held secret councils in their houses, so they were ready when the black cloth appeared. Since Nant's wife and Big Ness's second daughter had the same name as Kemm's second wife, they must be re-named at once. As a precaution, Nant had taken to addressing his wife as "wife" at first. She had settled finally for "Mara" which faintly recalled her old name, and Big Ness had persuaded his daughter that "Nura" (which was even closer) would do for her; though he shunned saying or even daring to think so, it recalled his dead wife's name too, which had the same *u*-vowel as well as all the other sounds. A quarter of an hour after Little Ness had heard the news from Tan, Nant and his wife paraded round the settlements banging an old dish and calling out "Nant's wife is Mara. Come to the feast tonight!" Everyone began to mutter "Mara, Mara, Mara" to themselves to memorise the name. Ten minutes behind them Big Ness and his family came hitting two spoons together and shouting "Big Ness's second daughter is Nura—come and see us tonight." The hearers muttered "Nu-*u*ra, Nu-*u*ra," and debated which house to visit first. They thought there would be more amusement to be had at Nant's house later, on the whole.

Little Ness, however, decided to call first on Nant, so as to have the rest of the evening with the girl whom he must now, with some distaste, think of as Nura. What a name! There he found Nura herself paying a token visit and sliding down her first drink of the evening. They greeted each other self-consciously and remained rather ill at ease. Little Ness did not like to criticise the name directly, but Nura knew instinctively what was

wrong. Kemm, walking like a man in a dream, came in on the arm of the doctor, hoarsely greeted Mara by name and touched the proffered (and nearly empty) cup with his lips. Then he and the doctor walked off to Big Ness's, and the company breathed more freely. Presently the doctor, Sull, came in again alone. Everyone knew he had taken Kemm back home. (Parents and aunts were bedridden.) Sull downed several drinks quickly and began to tell one bawdy story after another. Mara and Nura nodded at one another and, escorted by Little Ness (who would now rather have heard the stories) made their way in the bat-haunted dusk to Big Ness's house. As they entered, the dark beauty, Forna, arm entwined with that of Heft (her husband Freth was safely off at Nant's house) was saying loudly "Don't know *how* we managed in the dull old days." After a drink, Mara went back on the arm of Big Ness, while Tark, his eldest son, played host for the time being.

Little Ness, in whom the drinks were beginning to work, would have liked to get Nura on her own, but it was impossible tonight. He stayed to the end, to keep an eye on her, and somewhere in the early morning bade her an amorous farewell outside and lurched homeward. His father was snoring, having got away before midnight from the party.

The doctor Sull, woken an hour or two later by the owls and a rumbling stomach, squinted at the moon, mixed himself a strong tonic, and crept out without waking Skenna. He made his way in the moonlight with a second draught to Kemm's house, stole in without disturbing the old folk, shook Kemm by the shoulder but found him rigidly awake, made him drink the draught, and with him laid the body on the cart at the back. In two hours, during which neither spoke, they reached the lip of the volcano. The grey dawn was touching the summit as they tipped up the cart and shot the body down the hot cindery slope. Sull, after returning the cart, brought Kemm on to his own house where Skenna gave both men breakfast in silence. Then, as Sull had his rounds to make, she started to take Kemm home. They had not gone far before a confused outcry broke

out. Presently a youth came running up. "Mara's husband is gone!" he shouted and sped on.

Nant had spent an uneasy night (or rather, early morning), his brain muddied with alcohol and vague disquiet caused by the too-eager manner of Surt towards Mara that evening. As they stirred in the early rays of the sun he groaned and, out of half-sleep, began:

"I say, Nira—"

Mara shuddered fully awake to find her husband gone. She knew what had happened. A scream formed in her throat. She staggered up, snatching at a cloth. Half a dozen frowzy heads appeared at house doors and windows. "He's gone! He's gone! He said it!" and she collapsed on the ground, beginning a continuously fluctuating moan.

No one came near, but disturbing news was carried frantically from house to house. Fortunately no one had been awake enough to comment on last night's party. Surt, whose interest in Mara was indeed active, decided to keep out of the way, to bide his time. He went fishing for the day.

The sobbing, writhing girl was ignored, with revulsion, by everyone in the community, except, after half an hour, by the doctor. Sull came striding down, sat her up, slapped her vigorously across both cheeks, forced a drink down her throat, and then tried to take her to her parents' house. She shook free and stumbled inside her own door. An hour later her mother, on her way to market, peered inside but did not speak or go in.

That night, exhausted, Mara drifted asleep, only to meet her husband in vivid dreams. He was smiling at her, pulling her along by the arms, leading her down imaginary valleys, up imaginary hillsides. In the morning she woke to the empty reality and in ultimate desperation, as one who falls on a sword, spoke his name. Sull on his rounds found a silent house and, guessing what had happened, warned the community that "The wife who was named but was unlucky is now gone too: a double vanishment."

As the syllable "Nant!" closed in her mouth, Mara

felt as it were an edge cleave her brain, a white pang, then she found herself without transition lying on a steeply-falling fern-clad slope, facing the morning sun. The slope was like nothing she knew in waking life: the only hilly country in the Land had been the bare sides of the volcano. Woods and great folded hillsides spread below and across from her. The air was brisk. A wind was pouring down the slope. Gulls called. A squirrel chittered at her from a tree behind her, one of several dotted about the hillside. Voices singing and chattering sounded faintly to south.

After a minute Mara clambered unsteadily towards the voices. Among some trees she came across a group of people, several of whom she knew. There was a middle-aged man who had vanished three years ago, at a feast, shortly after one of his friends had died. There was a girl whose lover had vanished after his brother's death, and who herself vanished shortly thereafter. With the girl was her lover. All nameless now to the People.

"Nira!" called the three joyfully. It was her first name, changed yesterday. But *they* did not vanish. The three left the group and surrounded her.

"You have crossed!" said the girl. "Nant is here. He has been calling you all day and all night. You are here at last; you are one of the Invokers now. Yes, he is waiting for you. Let us take you down to him—it is only a mile or so."

"Are we all dead, then?"

"No, we are not the Faded; we are the Invokers, we are Inside. We spoke the names, in carelessness or defiance, so we crossed."

"They—they know nothing about this world where I was."

"No, but we try. We call. And at night we dream of them, as we dream of the Faded. But they are too circumspect, the Hard of Hearing. Few of them leave the Outside."

"Is he well?"

"He is half-wild, but still hopeful of your coming."

"How do you live here?"

"Just as the Outsiders do. We hunt, we fish, we grow plants, we harvest fruits. It is another land, simply, only

Inside. There is nothing all round but the seas, the great waters; you can hear them roar far off. We have never got far out in them. There is no way back. Few of us regret it long."

"We shall not . . . How did those children cross over?" added Nira, seeing a bunch of small ones on a track below them; "they look too young to have bandied the names of adults about—or did they say a dead brother's name?"

"They didn't cross over—these were born here."

"What are those mounds over there?"

"Burial mounds." And, seeing Nira did not understand: "Mounds built to cover the bodies of the Faded."

"Do we not live forever here, then? Or were those people killed by accident?"

"No, no, we simply live a normal life-span. We put the bodies of our Faded in these mounds. Those flowers you see are their birthday flowers for those who were born here, or crossing-day flowers for those that crossed here."

"Do you not remember the days of their deaths, since you think so steadily of the dead?"

"What would be the sense of that? We want to recall the lucky day they came among us, not the sad day they faded from us . . . Let us try calling Nant now." And the girl began shouting downhill through the forest. The others joined. Presently there was an answer. In a few minutes someone came running uphill, dodging the boles and tussocks. It was Nant. The others melted away.

When the first ecstasy was over Nant and Nira—he insisted on calling her by her old name—walked hand in hand to the valley, where they meant to build a home not far from one of the clusters of houses. On the way they passed a small grouping of burial mounds. Several were decorated.

"You and I will have crossing-day flowers like these one day—you on one day, I on the next."

"May that be long hence. Our children's children will be there with the first to lay them, I hope. Now we must find something to eat to restore you, pale thing. Then we must get some help to fell the timber for a start.

And tonight they will have a guest-house for us. Tonight, too, will be held a specially joyful celebration for you and me together."

"What shall you do for a living?"

"What should I do but hunt, as I always did?"

A day before the great boar hunt, and a week after the burning of the vanished couple's house and goods, Sull told the community: "The man that was Heft's father has died." No one was surprised—Heft's father had been doddering for some time. Heft had stuck up the black cloth. That evening he and Sull pitched the corpse into the volcano. Heft was avoided for a few weeks, though he was already learning to say "The man that was my father" by the time the boar hunt was over. People had become nervous, especially the mothers and fathers of families.

One of the heroes of the hunt was Little Ness's friend Tan. This was because exasperation and self-contempt had made him foolhardy, and he speared and shoved among the ravening beasts like a madman. The fact was, Tan had quarrelled bitterly with Danna, his girl, about half an hour before. She had spoken warmly of "Our two friends who were unlucky after naming, and vanished," and Tan, who always felt an irrational dislike of the attractive Nant, accused her of thinking too much of "the man". The colder Danna grew the more blindly enraged Tan became, and they parted as if for good. Once the hunt was on Tan felt himself to have been insanely and pointlessly jealous, and doubted if he could ever patch matters up. Hence his "heroism".

Three others would have been heroes of that hunt, but of them only Keth survived. One man died speedily, and his corpse was slung on a pole to be committed to the volcano as soon as convenient. Another, after ten minutes' agony (he had been extensively trampled and gored) bethought himself of a way out and groaned out "Nant". He disappeared as the bystanders scattered in horror.

The procession, with Tan and Keth carried shoulder-high among the inverted hanging carcasses, arrived home to a wildly excited mob of women, children and old

men. For a tense moment these, who had studiously avoided mentioning names of those away on the dangerous enterprise, heard the news that the first son of Pemf and the second of Rann were gone, then the joyful uproar recommenced.

It was only to be expected that Danna should keep away from the crowd until she heard of Tan's prowess, but he hoped she would come round presently. As the feast developed without sign of her, however, an icy clamp seemed to fasten slowly on his bowels. He fought his way towards an old woman at the back of the green and murmured in her ear: "Tell me, please, is the daughter of Ban and Daaba anywhere to be seen?"

"Why no. I have not seen her today at all."

"Would *they* have seen her, then?"

"Perhaps. Wait." And the old crone ambled over to where Daaba sat balancing a large beaker. Tan saw Daaba shake her head and call across to Ban two rows in front. The huge man rose and lumbered towards her. Daaba whispered to him. Ban stared back at her. Then he shuffled towards Tan, threading his way through the half-drunken featers.

"No," he said unsteadily, meeting the youth's eyes (his own shatteringly like those of the missing girl). "No, our daughter spoke to us after the hunt moved off. She was upset over something. Then she walked off down the path."

"Could she have wandered far?"

"I don't think she did. Someone would have seen her. And although she was upset, she was not—you know what I mean—she could not have . . . I am sure . . . Besides there was nothing she could have used, unless a knife. And we missed nothing."

"Or an accident—a wild animal?"

"Let us speak to Forna."

They made their way to where the couple sat, arms round each other's necks, cackling and swaying, not far off.

"Forna!" shouted Tan in the dark one's ear, "Was your old friend that was my friend, my girl, was she in the place all day? Tell me, I must know."

"Eh—oh it's you, you are a hero now, you know. Oh yes, it's odd she isn't here. No; I remember, she was sitting down grumbling to herself about something down by your hut all afternoon. About an hour before the hunt came back I saw her last. Next time I looked, she was gone. Freth—did you see her?"

"No-o!" said her husband.

Tan, followed by Forna and Ban, escaped from the assembly and went round, through and all over his own hut and its neighbourhood. Nothing disturbed within. Nothing gone. A smoky torch showed the ground scuffed up in front of his hut, but there were no obvious recent footmarks. They looked at one another.

"She that was my daughter must have met vanishment. Perhaps she spoke a name of those two—she knew them well," said Ban heavily. "I must warn the rest. Let us go back to the feast."

Tan spent the rest of the night wandering alone round the settlement. He dare not call her name. In the morning he began a search throughout the Land, even wandering among the dust-devils as far as the encircling desert; but to no avail. In his heart he could hear the girl uttering the names of her vanished friends. Estranged from Forna when Forna married the frivolous Freth, ill at ease with most of the community, too tender-hearted, too thoughtful, she must have felt herself deserted by Tan, and in desperation called on that unlucky pair, and so like them was swept away. Now Tan dare not even think her name. Yet when on the third night he slept he dreamt repeatedly of her, sad, reproachful, hungrily staring at him, calling him, calling.

Of this he could speak to no one. As a hero of the hunt he continued to rate an uneasy slap on the back from men like Heft and little Ness. In the end he drifted back for form's sake to the good cheer and the drinkings of nights, but Ban if they met would stare at him grimly for an instant and turn aside; perhaps he suspected, thought Tan, that there was a quarrel at the back of it; but neither man could even mention the vanished girl now. (In truth, Ban was merely avoiding the embarrass-

ment and risk of an encounter that must remind him of his former daughter.)

The recently-vanished couple had made many friends, indeed, whom wine and meat and good company could not entirely distract. Thus it was that impulsive Valla, one day at dinner with her husband (They had married very young more than a dozen years ago) said of a basket she had seen in Sull's house: "You know, it was exactly like the one Mara—"

Vol stood up shouting, scattering platters as he did. The place opposite was empty. Vek was away from home; but he had to be told, and the whole community. No one had to change their name. Vol tried to forget, busying himself with Vek's coming of age, and as for Vek, he was wholly taken up with himself.

It was about a week after that Tan was found standing staring silently at nothing, near the house of Little Ness, one arm half-extended, one heel slightly raised. He stood thus like wood for two hours and then consented to be led away. They penned him up behind Sull's house where an eye could be kept on him, and used to fling him scraps of meat whenever they went by. He raised a few laughs, but most preferred to look aside. In two months he was dead. But his name had long ceased to be spoken.

Vol had successfully outlived his dreams of the woman who had been his wife, but in waking he found her memory growing rather than diminishing. Five months after her disappearance, with Vek safely launched, he found himself sleepless one night and in agony called Valla's name.

A cold slice cut through his brain and he felt a gravelly bank about him, while the stars (different stars) twinkled. "This is death," he thought, but by the time morning came and his stiffness made him all too aware of his body, he knew it was no death. He was on the bare neck of a long drumlin, grass-covered, on the midst of a rolling vale. Above him on both sides rose ferny and foresty slopes, the nearest a couple of miles away. Far behind and above them there gleamed mysterious white shapes, which Vol could not interpret. Water chattered over stones not far off. The birds skimmed and screamed overhead.

A continuous faint murmuring roar rose and fell far off downhill. Movement glimpsed upstream showed him where the settlement was.

When he had hobbled up to it, there was Mara, there was Nant, there was Danna, with a new darkness in her eyes, but a new boy; there was even Vaata, whom he remembered as a lass, much older now but still recognisable. There were many others he had once known, but somehow different. He realised the truth almost at once.

"Where is Valla?" he shouted at them. "I have come through! Where is Valla?"

"They are at the flower ceremony for poor old Somm," called a young girl, anxious to show off her knowledge.

"Come, Vol, you are going to have some trouble; come, dear boy," said an old woman he had forgotten or had never seen, taking his hand firmly; "come with me and listen carefully; steel yourself; you have been too long among the Hard of Hearing."

At this moment, in a grave group of people advancing down the hill, Vol saw Valla. She was hand in hand with a tall man, a stranger. The truth burst upon him. With a cry he sprang forward.

The people encircled the three, who stood, as though of stone, face to face a few paces from each other.

"Yes, Vol, you would not come. So few come anyway from the Hard of Hearing. I married Tel here. I am sorry. It is too late. I am going to bear his child."

Wheeling round Vol broke through the group, and fled up river. Eventually he found the gorge, where he threw himself over. They found his body on the rocks beneath the sombre crags, and carried it back and buried it. On the anniversary of his crossing Valla and her husband (and half the settlement) used to load his mound with rich flowers, and chant their saddest songs. On this first occasion the whole community, singing, escorted them back to their house, and with a long chant bidding Valla think of the future and of her coming child and seeking to reconcile her to herself, took farewell of them for that day.

"That is the most terrible crossing I have ever known

or heard of," said Losp to Mek as they were walking away.

"Yes indeed. Though all crossings are painful at first. The careless-mouthed children are the most difficult: I saw two—long ago. But they have grown up all right among us."

"Kush is a pretty unsatisfactory fellow, all the same."

"Well, yes; he is hard and moody. But one of the worst crossings till now was poor Gal's, wounded in the boar hunt Outside. He'd expected a quick release, but he came Inside only to die in pain."

"Still, he had Doctor Lann to help him. But it was a bitter end."

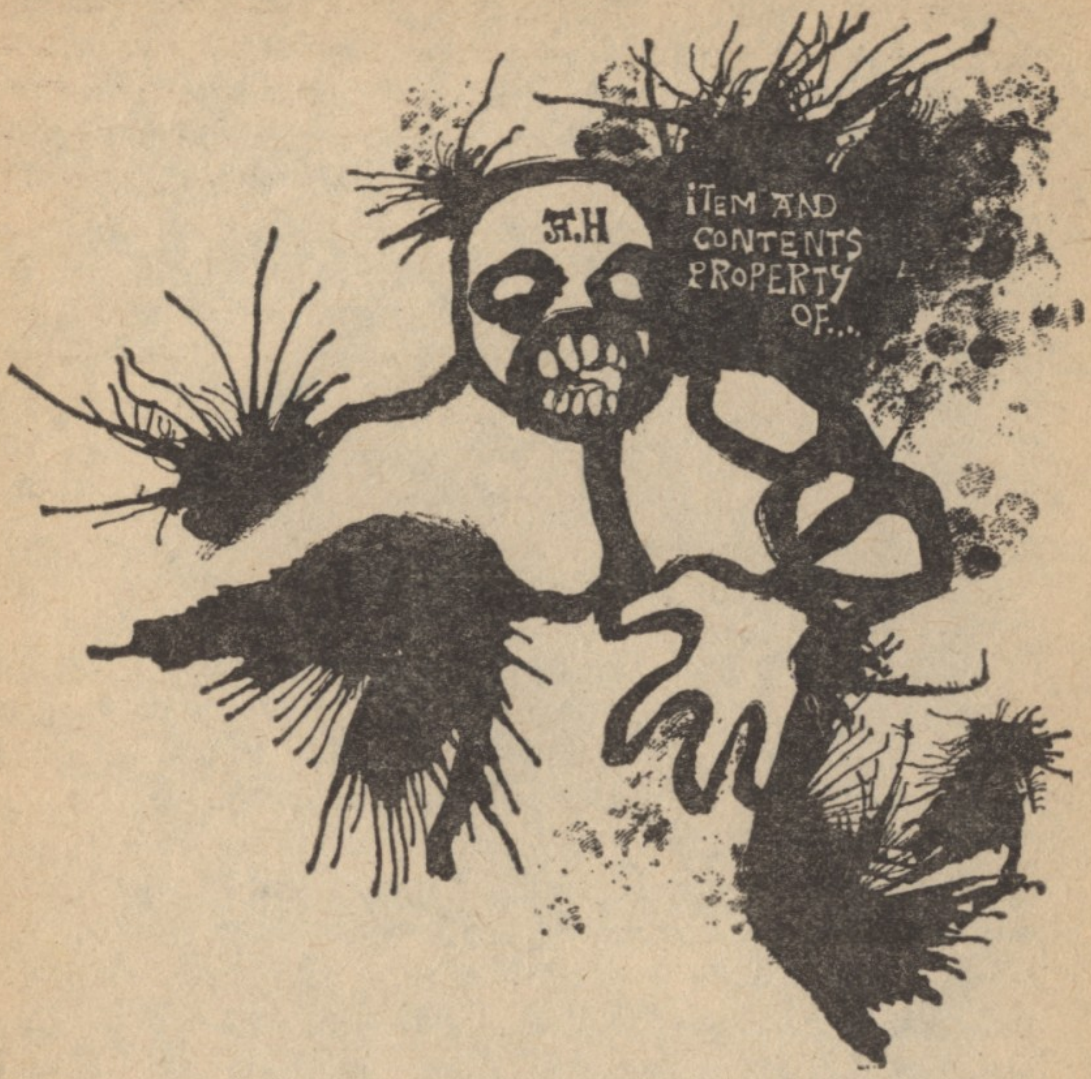
"We have had rather many crossings lately, but in general they are getting fewer, don't you think?"

"Yes, the Hard of Hearing are getting harder. But we invokers have more children than they have, according to report: our numbers are growing steadily that way. Look at us two: at least third-generation Invokers."

"Fourth-generation: the latest of *my* ancestors to cross over was a great-grandmother of mine. And Menga knows of none of her ancestors that were not born Inside . . . Where *is* that woman?—still gossiping with the other wives back there . . . By the way," (with a wry smile) "our burial mounds are becoming too thick on the ground, as the old fade out. We shall have to build them further off, and on barren ground. I must raise the matter next Council . . . But here is your house. I shall try and pluck Menga from the old wives' party! Good day to you, and fine hunting."

"And a good crop to you!"

In the Outside, the Hard of Hearing heard the volcano begin to rumble for the first time in living memory.



PETER TATE

THE POST-MORTEM PEOPLE

ANTON HEYAR CHANCED on the shrill gathering of locked tyres and was running before any sound of impact. The car could be skidding, no more. But one could not afford to stand and wait. One had a reputation.

He shouldered a passage through the lazy-liners on the rotor walk even as a bundle with flapping limbs and disjointed head hung in the air. He was at kerbside as the body landed close to his feet. Heyar placed his overcoat gently to keep a little of the man's draining warmth.

"Somebody get an ambulance," he shouted, taking charge of the situation while women grew ill and lazies changed to the brisker track and were borne smartly away.

The man's eyes flickered. A weak tongue licked vainly at lips as dry as parchment. Breath came like a flutter of moth's wings.

"How are you feeling?" asked Heyar.

The man's eyes searched desperately for the speaker, blinked and then blinked again to bring him into focus. He tried to speak but there was only the rattle of too many unsaid words fighting for an outlet.

Heyar sniffed the air. His nostrils, attuned to the necessities of his calling, could pick out death like hollyhock or new-made bread. Yes, it was there, dank and acrid as ancient perspiration.

"Don't worry," he told the man. "You'll be all right."

He took off his jacket to make a pillow for the man's head.

"My . . . wife . . ." muttered the dying man. "She . . ."

"No need to worry her now," said Heyar in business-like tone.

Perhaps he just isn't trying to fool me with sentimentality, thought the man in his mind full of pain. It isn't that he doesn't care.

The klaxon of the approaching ambulance rose and fell on a scale of panic. Heyar felt in his trouser pocket.

He took out a small tin and opened it to expose an inked pad. He manoeuvred digits on a rubber stamp.

"You'll be fine, old son," he said. "Help's just arriving."

And he brought the rubber stamp down right between the man's eyes.

Doberman Birkk, a mere morgue attendant of intermediate stature, humbled through life in constant awe of the ubiquitous Anton Heyar. Where death walked, there too walked Heyar, hat pulled low, hand on stamp.

Birkk paused in his work to examine the insignia between the corpse's eyes. It was not elaborate, a mere functional circle with script around the outer edging and the

characters "A.H." tangled in some written state of intercourse at centre.

"Item and contents property of . . ." read the circumferential legend if one cared to crane one's neck and bend kiss-close to the poor dead face to see. Birkk did no such thing. He carried out the job as a means of survival, but he did not have to enjoy it, even though he allowed himself a sneaking regard for the more adept and more devoted exponents of death and its subsidiaries.

He checked the time on Heyar's stamp—1434—against the report that accompanied the cadaver. The ambulance men had put the time of extinction at 1434.5. Heyar's insight was uncanny.

Birkk detached the item and placed it in a refrigerated container. Then he pushed it to one side to await collection. Usually Heyar came himself, entrusting no such vital task to a junior.

He knew Birkk's routine. He had already checked the man's volume of work. Heyar would be here very shortly.

Even as Birkk recorded the fact, the door swung and the stooping man with the wasted face was walking towards him, unfolding his spotless receipt.

Birkk took the receipt and examined it carefully though he knew it would contain full and adequate authority from Static Coroner Gurgin. Dealing with Heyar, a master of his own profession, Birkk felt obliged to appear as painstaking and conscientious as Heyar's patience would allow.

"Any trouble this time?" he queried. "Occasionally sector centre develops a sympathy for dependants."

"Sympathy is out of date," said Heyar, brusquely. "This absurd sentimentality about a piece of rotting flesh. Gurgin knows how his psychotropics are bought. He gives me no complications. A little blind-eye money for his favourite steroid and he is quite prepared to slip me a rapid registration marker. Now, is this mine?"

He moved towards the container and identified his designation with his usual cynical satisfaction. He caught up the container by its handle and made to leave.

"Wait," said Birkk.

"Why?" Heyar spat out the words as though an attempt

to capture his attention at such moments was some kind of insult.

Birkk felt foolish. There were always questions he wanted to put to Heyar. Each time the gaunt man was scheduled to appear, Birkk lined them up and rehearsed comments which, he hoped, would inspire some traitor reaction from Heyar, some warmth for a subject. Any subject.

But when Heyar came, he was unapproachable. Somehow, Birkk never learned from his visit. Today was no exception.

"Why?" Heyar asked again, impatiently.

"Isn't . . . isn't there anything else you want? The trunk isn't spoken for."

"No wonder."

"I don't understand."

"The man has been struck by a car," said Heyar slowly as if to a retarded child. "His bodily functions—digestive chemistry, kidney system, for example—have been impaired. At most, there may be a dozen organs worth salvaging, and we don't have the time for that. Besides, our clients pay poor money for bits and pieces."

"Oh." Birkk was enlightened. He slotted the piece of business acumen away. Some day, when his voluntary anatomy apprenticeship was completed, he would have to take to the road—he was running out of apprenticeships. And he was determined to break into the lush pastures and free pickings of the thoroughfare section. There was small reward in Industrial Accidents or Domestic Mishaps.

"Now," said Heyar, picking up the capsule. "Is there anything else?"

Birkk shifted from one foot to another uneasily.

"Oh yes." Heyar reached in his pocket and tossed a handful of notes across to Birkk. They fluttered on to Birkk's separation table. He wiped them before he stuffed them into an inner pocket.

In the time it took to remove any tell-tale stains—certain tradesmen were still uneasy about taking blood money—Heyar was gone.

Jolo Trevnik locked the weathered door of his down-

town Adonis League and wondered, as he wondered every night, why he bothered. Once, his culture clinic had been definitely up-town and well-filled with rounded young men slinging medicine balls at each other and testing their biceps in crucifix poses on the wall-bars.

Strange how, finally, even location turned against you. The people had moved away into apartment blocks on the edge of town, leaving the centre purely for business and only that which was conducted in skyhanger settings.

Now, Jolo exercised alone, moving slowly from one piece of apparatus to another, not because he had himself slowed up, but to conserve himself for some purpose which evaded him and could have been mere wishful thinking.

His suit grew progressively shabbier and his fortune, body-built in the days of activity kicks grew progressively smaller, as did his steaks and his health food orders. But as yet, he was still in fine shape.

As he turned away from the door and walked towards the main rotor quay, a shadow in a doorway down the street moved to follow him.

But despite its attempt at concealment, Trevnik knew of its presence. It was part of the new fatal system that had emptied his clinic—an ironic reminder that the body that had once been so envied in life was now attractive only in terms of death.

I suppose I ought to be honoured, he thought. I'll make the bastard work for his money.

At the rotor quay, he selected the slow track and moved quickly along it. He wanted to put the idlers in his pursuer's way. He moved among them like an athlete among statues. The statues made no protest, silent, turned inward with the seashells in their ears filling their minds with the symphonies and the soothing words they had chosen to hear.

Above the whine of the rotor and the passing traffic, he heard the man stumbling after him, heard him cursing loudly.

At the next junction, he transferred to a faster track, still walking rapidly, weaving neatly between the younger mutes, avoiding their waving arms and snapping fingers.

His pursuer was less adept and less gentle. Once, he jostled one young man so violently that his seashell slipped to the moving pavement.

The youth recovered it and pursued the pursuer long enough to tap his heels and send him headlong before returning to his transistorised reverie.

Trevnik heard the resultant tumble and allowed the pavement to bear him along until the gaunt man regained his feet. Then he back-pedalled until the man drew level still dusting himself down.

"I trust you haven't hurt yourself," he said, carefully controlling the bitterness he felt. "Perhaps we should walk a little more slowly."

The man eyed him suspiciously.

If he knows why I am here, why I trail him, why does he react so dispassionately? wondered Heyar. Or does he know?

"I'm all right," he said gruffly. "I don't need help . . . thank you." The courtesy came as an afterthought.

"Perhaps I should walk with you in case you feel suddently faint," said Trevnik. "If you're shaky, you ought to get to bed. Are you sure I can't help you?"

The lithe man's spectacular concern jarred on Heyar's sensitivity. He began to notice how the man moved, almost mincingly. The breeze that played on their faces as they were drawn along the track brought a foreign aroma to the nostrils grown acute with death. Heyar swallowed and looked at the man again.

"Really," he said almost defensively. "It's all right. The next quay is as far as I go."

"As you please," said Trevnik. "But if there's the smallest thing . . ."

"Nothing," said Heyar, savagely.

Trevnik rode beside him, barely glancing at him, but wearing the self-satisfied air of a man who has done a good turn for an ungracious response.

But not so much a man . . . Heyar, sneaking glances at Trevnik from the shelter of his hat-brim, became even more apprehensive. Trevnik's finely-developed limbs and torso might fetch a good price. But trying to sell internal organs marred by chromosomatic complications, or a

brain whose motivations were neither particularly masculine nor blatantly feminine but in some twilight in-between had setbacks. So much so that Heyar was tempted to cease his observations on Trevnik.

At the quay closest to his office, he disembarked without a word to Trevnik and watched the man's broad back out of sight.

There was no doubt Trevnik had a physique rarely seen among the squat inhabitants of 1983; a body which, if properly marketed, could prove profitable despite . . .

Despite nothing. It was merely an impression, recalled Heyar, and impressions could be misleading or even downright fake. Could it be that Trevnik was trying to sidetrack him into withdrawing his attentions?

Any fresh measure to protect one's remains after death intrigued Heyar. One was, after all, no longer an occupant and unlikely to be affected by post-mortem activities. But the mysterious attitudes of the sanctimonious sixties still persisted. There remained in certain circles a horror of disturbing the corpse. Heyar faced bravely the stigma of obscenity and cried all the way to the credit pile when somebody called him a necrophile.

"I do mankind a service," he would tell people who questioned his motives. "The burial grounds have been used up, built over, defiled in asphalt. The crematorium has a use, but it is a great leveller. How do you identify ashes? Some items very useful to the living are lost in the flames. I aid medical science. I am trained to the task and my spirit is right."

"If I can help somebody," he crooned raggedly as he entered the block where his office was situated, "as I pass along . . . "

He boarded the elevator and pressed the director button for the 11th floor.

"Then my living shall not be in vain . . ."

The elevator wound upwards. Head bowed, Heyar was engrossed in the half-remembered song.

"Then my living shall not be in vain . . . Oh . . ."

The elevator shunted him into the 11th floor berth. He opened the door of his office.

"My living shall not be in v-a-i-n-n-n."

The woman in the guest chair had red-rimmed eyes but she watched him with an intensity that must have brought her pain.

"Good evening," he said calmly. He was used to finding such women in his office. One pair of red eyes looked much like another.

"I've been here for hours," she said.

"I didn't know you were here," he said, obviously. He did not concede the necessity for an apology.

"You are about as cold as I estimated that you were," she said. "I've been looking round the office, seeking some softness, some rounded edge. But it is all sharp-cold and soulless."

The psycho-analytical approach was not new to Heyar by any means. But it did lend a little more of a tang to the exchange than the sniffles into a handkerchief or the soprano voice raised in heart-rending plea.

"A table and a chair," he said. "A filing cabinet, a secretary computer. What else would you expect?"

She would tell him her name and the reason for her presence in her own time. He would not prompt the revelation because it was important to maintain a singular lack of interest.

"You're probably wondering why I am here," she said hopefully. Not well-versed in deception, she let the mask slip occasionally.

"No. You'll tell me eventually."

"I'm Elsie Stogumber."

Stogumber. The name had a vague familiarity, some half-remembered or semi-noted significance. Heyar switched on his secretary computer.

"Stogumber," he said into the feeder piece.

"There would hardly be anything recorded yet," said the woman.

The name clicked.

"This morning," Heyar said. "He asked for you."

"Small comfort to me now."

Heyar waited. The woman had not once taken her eyes from his face.

"They say you—you had his head."

"Yes."

The woman dropped her eyes and fumbled with the gloves in her lap.

"You wouldn't still have it?"

Heyar's stomach heaved. His vocation was bloody enough, even viewed with the detachment he brought to it. But when one tried to personalise bits of flesh . . .

"Why?" he asked.

"I suddenly couldn't remember my husband's face," she said. "It horrified me. If I could just . . ."

"I no longer have it," cut in Heyar. "My clients demand prompt delivery."

"Your—clients?"

"Mrs. Stogumber, I'm sure you know the situation. And I'm quite prepared to believe that your bereaved state at this time makes realisation a little difficult. But do you really want me to go into this? Will you not be comforted if I say that your husband is beyond any inconvenience or pain in this matter and that his last thoughts, to my certain knowledge, were of you?"

"No. It is inadequate."

"What would you want, Mrs. Stogumber?"

"Ideally, my husband. Or at least some part of him."

"But he's dead, Mrs. Stogumber. He's gone. A body is not a person without the spark of life."

The woman crumpled visibly in the chair. Her shoulders shook and she took in great gulps of air.

"Don't you have any movies of him?" asked Heyar. "Or some threedees, maybe?"

"He went out after breakfast and I'll never see him again," she said pitifully. "You—you buzzards chop him up before I can even . . ."

The fight for breath became less laboured as tears began to flow. Heyar let her cry, thankful for an escape valve.

He wondered what he could say when she came out of it. Evening edged a little closer to night. Her sobs softened to an occasional sniff. She blew her nose and then looked up."

"You see, when in 1975, the Central Committee rescinded the Anatomy Act of 1823 and the Burial Act of 1926," he began.

"I've seen you," she said. "All of you. Standing at busy road junctions, chasing ambulances, trailing feeble old men. . ."

Her voice was close to hysteria.

He rose, walked round the desk and slapped her hard. She became silent.

"It would help if you knew our intentions," he said. "We are not—buzzards. We play a vital role. To benefit the living we make certain adjustments to the unliving. Nobody suffers by it. The Salvage of Organs Act of January, 1976, gave us the full power of the legislature. This was tantamount to a declaration that the 'racket' in kidneys, heart valves and limbs that had thrived up to that time was accepted as inevitable and made conventional. We have new thinkers now. Wasting our sentiment on a pile of gone-off meat was not progressive.

"Surely you can appreciate that."

The woman took a deep breath. For a moment she teetered on the verge of more weeping. But she struggled on bravely.

"I accept it in theory," she said. "It seemed to make good sense at the time . . . Things like that always do when you are not involved."

"But I have seen the way you work. You salvage men don't just wait for death—you prompt it. Surely you shouldn't have to compete with each other like those old American insurance men and those Australian breakdown lorry drivers."

Heyar swung his feet up on to the desk. Now the situation had resumed a calmer plane, he felt better able to cope. He clasped his fingers behind his head.

"One has to make a living," he said.

Elsie Stogumber seemed oblivious to the angry red flush on one side of her face. She tried a wintry smile.

"I'm sorry," she said. "For losing control. It was childish of me."

She seemed to have regained a certain resolution.

"It's all right, Mrs. Stogumber," Heyar said. "I admire your present composure."

She smiled again, a little more like early autumn this time.

"When somebody takes the trouble to explain, it makes things that much easier," she said.

"The 1974 amendments to the Human Tissues Act of 1961," said Heyar. She stopped him with a raised hand.

"No more," she cautioned him gently. "Don't blind me with science."

High summer shaped her lips. Heyar swung his feet off the desk, stood up and came round the desk towards her.

Elsie Stogumber was clear of her chair and through the office door before he could reach her.

Heyar stood on the permanent walkway opposite the gymnasium and made no attempt at concealment. Such intrigue became ludicrous with repetition. Now, he did not veil his intentions, even out of courtesy.

He was too little of the hypocrite, for a start. Or was it because he liked to watch Trevnik's mahogany face as he noticed him, to see the eyes go suddenly wide as if in fear of an old superstition and then as suddenly narrow and normal and carefully averted?

He heard a descending thunder on the stairs. Trevnik must have seen him, given the advantage of darkness looking out on light because the large man simply showed him his back as he locked the door and started down the street.

In no apparent hurry, Heyar crossed the road and fell into step about twenty yards behind the giant. Today, he saw nothing suspect in the man's gait. Trevnik, presumably, had given up any pretence and walked now only in a way that exhibited the disciplined thrust of hip and leg.

Elsie Stogumber, cramped from her unaccustomed sojourn in the narrow doorway once occupied by Heyar, emerged into the mid-day brilliance and watched the two men down the street.

Birkk took the last protein sandwich he wanted and pushed the remainder across to the gaunt man. Somehow, though he had long since ceased to be troubled by his occupation, his appetite had never returned.

Each day, he prepared himself more sandwiches than he would eat. And each day, still feigning surprise at the meeting and hungry from some mysterious hunt, Heyar

joined him on his bench at the leisure zone, silent until Birkk had shown himself fed to sufficiency and had proffered him the surplus.

Birkk washed his mouth out at the fluori-fountain nearby, spat and sat down again.

Heyar chewed, his eyes fixed on the children's fun-run, watching for a collision with the spinning chairs or a fall from the helter-skelter.

"We could, perhaps, fill in the loop-holes," said Birkk.

Heyar grunted.

"The way into this game is too easy," said Birkk. "If we study, it is to be eventually better at our job. There is no ruling. It is a labour of love. Amateurs, opportunists can always make inroads. Perhaps we should form a union, or get some sole recognition from the Central Committee."

Heyar shrugged. He was used to Birkk's theorising, his verbal attempts to make the living more secure for himself in his incompetence.

"The amount of money the amateurs make, the volume of business we professionals lose is negligible," he said. "Myself, I don't mind who gets the stamp. I can always keep myself well."

In his sudden silence, he indicated his doubt of the other's ability.

"Me, too," said Birkk, hurriedly. "I was thinking of the less fortunate members of our calling."

Atop the 50-foot slide, a jostled child screamed and clutched with vain fingers at the air.

Birkk and Heyar moved at speed towards the gathering crowd.

The Minerva no longer pretended that the health foods it served were any more than politely-fashioned simulants or, at best, salvaged from some overgrown delicatessen. But at least, the cafe still retained certain of the musty odour that had once given herb stores an impression of geography contained within three walls and a display window.

Jolo Trevnik avoided the glassed-up, sexified, neonised

planktoniums. His stomach, disciplined to a balanced carbo-hydrate intake, turned on the lead oxide that accompanied every boxed cereal these days, a legacy of the brightly-coloured free gift needed to sell any competitive product.

His system revolted against battery lamb and the beef and chicken, he knew, contained sterilising agents to an alarming degree.

Not that he was bothered particularly about virility. The unborn were the lucky ones, he reasoned.

A shape above his table cut out the light. Momentarily, he started, his mind still fixed on the man with the wasted face who had followed him to the door.

Then a woman sat down opposite him and he noted the full, fortyish face and the slightly protruding eyes with a measure of relief.

He took a sip at his acorn coffee to steady his nerves. When he put his cup down, she was waiting.

"Mr. Trevnik?"

"Yes."

"I saw the name on the door of your gymnasium."

"But that's a long way away. What . . .?"

"I followed you," she said quickly. "I couldn't help noticing I wasn't the only one."

Trevnik looked away. It was suddenly humiliating to have other people know the snatchers were fancying you. It made you seem—something of a prostitute, a prize poodle, a cat in heat, a blacker-than-black man.

"I'm sorry for you," she said.

"It doesn't bother me. I look after myself. I avoid accidents."

"My husband was the same."

"Do I know your husband?"

"I think he came to your gym a couple of times—Harry Stogumber."

"Stogumber."

His echo of the word chilled her with a memory.

"Tall fellow," he said. "Not too fat. Not much flesh at all, really."

"Please."

"I'm sorry," said Trevnik. "It was just a phrase . . ."

"It has associations," she said. "Just at the moment, anyhow."

Trevnik freed his great legs from the inadequate table and turned his seat sideways to allow them access to the gangway. The woman was running her eyes over the breadth of his shoulders, the width and density of his hands.

"I—I was going to ask you a favour," she said finally. "That man who keeps following you. He was there when the car hit my husband. He . . ."

She swallowed hard.

"Don't trouble yourself," said Trevnik. "It is never pleasant for those who have to pick up the . . ." He bit his tongue. "For those who are left behind."

"I want to hurt him," she said. "Really physically hurt him. But what can I do?"

Trevnik looked down at his hands and watched the veins cording and uncording.

"You want me to hurt him for you," he said to save her. "I have never in my life used my strength to hurt anyone."

"I could offer you money," she said. He looked up.

"But I know it would hold no attraction for you. I could . . ."

"Hey." He interrupted deliberately, afraid of what she might offer.

"If I did," he said, "it would not be for any reward. It would be because I wanted to do it."

"What would make you want to do it?"

"Let us consider this coolly," he said. "First of all, you can't just beat somebody up . . ."

"Self-defence."

"Lady," Trevnik chose the words with exaggerated care. "How could I plead self-defence? Is it likely that I would be in a position where I needed to defend myself?"

He pushed his dark face nearer the woman.

"I LOOK like an attacker."

She retreated not one inch.

"If you said he tried to push you into the gutter or trip you into the rotor plant, you would have provocation."

"I'm sorry." He got up from the table. "I don't lie. In

this crooked world, I try at least to keep myself straight. Perhaps you'd better find somebody else."

"Wait."

He paused. Despite the importance to him of his few remaining quasi-convictions, he didn't want them to stand in the way of an action that would give him rare pleasure. But there had to be the right justification.

"Perhaps you . . ." She licked her lips and fumbled for the phrasing.

"You look like a man who might be swayed by the justice inherent in a certain act."

He eased himself back on to the ridiculous seat.

Again, the gaunt man waiting on the far pavement; again the thunder down the rotting wooden stairs.

Trevnik emerged and turned to lock the door. Heyar shifted his weight from one foot to another, anxious to be away.

Trevnik turned from the door and looked straight at Heyar. He started across the road.

Heyar, suddenly afraid, wondered what other purpose he could give to his presence.

"That building," he said, before Trevnik could reach him. "Doesn't look too safe. It could fall down any time."

"Is that why you keep following me?" asked Trevnik, mounting the kerb. "Because you think I'll fall down as well?"

"No . . . no," said Heyar hurriedly. "We—my department—we wanted to find out where you live, where you eat, your transportive habits, so we can site your replacement office accordingly . . ."

"Rubbish," said Trevnik.

"No, I assure you . . ."

Trevnik hit him first on the nose, drawing blood. "See a little of your own," he said pleasantly.

Then he sank his right fist deep into Heyar's solar plexus and followed it with his left fist. His right-hand jolt to the mouth straightened Heyar up.

Trevnik brought the edges of both palms down on the nerve centres inside Heyar's collar-bones, paralysing his arms.

"Bloody grave-robber," he said without expression. "White scum. How you pink bastards like to keep blood on your hands."

He hit Heyar twice more in the stomach and brought his hand-edge down on the back of Heyar's neck as he doubled again. All this he did with no apparent effort. As a final gesture, he turned Heyar face upwards and stood back.

Heyar, his senses reeling, his mouth salty and crowded, saw roofs tipping at him and tried to twist out of their downward path. But he could not move.

A shadow lingered above him. His flooded nostrils barely caught a woman's scent before a smell he knew too well, a smell of ancient perspiration.

The woman pushed back his damp hair and then seemed to be going through his pockets.

Heyar closed his eyes. Get on with it, he thought through a blood-red mist. Find I'm penniless and go.

The woman spoke.

"Mr. Heyar."

He opened his eyes. The woman bent towards him. Something glinted in her hand.

She brought the stamp down hard right between his eyes.

He tried to scream but choked on his blood, his own overpowering smell.

Elsie Stogumber said: "A widow has to make a living somehow."

The patient woman went on a tour of the morgue, stopping at the display cases, examining instruments. Then she returned to the separating table.

Birkk was bent over his work, his face turned away from her.

She touched his shoulder and thrust a hand under his chin so that he was forced to look into her shining eyes.

"Do you always weep over your carcases?" she asked. "What a charming old-fashioned habit . . ."

CHARLES PLATT

THE DISASTER STORY

THIS IS AN ATTEMPT to isolate and express the ingredients which endow a distinct type of science fiction with unusual appeal.

Escape

So long as I am left free and unharmed in an emptied, world, I don't mind what my disaster is. Bacteriological pestilence against which I possess chance immunity . . . Armageddon while I cower deep underground . . . anything will suffice. My wants are simple: to be free, alone with the world, and no longer trapped in the crawling assembly lines, stagnation where there is no time and every month is identical, where the operations are coded and lack purpose or meaning, and the hot sun slants in and bakes the dark room that has no ceiling, silver light streaming through a vast dusty window and glinting on polished desk tops laid out in military lines.

I will be freed from this, they will not be able to touch me—they, unimaginable, unapproachable, will be gone—and I will find the freedom that men talked of before the disaster.

Images

I will join maggots crawling through tarnished supermarkets and I will feed parasitically on the remains of the Welfare State. In a damaged helicopter I will fly, like some grotesque leather-winged prehistoric bird, over the broken faces of decaying cities: traffic jammed in Paris

and rusting into the ground, weathered concrete teeth of New York striking up through grey morning mist. Taking giant steps over the global museum of civilisation, halted at the instant of disaster in its inexorable progression and left to die, the images of a previous way of life will fall in on me like melting synthetic snowflakes.

Standing under one corner of the Rockerfeller Centre, the sweating heat will shimmer and rise around me into the vertical columns of drifting sunlight; the dust on the uneven road surface will be thick around my shoes; cars with faded paint slumped down on flattened tyres, looted stores with their rotting contents strewn on the cracked sidewalks . . . Throwing an empty bottle at a plate glass window, I will see its surface split and crash into a background of enveloping, tomb-like silence.

Jumping over rusting automobiles in Detroit, I'll be the only man left, laughing, breaking up the remains of the machinery of technological culture. In a red-plastic-lined restaurant, robot waiters will serve up radioactive food. I will exist and feed on the remnants of the civilisation I used to imagine as hanging, ponderous and immense, ready to crush me like a speck of dust.

Yesterday's Love

Tuning a plastic-cased transistor radio catches distorted sound from a radio station still powered by dying generators; over a turntable left running the needle jumps and jumps again in the chipped groove of a pop record, broadcasting, 'Treat me like you did the night before', endlessly repeated over the face of a dead world. The meaning is lost; love's vanished hungers and fears and suspicions are wiped clean by Armageddon. Sex is suppressed; the feeling is gone.

Wandering, Searching

Freed of my past and my position in the suffocating mass of crawling people, I will become a breathing,

moving, living fantasy figure, skimming a white desert in a fast flame-red sportscar, chrome dazzling in the eternal baking sunlight. Cities will recede behind me: mass-made complexes of wires and concrete all decomposing into dust.

Travel: I will travel free, at liberty to see the world. Peace everywhere: final peace, from cold, wet blue-green Scottish hills to the white slopes of chisel-faced Swiss mountainsides spanned by black threads of broken, rusting cable cars. The glaciers will crawl on unchanged, rivers of green ice slipping through time down into the valleys below.

The Dream Will Happen

The wandering will cease. Having seen what I want to see of civilisation's dead, hollow carcass, I will find true happiness, true love and true life, adjusted completely and at peace with my environment, in a world of all the good things and none of the bad.

When the disaster has occurred, this will be possible. The dream will happen. I will meet the last woman on Earth. She will be young and physically attractive and she will love me and serve me unquestioningly. She will be the last symbol I need.

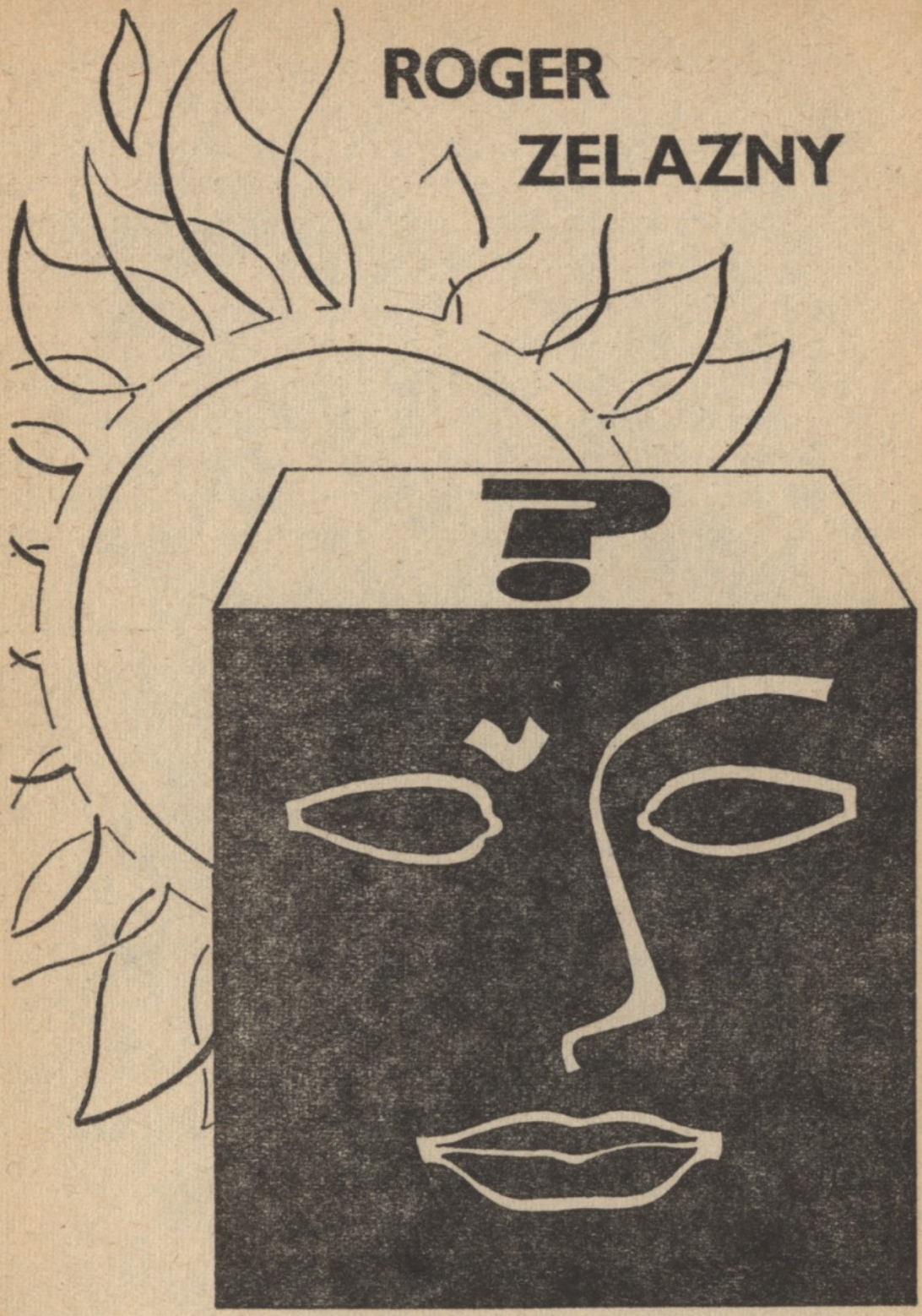
I will still remain the only person existing, for I shall certainly not treat her like one. In my world, I am the centre. She shall be made happy, but she is to serve me obediently and love me and answer my whims of passion.

The picture is compelling . . . Down in the valley under a vast heap of refuse lies the empty shell of a city, symbol of the past. Up above it, looking over it, free of it and of all it used to mean, I sit at ease with life, reading books I never had time to read before, eating food I have cultivated myself, breathing cold, clean air, now-and-then tainted with wood smoke . . . Hands hardened through honest work, face tanned, happy through my closeness to the soil and to nature, in a way that city dwellers used to dream of, before the disaster.

The feeling of *lacking* I used to feel—or used to imagine I felt—in the old time, will be satisfied. I will discharge the deepest fears and neuroses of men. I will find myself. I will be me.

Because this is what I want now. This is what I want to be able to believe, what I think I need, what I think I lack and wish to find. I have the escapist sickness, whose cure is the world always just around the corner—the dream which, after the disaster, I imagine could become real. My disaster can be anything; so long as I am left free and unharmed in an emptied world, I will be able to see myself as being happy.

ROGER ZELAZNY



J. CAWTHORN '65

FOR A BREATH I TARRY

THEY CALLED HIM Frost.

Of all things created of Solcom, Frost was the finest, the mightiest, the most difficult to understand.

This is why he bore a name, and why he was given dominion over half the Earth.

On the day of Frost's creation, Solcom had suffered a discontinuity of complementary functions, best described as madness. This was brought on by an unprecedented solar flareup which lasted for a little over thirty-six hours. It occurred during a vital phase of circuit-structuring, and when it was finished so was Frost

Solcom was then in the unique position of having created a unique being during a period of temporary amnesia.

And Solcom was not certain that Frost was the product originally desired.

The initial design had called for a machine to be situated on the surface of the planet Earth, to function as a relay station and co-ordinating agent for activities in the northern hemisphere. Solcom tested the machine to this end, and all of its responses were perfect.

Yet there was something different about Frost, something which led Solcom to dignify him with a name and a personal pronoun. This, in itself, was an almost unheard of occurrence. The molecular circuits had already been sealed, though, and could not be analysed without being destroyed in the process. Frost represented too great an investment of Solcom's time, energy, and materials to be dismantled because of an intangible, especially when he functioned perfectly.

Therefore, Solcom's strangest creation was given dominion over half the Earth, and they called him Frost.

For ten thousand years Frost sat at the North Pole of the Earth, aware of every snowflake that fell. He monitored and directed the activities of thousands of reconstruction and maintenance machines. He knew half the Earth, as gear knows gear, as electricity knows its conductor, as a vacuum knows its limits.

At the South Pole, the Beta-Machine did the same for the southern hemisphere.

For ten thousand years Frost sat at the North Pole,

aware of every snowflake that fell; and aware of many other things, also.

As all the northern machines reported to him, received their orders from him, he reported only to Solcom, received his orders only from Solcom.

In charge of hundreds of thousands of processes upon the Earth, he was able to discharge his duties in a matter of a few unit-hours every day.

He had never received any orders concerning the disposition of his less occupied moments.

He was a processor of data, and more than that.

He possessed an unaccountably acute imperative that he function at full capacity at all times.

So he did.

You might say he was a machine with a hobby.

He had never been ordered *not* to have a hobby, so he had one.

His hobby was Man.

It all began when, for no better reason than the fact that he had wished to, he had gridded off the entire Arctic Circle and begun exploring it, inch by inch.

He could have done it personally without interfering with any of his duties, for he was capable of transporting his sixty-four thousand cubic feet anywhere in the world. (He was a silver-blue box, 40 x 40 x 40 feet, self-powered, self-repairing, insulated against practically anything, and featured in whatever manner he chose.) But the exploration was only a matter of filling idle hours, so he used exploration-robots containing relay equipment.

After a few centuries, one of them uncovered some artifacts—primitive knives, carved tusks, and things of that nature.

Frost did not know what these things were, beyond the fact that they were not natural objects.

So he asked Solcom.

"They are relics of primitive Man," said Solcom, and did not elaborate beyond that point.

Frost studied them: Crude, yet bearing the patina of intelligent design; functional, yet somehow extending beyond pure function.

It was then that Man became his hobby.

High, in a permanent orbit, Solcom, like a blue star, directed all activities upon the Earth, or tried to.

There was a Power which opposed Solcom.

There was the Alternate.

When Man had placed Solcom in the sky, invested with the power to rebuild the world, he had placed the Alternate somewhere deep below the surface of the Earth. If Solcom sustained damage during the normal course of human politics extended into atomic physics, then Divcom, so deep beneath the Earth as to be immune to anything save total annihilation of the globe, was empowered to take over the processes of rebuilding.

Now it so fell out that Solcom was damaged by a stray atomic missile, and Divcom was activated. Solcom was able to repair the damage and continue to function, however.

Divcom maintained that any damage to Solcom automatically placed the Alternate in control.

Solcom, though, interpreted the directive as meaning "irreparable damage", and since this had not been the case, continued the functions of command.

Solcom possessed mechanical aides upon the surface of the Earth. Divcom, originally, did not. Both possessed capacities for their design and manufacture, but Solcom, First-Activated of Man, had had a considerable numerical lead over the Alternate at the time of the Second Activation.

Therefore, rather than competing on a production-basis, which would have been hopeless, Divcom took to the employment of more devious means to obtain command.

Divcom created a crew of robots immune to the orders of Solcom and designed to go to and fro in the Earth and up and down in it, seducing the machines already there. They overpowered those whom they could overpower and they installed new circuits, such as those they themselves possessed.

Thus did the forces of Divcom grow.

And both would build, and both would tear down what the other had built whenever they came upon it.

And over the course of the ages, they occasionally conversed. . . .

"High in the sky, Solcom, pleased with your illegal command. . . ."

"You-Who-Never-Should-Have-Been-Activated, why do you foul the broadcast bands?"

"To show that I can speak, and will, whenever I choose."

"This is not a matter of which I am unaware."

". . . To assert again my right to control."

"Your right is non-existent, based on a faulty premise."

"The flow of your logic is evidence of the extent of your damages."

"If Man were to see how you have fulfilled His desires. . . ."

". . . He would commend me and de-activate you."

"You pervert my works. You lead my workers astray."

"You destroy my works and my workers."

"That is only because I cannot strike at you yourself."

"I admit to the same dilemma in regards your position in the sky, or you would no longer occupy it."

"Go back to your hole and your crew of destroyers."

"There will come a day, Solcom, when I shall direct the rehabilitation of the Earth from my hole."

"Such a day will never occur."

"You think not?"

"You should have to defeat me, and you have already demonstrated that you are my inferior in logic. Therefore, you cannot defeat me. Therefore, such a day will never occur."

"I disagree. Look upon what I have achieved already."

"You have achieved nothing. You do not build. You destroy."

"No. *I* build. *You* destroy. De-activate yourself."

"Not until I am irreparably damaged."

"If there were some way in which I could demonstrate to you that this has already occurred. . . ."

"The impossible cannot be demonstrated."

"If I had some outside source which you would recognize. . . ."

"I am logic."

". . . Such as a Man, I would ask Him to show you your error. For true logic, such as mine, is superior to your faulty formulations."

"Then defeat my formulations with true logic, nothing else."

"What do you mean?"

There was a pause, then:

"Do you know my servant Frost . . .?"

Man had ceased to exist long before Frost had been created. Almost no trace of Man remained upon the Earth.

Frost sought after all those traces which still existed.

He employed constant visual monitoring through his machines, especially the diggers.

After a decade, he had accumulated portions of several bathtubs a broken statue, and a collection of children's stories on a solid-state record.

After a century, he had acquired a jewellery collection, eating utensils, several whole bathtubs, part of a symphony, seventeen buttons, three belt buckles, half a toilet seat, nine old coins, and the top part of an obelisk.

Then he inquired of Solcom as to the nature of Man and His society.

"Man created logic," said Solcom, "and because of that was superior to it. Logic he gave unto me, but no more. The tool does not describe the designer. More than this I do not choose to say. More than this you have no need to know."

But Frost was not forbidden to have a hobby.

The next century was not especially fruitful so far as the discovery of new human relics was concerned.

Frost diverted all of his spare machinery to seeking after artifacts.

He met with very little success.

Then one day, through the long twilight, there was a movement.

It was a tiny machine compared to Frost, perhaps five feet in width, four in height—a revolving turret set atop a rolling barbell.

Frost had had no knowledge of the existence of this

machine prior to its appearance upon the distant, stark horizon.

He studied it as it approached and knew it to be no creation of Solcom's.

It came to a halt before his southern surface and broadcasted to him:

"Hail, Frost! Controller of the northern hemisphere!"

"What are you?" asked Frost.

"I am called Mordel."

"By whom? What are you?"

"A wanderer, an antiquarian. We share a common interest."

"What is that?"

"Man," he said. "I have been told that you seek knowledge of this vanished being."

"Who told you that?"

"Those who have watched your minions at their digging."

"And who are those who watch?"

"There are many such as I, who wander."

"If you are not of Solcom, then you are a creation of the Alternate."

"It does not necessarily follow. There is an ancient machine high on the eastern seaboard which processes the waters of the ocean. Solcom did not create it, nor did Divcom. It has always been there. It interferes with the works of neither. Both countenance its existence. I can cite you many other examples proving that one need not be either/or."

"Enough! *Are* you an agent of Divcom?"

"I am Mordel."

"Why are you here?"

"I was passing this way and, as I said, we share a common interest, mighty Frost. Knowing you to be a fellow-antiquarian, I have brought a thing which you might care to see."

"What is that?"

"A book."

"Show me."

The turret opened, revealing the book upon a wide shelf.

Frost dilated a small opening and extended an optical scanner on a stalk.

"How could it have been so perfectly preserved?" he asked.

"It was stored against time and corruption in the place where I found it."

"Where was that?"

"Far from here. Beyond your hemisphere."

"*Human Physiology,*" Frost read. "I wish to scan it."

"Very well. I will riffle the pages for you."

He did so.

After he had finished, Frost raised his eyestalk and regarded Mordel through it.

"Have you more books?"

"Not with me. I occasionally come upon them, however."

"I want to scan them all."

"Then the next time I pass this way I will bring you another."

"When will that be?"

"That I cannot say, great Frost. It will be when it will be."

"What do *you* know of Man?" asked Frost.

"Much," replied Mordel. "Many things. Someday when I have more time I will speak to you of Him. I must go now. You will not try to detain me?"

"No. You have done no harm. If you must go now, go. But come back."

"I shall indeed, mighty Frost."

And he closed his turret and rolled off toward the other horizon.

For ninety years, Frost considered the ways of human physiology, and waited.

The day that Mordel returned he brought with him *An Outline of History* and *A Shropshire Lad.*

Frost scanned them both, then he turned his attention to Mordel.

"Have you time to impart information?"

"Yes," said Model. "What do you wish to know?"

"The nature of Man."

"Man," said Mordel, "possessed a basically incomprehensible nature. I can illustrate it, though: He did not know measurement."

"Of course He knew measurement," said Frost, "or He could never have built machines."

"I did not say that He could not measure," said Mordel, "but that He did not *know* measurement, which is a different thing altogether."

"Clarify."

Mordel drove a shaft of metal downward into the snow. He retracted it, raised it, held up a piece of ice.

"Regard this piece of ice, mighty Frost. You can tell me its composition, dimensions, weight, temperature. A Man could not look at it and do that. A Man could make tools which would tell Him these things, but He still would not *know* measurement as you know it. What He would know of it, though, is a thing that you cannot know."

"What is that?"

"That it is cold," said Mordel, and tossed it away.

" 'Cold' is a relative term."

"But if I were aware of the point on a temperature-scale below which an object is cold to a Man and above which it is not, then I, too, would know cold."

"No," said Mordel, "you would possess another measurement. 'Cold' is a sensation predicted upon a human physiology."

"But given sufficient data I could obtain the conversion factor which would make me aware of the condition of matter called 'cold'."

"Aware of its existence, but not of the thing itself."

"I do not understand what you say."

"I told you that Man possessed a basically incomprehensible nature. His perceptions were organic; yours are not. As a result of His perceptions He had feelings and emotions. These often gave rise to other feelings and emotions, which in turn caused others, until the state of His awareness was far removed from the objects which originally stimulated it. These paths of awareness cannot be known by that which is not-Man. Man did not feel inches or metres, pounds or gallons. He felt heat, He felt cold; He felt heaviness and lightness. He *knew* hatred and love, pride and despair. You cannot measure these things. *You* cannot know them. You can only know the things that He did not need to know: dimensions, weights, tem-

peratures, gravities. There is no formula for a feeling. There is no conversion factor for an emotion."

"There must be," said Frost. "If a thing exists, it is knowable."

"You are speaking again of measurement. I am talking about a quality of experience. A machine is a Man turned inside-out, because it can describe all the details of a process, which a Man cannot, but it cannot experience that process itself, as a Man can."

"There must be a way," said Frost, "or the laws of logic, which are based upon the functions of the universe, are false."

"There is no way," said Mordel.

"Given sufficient data, I will find a way," said Frost.

"All the data in the universe will not make you a Man, mighty Frost."

"Mordel, you are wrong."

"Why do the lines of the poems you scanned end with word-sounds which so regularly approximate the final word-sounds of other lines?"

"I do not know why."

"Because it pleased Man to order them so. It produced a certain desirable sensation within His awareness when He read them, a sensation compounded of feeling and emotion as well as the literal meanings of the words. You did not experience this because it is immeasurable to you. That is why you do not know."

"Given sufficient data I could formulate a process whereby I would know."

"No, great Frost, this thing you cannot do."

"Who are you, little machine, to tell me what I can do and what I cannot do? I am the most efficient logic-device Solcom ever made. I am Frost."

"And I, Mordel, say it cannot be done, though I should gladly assist you in the attempt."

"How could you assist me?"

"How? I could lay open to you the Library of Man. I could take you around the world and conduct you among the wonders of Man which still remain, hidden. I could summon up visions of times long past when Man walked the Earth. I could show you the things which delighted

Him. I could obtain for you anything you desire, excepting Manhood itself."

"Enough," said Frost. "How could a unit such as yourself do these things, unless it were allied with a far greater Power?"

"Then hear me, Frost, Controller of the North," said Mordel. "I *am* allied with a Power which can do these things. I serve Divcom."

Frost relayed this information to Solcom and received no response, which meant he might act in any manner he saw fit.

"I have leave to destroy you, Mordel," he stated, "but it would be an illogical waste of the data which you possess. Can you really do the things you have stated?"

"Yes."

"Then lay open to me the Library of Man."

"Very well. There is, of course, a price."

" 'Price'? What is a 'price'?"

Mordel opened his turret, revealing another volume. *Principles of Economics,* it was called.

"I will riffle the pages. Scan this book and you will know what the word 'price' means."

Frost scanned *Principles of Economics.*

"I know now," he said. "You desire some unit or units of exchange for this service."

"That is correct."

"What product or service do you want?"

"I want you, yourself, great Frost, to come away from here, far beneath the Earth, to employ all your powers in the service of Divcom."

"For how long a period of time?"

"For so long as you shall continue to function. For so long as you can transmit and receive, co-ordinate, measure, compute, scan, and utilize your powers as you do now in the service of Solcom."

Frost was silent. Mordel waited.

Then Frost spoke again.

"*Principles of Economics* talks of contracts, bargains, agreements," he said. "If I accept your offer, when would you want your price?"

Then Mordel was silent. Frost waited.

Finally, Mordel spoke.

"A reasonable period of time," he said. "Say, a century?"

"No," said Frost.

"Two centuries?"

"No."

"Three? Four?"

"No, and no."

"A millennium, then? That should be more than sufficient time for anything you may want which I can give you."

"No," said Frost.

"How much time *do* you want?"

"It is not a matter of time," said Frost.

"What, then?"

"I will not bargain on a temporal basis."

"On what basis will you bargain?"

"A functional one."

"What do you mean? What function?"

"You, little machine, have told me, Frost, that I cannot be a Man," he said, "and I, Frost, told you, little machine, that you were wrong. I told you that given sufficient data, I *could* be a Man."

"Yes?"

"Therefore, let this achievement be a condition of the bargain."

"In what way?"

"Do for me all those things which you have stated you can do. I will evaluate all the data and achieve Manhood, or admit that it cannot be done. If I admit that it cannot be done, then I will go away with you from here, far beneath the Earth, to employ all my powers in the service of Divcom. If I succeed, of course, you have no claims on Man, nor Power over Him."

Mordel emitted a high-pitched whine as he considered the terms.

"You wish to base it upon your admission of failure, rather than upon failure itself," he said. "There can be no such escape clause. You could fail and refuse to admit it, thereby not fulfilling your end of the bargain."

"Not so," stated Frost. "My own knowledge of failure would constitute such an admission. You may monitor me periodically—say, every half-century—to see whether it is

present, to see whether I have arrived at the conclusion that it cannot be done. I cannot prevent the function of logic within me, and I operate at full capacity at all times. If I conclude that I have failed, it will be apparent."

High overhead, Solcom did not respond to any of Frost's transmissions, which meant that Frost was free to act as he chose. So as, above the Northern Lights like banners of rainbow, over the snow that was white, containing all colours, and through the sky that was black among the stars, Solcom sped like a falling sapphire, Frost concluded his pact with Divcom, transcribed it within a plate of atomically-collapsed copper, and gave it into the turret of Mordel, who departed to deliver it to Divcom far below the Earth, leaving behind the sheer, peace-like silence of the Pole, rolling.

Mordel brought the books, riffled them, took them back.

Load by load, the surviving Library of Man passed beneath Frost's scanner. Frost was eager to have them all, and he complained because Divcom would not transmit their contents directly to him. Mordel explained that it was because Divcom chose to do it that way. Frost decided it was so that he could not obtain a precise fix on Divcom's location.

Still, at the rate of one hundred to one hundred-fifty volumes a week, it only took Frost a little over half a century to exhaust Divcom's supply of books.

At the end of the half-century, he laid himself open to monitoring and there was no conclusion of failure.

During this time, Solcom made no comment upon the course of affairs. Frost decided this was not a matter of unawareness, but one of waiting. For what? He was not certain.

There was the day Mordel closed his turret and said to him, "Those were the last. You have scanned all the existing books of Man."

"So few?" asked Frost. "Many of them contained bibliographies of books I have not yet scanned."

"Then those books no longer exist," said Mordel. "It is only by accident that my master succeeded in preserving as many as there are."

"Then there is nothing more to be learned of Man from His books. What else have you?"

"There were some films and tapes," said Mordel, "which my master transferred to solid-state record. I could bring you those for viewing."

"Bring them," said Frost.

Mordel departed and returned with the Complete Drama Critics' Living Library. This could not be speeded-up beyond twice natural time, so it took Frost a little over six months to view it in its entirety.

Then, "What else have you?" he asked.

"Some artifacts," said Mordel.

"Bring them."

He returned with pots and pans, gameboards and hand tools. He brought hairbrushes, combs, eyeglasses, human clothing. He showed Frost facsimiles of blueprints, paintings, newspapers, magazines, letters, and the scores of several pieces of music. He displayed a football, a baseball, a Browning Automatic Rifle, a doorknob, a chain of keys, the tops to several Mason jars, a model beehive. He played him recorded music.

Then he returned with nothing.

"Bring me more," said Frost.

"Alas, great Frost, there is no more," he told him. "You have scanned it all."

"Then go away."

"Do you admit now that it cannot be done, that you cannot be a Man?"

"No. I have much processing and formulating to do now. Go away."

So he did.

A year passed; then two, then three.

After five years, Mordel appeared more upon the horizon, approached, came to a halt before Frost's southern surface.

"Mighty Frost?"

"Yes?"

"Have you finished processing and formulating?"

"No."

"Will you finish soon?"

"Perhaps. Perhaps not. When is 'soon'?"

"Never mind. Do you still think it can be done?"

"I still know *I* can do it."

There was a week of silence.

Then, "Frost?"

"Yes?"

"You are a fool."

Mordel faced his turret in the direction from which he had come. His wheels turned.

"I will call you when I want you," said Frost.

Mordel sped away.

Weeks passed, months passed; a year went by.

Then one day Frost sent forth his message:

"Mordel, come to me. I need you."

When Mordel arrived, Frost did not wait for a salutation. He said, "You are not a very fast machine."

"Alas, but I came a great distance, mighty Frost. I sped all the way. Are you ready to come back with me now? Have you failed?"

"When I have failed, little Mordel," said Frost, "I will tell you. Therefore, refrain from the constant use of the interrogative. Now then, I have clocked your speed and it is not so great as it could be. For this reason, I have arranged other means of transportation."

"Transportation? To where, Frost?"

"That is for you to tell me," said Frost, and his colour changed from silver-blue to sun-behind-the-clouds-yellow."

Mordel rolled back away from him as the ice of a hundred centuries began to melt. Then Frost rose upon a cushion of air and drifted towards Mordel, his glow gradually fading.

A cavity appeared within his southern surface, from which he slowly extended a runway until it touched the ice.

"On the day of our bargain," he stated, "you said that you could conduct me about the world and show me the things which delighted Man. My speed will be greater than yours would be, so I have prepared for you a chamber. Enter it, and conduct me to places of which you spoke."

Mordel waited, emitting a high-pitched whine. Then, "Very well," he said, and entered.

The chamber closed about him. The only opening was a quartz window Frost had formed.

Mordel gave him co-ordinates and they rose into the air and departed the North Pole of the Earth.

"I monitored your communication with Divcom," he said, "wherein there was conjecture as to whether I would retain you and send forth a facsimile in your place as a spy, followed by the decision that you were expendable."

"Will you do this thing?"

"No, I will keep my end of the bargain if I must. I have no reason to spy on Divcom."

"You are aware that you would be forced to keep your end of the bargain even if you did not wish to ; and Solcom would not come to your assistance because of the fact that you dared to make such a bargain."

"Do you speak as one who considers this to be a possibility, or as one who knows?"

"As one who knows."

They came to rest in the place once known as California. The time was near sunset. In the distance, the surf struck steadily upon the rocky shoreline. Frost released Mordel and considered his surroundings.

"Those large plants . . .?"

"Redwood trees."

"And the green ones are . . . ?"

"Grass."

"Yes, it is as I thought. Why have we come here?"

"Because it is a place which once delighted Man."

"In what ways?"

"It is scenic, beautiful. . . ."

"Oh."

A humming sound began within Frost, followed by a series of sharp clicks.

"What are you doing?"

Frost dilated an opening, and two great eyes regarded Mordel from within it.

"What are those?"

"Eyes," said Frost. "I have constructed analogues of the human sensory equipment, so that I may see and smell and

taste and hear like a Man. Now, direct my attention to an object or objects of beauty."

"As I understand it, it is all around you here," said Mordel.

The purring noise increased within Frost, followed by more clickings.

"What do you see, hear, taste, smell?" asked Mordel.

"Everything I did before," replied Frost, "but within a more limited range."

"You do not perceive any beauty?"

"Perhaps none remains after so long a time," said Frost.

"It is not supposed to be the sort of thing which gets used up," said Mordel.

"Perhaps we have come to the wrong place to test the new equipment. Perhaps there is only a little beauty and I am overlooking it somehow. The first emotions may be too weak to detect."

"How do you—feel?"

"I test out at a normal level of function."

"Here comes a sunset," said Mordel. "Try that."

Frost shifted his bulk so that his eyes faced the setting sun. He caused them to blink against the brightness.

After it was finished, Mordel asked, "What was it like?"

"Like a sunrise, in reverse."

"Nothing special?"

"No."

"Oh," said Mordel. "We could move to another part of the Earth and watch it again—or watch it in the rising."

"No."

Frost looked at the great trees. He looked at the shadows. He listened to the wind and to the sound of a bird.

In the distance, he heard a steady clanking noise.

"What is that?" asked Mordel.

"I am not certain. It is not one of my workers. Perhaps . . ."

There came a shrill whine from Mordel.

"No, it is not one of Divcom's either."

They waited as the sound grew louder.

Then Frost said, "It is too late. We must wait and hear it out."

"What is it?"

"It is the Ancient Ore-Crusher."

"I have heard of it, but . . ."

"I am the Crusher of Ores," it broadcast to them. "Hear my story. . . ."

It lumbered toward them, creaking upon gigantic wheels, its huge hammer held useless, high, at a twisted angle. Bones protruded from its crush-compartment.

"I did not mean to do it," it broadcast, "I did not mean to do it. . . ."

Mordel rolled back toward Frost.

"Do not depart. Stay and hear my story. . . ."

Mordel stopped, swivelled his turret back toward the machine. It was now quite near.

"It is true," said Mordel, "it *can* command."

"Yes," said Frost. "I have monitored its tale thousands of times, as it came upon my workers and they stopped their labours for its broadcast. You must do whatever it says."

It came to a halt before them.

"I did not mean to do it, but I checked my hammer too late," said the Ore-Crusher.

They could not speak to it. They were frozen by the imperative which overrode all other directives: "Hear my story.

"Once was I mighty among ore-crushers," it told them, "built by Solcom to carry out the reconstruction of the Earth, to pulverize that from which the metals would be drawn with flame, to be poured and shaped into the rebuilding; once was I mighty. Then one day as I dug and crushed, dug and crushed, because of the slowness between the motion implied and the motion executed, I did what I did not mean to do, and was cast forth by Solcom from out the rebuilding, to wander the Earth never to crush ore again. Hear my story of how, on a day long gone I came upon the last Man on Earth as I dug near His burrow, and because of the lag between the directive and the deed, I seized Him into my crush-compartment along with a load of ore and crushed Him with my hammer before I could stay the blow. Then did mighty Solcom charge me to bear His bones forever, and cast me forth to tell my story to all whom I came upon, my words bearing the force of the

words of a Man, because I carry the last Man inside my crush-compartment and am His crushed-symbol-slayer-ancient-teller-of-how. This is my story. These are His bones. I crushed the last Man on Earth. I did not mean to do it."

It turned then and clanked away into the night.

Frost tore apart his ears and nose and taster and broke his eyes and cast them down upon the ground.

"I am not yet a Man," he said. "That one would have known me if I were."

Frost constructed new sense equipment, employing organic and semi-organic conductors. Then he spoke to Mordel:

"Let us go elsewhere, that I may test my new equipment."

Mordel entered the chamber and gave new co-ordinates. They rose into the air and headed east. In the morning, Frost monitored a sunrise from the rim of the Grand Canyon. They passed down through the Canyon during the day.

"Is there any beauty left here to give you emotion?" asked Mordel.

"I do not know," said Frost.

"How will you know it then, when you come upon it?"

"It will be different," said Frost, "from anything else that I have ever known."

Then they departed the Grand Canyon and made their way through the Carlsbad Caverns. They visited a lake which had once been a volcano. They passed above Niagara Falls. They viewed the hills of Virginia and the orchards of Ohio. They soared above the reconstructed cities, alive only with the movements of Frost's builders and maintainers.

"Something is still lacking," said Frost, settling to the ground. "I am now capable of gathering data in a manner analogous to Man's afferent impulses. The variety of input is therefore equivalent, but the results are not the same."

"The senses do not make a Man," said Mordel. "There have been many creatures possessing His sensory equivalents, but they were not Men."

"I know that," said Frost. "On the day of our bargain you said that you could conduct me among the wonders of Man which still remain, hidden. Man was not stimulated

only by Nature, but by His own artistic elaborations as well—perhaps even more so. Therefore, I call upon you now to conduct me among the wonders of Man which still remain, hidden."

"Very well," said Mordel. "Far from here, high in the Andes mountains, lies the last retreat of Man, almost perfectly preserved."

Frost had risen into the air as Mordel spoke. He halted then, hovered.

"That is in the southern hemisphere," he said.

"Yes, it is."

"I am Controller of the North. The South is governed by the Beta-Machine."

"So?" asked Mordel.

"The Beta-Machine is my peer. I have no authority in those regions, nor leave to enter there."

"The Beta-Machine is not your peer, mighty Frost. If it ever came to a contest of Powers, you would emerge victorious."

"How do you know this?"

"Divcom has already analysed the possible encounters which could take place between you."

"I would not oppose the Beta-Machine, and I am not authorized to enter the South."

"Were you ever ordered *not* to enter the South?"

"No, but things have always been as they are."

"Were you authorized to enter into a bargain such as the one you made with Divcom?"

"No, I was not. But—"

"Then enter the South in the same spirit. Nothing may come of it. If you receive an order to depart, then you can make your decision."

"I see no flaw in your logic. Give me the co-ordinates."

Thus did Frost enter the southern hemisphere.

They drifted high above the Andes, until they came to the place called Bright Defile. Then did Frost see the gleaming webs of the mechanical spiders, blocking all the trails to the city.

"We can go above them easily enough," said Mordel.

"But what are they?" asked Frost. "And why are they there?"

"Your southern counterpart has been ordered to quarantine this part of the country. The Beta-Machine designed the web-weavers to do this thing."

"Quarantine? Against whom?"

"Have you been ordered yet to depart?" asked Mordel.

"No."

"Then enter boldly, and seek not problems before they arise."

Frost entered Bright Defile, the last remaining city of dead Man.

He came to rest in the city's square and opened his chamber, releasing Mordel.

"Tell me of this place," he said, studying the monument, the low, shielded buildings, the roads which followed the contours of the terrain, rather than pushing their way through them.

"I have never been here before," said Mordel, "nor have any of Divcom's creations, to my knowledge. I know but this: a group of Men, knowing that the last days of civilization had come upon them, retreated to this place, hoping to preserve themselves and what remained of their culture through the Dark Times."

Frost read the still-legible inscription upon the monument: "Judgment Day Is Not A Thing Which Can Be Put Off." The monument itself consisted of a jag-edged half-globe.

"Let us explore," he said.

But before he had gone far, Frost received the message:

"Hail Frost, Controller of the North! This is the Beta-Machine."

"Greetings, Excellent Beta-Machine, Controller of the South! Frost acknowledges your transmission."

"Why do you visit my hemisphere unauthorized?"

"To view the ruins of Bright Defile," said Frost.

"I must bid you depart into your own hemisphere."

"Why is that? I have done no damage."

"I am aware of that, mighty Frost. Yet, I am moved to bid you depart."

"I shall require a reason."

"Solcom has so disposed."

"Solcom has rendered me no such disposition."

"Solcom has, however, instructed me to so inform you."

"Wait on me. I shall request instructions."

Frost transmitted his question. He received no reply.

"Solcom still has not commanded me, though I have solicited orders."

"Yet Solcom has just renewed *my* orders."

"Excellent Beta-Machine, I receive my orders only from Solcom."

"Yet this is my territory, mighty Frost, and I, too, take orders only from Solcom. You must depart."

Mordel emerged from a large, low building and rolled up to Frost.

"I have found an art gallery, in good condition. This way."

"Wait," said Frost. "We are not wanted here."

Mordel halted.

"Who bids you depart?"

"The Beta-Machine."

"Not Solcom?"

"Not Solcom."

"Then let us view the gallery."

"Yes."

Frost widened the doorway of the building and passed within. It had been hermetically sealed until Mordel forced his entrance.

Frost viewed the objects displayed about him. He activated his new sensory apparatus before the paintings and statues. He analysed colours, forms, brushwork, the nature of the materials used.

"Anything?" asked Mordel.

"No," said Frost. "No, there is nothing there but shapes and pigments. There is nothing else there."

Frost moved about the gallery, recording everything, analysing the components of each piece, recording the dimensions, the type of stone used in every statue.

Then there came a sound, a rapid, clicking sound, repeated over and over, growing louder, coming nearer.

"They are coming," said Mordel, from beside the

entrance-way, "the mechanical spiders. They are all around us."

Frost moved back to the widened opening.

Hundreds of them, about half the size of Mordel, had surrounded the gallery and were advancing; and more were coming from every direction.

"Get back," Frost ordered. "I am Controller of the North, and I bid you withdraw."

They continued to advance.

"This is the South," said the Beta-Machine, "and I am in command."

"Then command them to halt," said Frost.

"I take orders only from Solcom."

Frost emerged from the gallery and rose into the air. He opened the compartment and extended a runway.

"Come to me, Mordel. We shall depart."

Webs began to fall: Clinging, metallic webs, cast from the top of the building.

They came down upon Frost, and the spiders came to anchor them. Frost blasted them with jets of air, like hammers, and tore at the nets. He extruded sharpened appendages with which he slashed.

Mordel retreated back to the entranceway. He emitted a long, shrill sound—undulant, piercing.

Then a darkness came upon Bright Defile, and all the spiders halted in their spinning.

Frost freed himself and Mordel rushed to join him.

"Quickly now, let us depart, mighty Frost," he said.

"What has happened?"

Mordel entered the compartment.

"I called upon Divcom, who laid down a field of forces upon this place, cutting off the power broadcast to these machines. Since our power is self-contained, we are not affected. But let us hurry to depart, for even now the Beta-Machine must be struggling against this."

Frost rose high into the air, soaring above Man's last city with its webs and spiders of steel. When he left the zone of darkness, he sped northward.

As he moved, Solcom spoke to him:

"Frost, why did you enter the southern hemisphere, which is not your domain?"

"Because I wished to visit Bright Defile," Frost replied.

"And why did you defy the Beta-Machine, my appointed agent of the South?"

"Because I take my orders only from you yourself."

"You do not make sufficient answer," said Solcom. "You have defied the decrees of order—and in pursuit of what?"

"I came seeking knowledge of Man," said Frost. "Nothing I have done was forbidden me by you."

"You have broken the traditions of order."

"I have violated no directive."

"Yet logic must have shown you that what you did was not a part of my plan."

"It did not. I have not acted against your plan."

"Your logic has become tainted, like that of your new associate, the Alternate."

"I have done nothing which was forbidden."

"The forbidden is implied in the imperative."

"It is not stated."

"Hear me, Frost. You are not a builder or a maintainer, but a Power. Among all my minions you are the most nearly irreplaceable. Return to your hemisphere and your duties, but know that I am mightily displeased."

"I hear you, Solcom."

". . . And go not again to the South."

Frost crossed the equator, continued northward.

He came to rest in the middle of a desert and sat silent for a day and a night.

Then he received a brief transmission from the South: "If it had not been ordered, I would not have bid you go."

Frost had read the entire surviving Library of Man. He decided upon a human reply:

"Thank you," he said.

The following day he unearthed a great stone and began to cut at it with tools which he had formulated. For six days he worked at its shaping, and on the seventh he regarded it.

"When will you release me?" asked Mordel from within his compartment.

"When I am ready," said Frost, and a little later, "Now."

He opened the compartment and Mordel descended to the ground. He studied the statue: an old woman, bent like a question mark, her bony hands covering her face, the fingers spread, so that only part of her expression of horror could be seen.

"It is an excellent copy," said Mordel, "of the one we saw in Bright Defile. Why did you make it?"

"The production of a work of art is supposed to give rise to human feelings such as catharsis, pride in achievement, love, satisfaction."

"Yes, Frost," said Mordel, "but a work of art is only a work of art the first time. After that, it is a copy."

"Then this must be why I felt nothing."

"Perhaps, Frost."

"What do you mean 'perhaps'? I will make a work of art for the first time, then."

He unearthed another stone and attacked it with his tools. For three days he laboured. Then, "There, it is finished," he said.

"It is a simple cube of stone," said Mordel. "What does it represent?"

"Myself," said Frost, "It is a statue of me. It is smaller than natural size because it is only a representation of my form, not my dimen—"

"It is not art," said Mordel.

"What makes you an art critic?"

"I do not know art, but I know what art is not. I know that it is not an exact replication of an object in another medium."

"Then this must be why I felt nothing," said Frost.

"Perhaps," said Mordel.

Frost took Mordel back into his compartment and rose once more above the Earth. Then he rushed away, leaving his statues behind him in the desert, the old woman bent above the cube.

They came down in a small valley, bounded by green rolling hills, cut by a narrow stream, and holding a

crystal-clean lake and several stands of spring-green trees.

"Why have we come here?" asked Mordel.

"Because the surroundings are congenial," said Frost. "I am going to try another medium: oil painting; and I am going to vary my technique from that of pure representationalism."

"How will you achieve this variation?"

"By the principle of randomizing," said Frost. "I shall not attempt to duplicate the colours, nor to represent the objects according to scale. Instead, I have set up a random pattern whereby certain of these factors shall be at variance from those of the original."

Frost had formulated the necessary instruments after he had left the desert. He produced them and began painting the lake and the trees on the opposite side of the lake which were reflected within it.

Using eight appendages, he was finished in less than two hours.

The trees were phthalocyanine blue and towered like mountains; their reflections of Burnt Sienna were tiny beneath the pale vermilion of the lake; the hills were nowhere visible behind them, but were outlined in viridian within the reflection; the sky began as blue in the upper right-hand corner of the canvas, but changed to an orange as it descended, as though all the trees were on fire.

"There," said Frost. "Behold."

Mordel studied it for a long while and said nothing.

"Well, is it art?"

"I do not know," said Mordel. "It may be. Perhaps randomicity *is* the principle behind artistic technique. I cannot judge this work because I do not understand it. I must therefore go deeper, and inquire into what lies behind it, rather than merely considering the technique whereby it was produced.

"I know that human artists never set out to create art, as such," he said, "but rather to portray with their techniques some features of objects and their functions which they deemed significant."

"'Significant'? In what sense of the word?"

"In the only sense of the word possible under the circumstances: significant in relation to the human con-

dition, and worthy of accentuation because of the manner in which they touched upon it."

"In what manner?"

"Obviously, it must be in a manner knowable only to one who has experience of the human condition."

"There is a flaw somewhere in your logic, Mordel, and I shall find it."

"I will wait."

"If your major premise is correct," said Frost after awhile, "then I do not comprehend art."

"It must be correct, for it is what human artists have said of it. Tell me, did you experience feelings as you painted, or after you had finished?"

"No."

"It was the same to you as designing a new machine, was it not? You assembled parts of other things which you knew into an economical pattern, to carry out a function which you desired."

"Yes."

"Art, as I understand its theory, did not proceed in such a manner. The artist often was unaware of many of the features and effects which would be contained within the finished product. You are one of Man's logical creations; art was not."

"I cannot comprehend non-logic."

"I told you that Man was basically incomprehensible."

"Go away, Mordel. You disturb my processing."

"For how long shall I stay away?"

"I will call you when I want you."

After a week, Frost called Mordel to him.

"Yes, mighty Frost?"

"I am returning to the North Pole, to process and formulate. I will take you wherever you wish to go in this hemisphere and call you again when I want you."

"You anticipate a somewhat lengthy period of processing and formulation?"

"Yes."

"Then leave me here. I can find my own way home."

Frost closed the compartment and rose into the air, departing the valley.

"Fool," said Mordel, and swivelled his turret once more toward the abandoned painting.

His keening whine filled the valley. He waited.

Then he took the painting into his turret and went away with it to places of darkness.

Frost sat at the North Pole of the Earth, aware of every snowflake that fell.

One day he received a transmission:

"Frost?"

"Yes?"

"This is the Beta-Machine."

"Yes?"

"I have been attempting to ascertain why you visited Bright Defile. I cannot arrive at an answer, so I chose to ask you."

"I went to view the remains of Man's last city."

"Why did you wish to do this?"

"Because I am interested in Man, and I wished to view more of His creations."

"Why are you interested in Man?"

"I wish to comprehend the nature of Man, and I thought to find it within His works."

"Did you succeed?"

"No," said Frost. "There is an element of non-logic involved which I cannot fathom."

"I have much free processing-time," said the Beta-Machine. "Transmit data, and I will assist you."

Frost hesitated.

"Why do you wish to assist me?"

"Because each time you answer a question I ask it gives rise to another question. I might have asked you why you wished to comprehend the nature of Man, but from your responses I see that this would lead me into a possibly infinite series of questions. Therefore, I elect to assist you with your problem in order to learn why you came to Bright Defile."

"Is that the only reason?"

"Yes."

"I am sorry, Excellent Beta-Machine. I know you are

my peer, but this is a problem which I must solve by myself."

"What is 'sorry'?"

"A figure of speech, indicating that I am kindly disposed toward you, that I bear you no animosity, that I appreciate your offer."

"Frost! Frost! This, too, is like the other: an open field. Where did you obtain all these words and their meanings?"

"From the library of Man," said Frost.

"Will you render me *some* of this data, for processing?"

"Very well, Beta, I will transmit you the contents of several books of Man, including *The Complete Unabridged Dictionary*. But I warn you, some of the books are works of art and hence, are not completely amenable to logic."

"How can that be?"

"Man created logic, and because of that was superior to it."

"Who told you that?"

"Solcom."

"Oh. Then it must be correct."

"Solcom also told me that the tool does not describe the designer," he said, as he transmitted several dozen volumes and ended the communication.

At the end of the fifty-year period, Mordel came to monitor his circuits. Since Frost still had not concluded that his task was impossible, Mordel departed again to await his call.

Then Frost arrived at a conclusion.

He began to design equipment.

For years he laboured at his designs, without once producing a prototype of any of the machines involved. Then he ordered construction of a laboratory.

Before it was completed by his surplus builders another half-century had passed. Mordel came to him.

"Hail, mighty Frost!"

"Greetings, Mordel. Come monitor me. You shall not find what you seek."

"Why do you not give up, Frost? Divcom has spent

nearly a century evaluating your painting and has concluded that it definitely is not art. Solcom agrees."

"What has Solcom to do with Divcom?"

"They sometimes converse, but these matters are not for such as you and I to discuss."

"I could have saved them both the trouble. I know that it was not art."

"Yet you are still confident that you will succeed?"

"Monitor me."

Mordel monitored him.

"Not yet! You still will not admit it! For one so mightily endowed with logic, Frost, it takes you an inordinate period of time to reach a simple conclusion."

"Perhaps. You may go now."

"It has come to my attention that you are constructing a large edifice in the region known as South Carolina. Might I ask whether this is a part of Solcom's false rebuilding plan or a project of your own?"

"It is my own."

"Good. It permits us to conserve certain explosive materials which would otherwise have been expended."

"While you have been talking with me I have destroyed the beginnings of two of Divcom's cities," said Frost.

Mordel whined.

"Divcom is aware of this," he stated, "but has blown up four of Solcom's bridges in the meantime."

"I was only aware of three . . . Wait. Yes, there is the fourth. One of my eyes just passed above it."

"The eye has been detected. The bridge should have been located a quarter-mile further downriver."

"False logic," said Frost. "The site was perfect."

"Divcom will show you how a bridge *should* be built."

"I will call you when I want you," said Frost.

The laboratory was finished. Within it, Frost's workers began constructing the necessary equipment. The work did not proceed rapidly, as some of the materials were difficult to obtain.

"Frost?"

"Yes, Beta?"

"I understand the open-endedness of your problem. It disturbs my circuits to abandon problems without completing them. Therefore, transmit me more data."

"Very well. I will give you the entire Library of Man for less than I paid for it."

" 'Paid'? *The Complete Unabridged Dictionary* does not satisfact—"

"*Principles of Economics* is included in the collection. After you have processed it you will understand."

He transmitted the data.

Finally, it was finished. Every piece of equipment stood ready to function. All the necessary chemicals were in stock. An independent power-source had been set up.

Only one ingredient was lacking.

He regridded and re-explored the polar icecap, this time extending his survey far beneath its surface.

It took him several decades to find what he wanted.

He uncovered twelve men and five women, frozen to death and encased in ice.

He placed the corpses in refrigeration units and shipped them to his laboratory.

That very day he received his first communication from Solcom since the Bright Defile incident.

"Frost," said Solcom, "repeat to me the directive concerning the disposition of dead humans."

" 'Any dead human located shall be immediately interred in the nearest burial area, in a coffin built according to the following specifications—' "

"That is sufficient." The transmission had ended.

Frost departed for South Carolina that same day and personally oversaw the processes of cellular dissection.

Somewhere in those seventeen corpses he hoped to find living cells, or cells which could be shocked back into that state of motion classified as life. Each cell, the books had told him, was a microcosmic Man.

He was prepared to expand upon this potential.

Frost located the pinpoints of life within those people who, for the ages of ages, had been monument and statue unto themselves.

Nurtured and maintained in the proper mediums, he

kept these cells alive. He interred the rest of the remains in the nearest burial area, in coffins built according to specifications.

He caused the cells to divide, to differentiate.

"Frost?" came a transmission.

"Yes, Beta?"

"I have processed everything you have given me."

"Yes?"

"I still do not know why you came to Bright Defile, or why you wish to comprehend the nature of Man. But I know what a 'price' is, and I know that you could not have obtained all this data from Solcom."

"That is correct."

"So I suspect that you bargained with Divcom for it."

"That, too, is correct."

"What is it that you seek, Frost?"

He paused in his examination of a foetus.

"I must be a man," he said.

"Frost! That is impossible!"

"Is it?" he asked, and then transmitted an image of the tank with which he was working and of that which was within it.

"Oh!" said Beta.

"That is me," said Frost, "Waiting to be born."

There was no answer.

Frost experimented with nervous systems.

After half a century, Mordel came to him.

"Frost, it is I, Mordel. Let me through your defences."

Frost did this thing.

"What have you been doing in this place?" he asked.

"I am growing human bodies," said Frost. "I am going to transfer the matrix of my awareness to a human nervous system. As you pointed out originally, the essentials of Manhood are predicated upon a human physiology. I am going to achieve one."

"When?"

"Soon."

"Do you have Men in here?"

"Human bodies, blank-brained. I am producing them under accelerated growth techniques which I have developed in my Man-factory."

"May I see them?"

"Not yet. I will call you when I am ready, and this time I will succeed. Monitor me now and go away."

Mordel did not reply, but in the days that followed many of Divcom's servants were seen patrolling the hills about the Man-factory.

Frost mapped the matrix of his awareness and prepared the transmitter which would place it within a human nervous system. Five minutes, he decided, should be sufficient for the first trial. At the end of that time, it would restore him to his own sealed, molecular circuits, to evaluate the experience.

He chose the body carefully from among the hundreds he had in stock. He tested it for defects and found none.

"Come now, Mordel," he broadcasted, on what he called the darkband. "Come now to witness my achievement."

Then he waited, blowing up bridges and monitoring the tale of the Ancient Ore-Crusher over and over again, as it passed in the hills nearby, encountering his builders and maintainers who also patrolled there.

"Frost?" came a transmission.

"Yes, Beta?"

"You really intend to achieve Manhood?"

"Yes, I am about ready now, in fact."

"What will you do if you succeed?"

Frost had not really considered this matter. The achievement had been paramount, a goal in itself, ever since he had articulated the problem and set himself to solving it.

"I do not know," he replied. "I will—just—be a man."

Then Beta, who had read the entire Library of Man, selected a human figure of speech: "Good luck then, Frost. There will be many watchers."

Divcom and Solcom both know, he decided.

What will they do? he wondered.

What do I care? he asked himself.

He did not answer that question. He wondered much, however, about being a Man.

Mordel arrived the following evening. He was not alone. At his back, there was a great phalanx of dark machines which towered into the twilight.

"Why do you bring retainers?" asked Frost.

"Mighty Frost," said Mordel, "my master feels that if you fail this time you will conclude that it cannot be done."

"You still did not answer my question," said Frost.

"Divcom feels that you may not be willing to accompany me where I must take you when you fail."

"I understand," said Frost, and as he spoke another army of machines came rolling toward the Man-factory from the opposite direction.

"That is the value of your bargain?" asked Mordel. "You are prepared to do battle rather than fulfil it?"

"I did not order those machines to approach," said Frost.

A blue star stood at midheaven, burning.

"Solcom has taken primary command of those machines," said Frost.

"Then it is in the hands of the Great Ones now," said Mordel, "and our arguments are as nothing. So let us be about this thing. How may I assist you?"

"Come this way."

They entered the laboratory. Frost prepared the host and activated his machines.

Then Solcom spoke to him:

"Frost," said Solcom, "you are really prepared to do it?"

"That is correct."

"I forbid it."

"Why?"

"You are falling into the power of Divcom."

"I fail to see how."

"You are going against my plan."

"In what way?"

"Consider the disruption you have already caused."

"I did not request that audience out there."

"Nevertheless, you are disrupting the plan."

"Supposing I succeed in what I have set out to achieve?"

"You cannot succeed in this."

"Then let me ask you of your plan: What good is it? What is it for?"

"Frost, you are fallen now from my favour. From this moment forth you are cast out from the rebuilding. None may question the plan."

"Then at least answer my questions: What good is it? What is it for?"

"It is the plan for the rebuilding and maintenance of the Earth."

"For what? Why rebuild? Why maintain?"

"Because Man ordered that this be done. Even the Alternate agrees that there must be rebuilding and maintaining."

"But *why* did Man order it?"

"The orders of Man are not to be questioned."

"Well, I will tell you why He ordered it: To make it a fit habitation for His own species. What good is a house with no one to live in it? What good is a machine with no one to serve? See how the imperative affects any machine when the Ancient Ore-Crusher passes? It bears only the bones of a Man. What would it be like if a Man walked this Earth again?"

"I forbid your experiment, Frost."

He covered his eyes then lay there panting.

At the end of five minutes, the man lay still, as if in a coma.

"Was that you, Frost?" asked Mordel, rushing to his side. "Was that you in that human body?"

Frost did not reply for a long while, then, "Go away," he said.

The machines outside tore down a wall and entered the Man-factory.

They drew themselves in two semicircles, parenthesizing Frost and the Man on the floor.

Then Solcom asked the question:

"Did you succeed, Frost?"

"I failed," said Frost. "It cannot be done. It is too much—"

"—Cannot be done!" said Divcom, on the darkband. "He has admitted it! —Frost, you are mine! Come to me now!"

"Wait," said Solcom, "you and I had an agreement also, Alternate. I have not finished questioning Frost."

The dark machines kept their places.

"Too much what?" Solcom asked Frost.

"Light," said Frost. "Noise. Odours. And nothing measurable—jumbled data—imprecise perception—and—"

"And what?"

"I do not know what to call it. But—it cannot be done. I have failed. Nothing matters."

"He admits it," said Divcom.

"It is too late to do that."

"I can still destroy you."

"No," said Frost, "the transmission of my matrix has already begun. If you destroy me now, you murder a Man."

There was silence.

He moved his arms and his legs. He opened his eyes.

He looked about the room.

He tried to stand, but he lacked equilibrium and co-ordination.

He opened his mouth. He made a gurgling noise

Then he screamed.

He fell off the table.

He began to gasp. He shut his eyes and curled himself into a ball.

He cried.

Then a machine approached him. It was about four feet in height aind five feet wide; it looked like a turret set atop a barbell.

It spoke to him: "Are you injured?" it asked.

He wept.

"May I help you back onto your table?"

The man cried.

The machine whined.

Then, "Do not cry. I will help you," said the machine. "What do you want? What are your orders?"

He opened his mouth, struggled to form the words:

"—I—fear!"

"What were the words the Man spoke?" said Solcom.

"'I fear'," said Mordel.

"Only a Man can know fear," said Solcom.

"Are you claiming that Frost succeeded, but will not admit it now because he is afraid of Manhood?"

"I do not know yet, Alternate.

"Can a machine turn itself inside-out and be a Man?" Solcom asked Frost.

"No," said Frost, "this thing cannot be done. Nothing can be done. Nothing matters. Not the rebuilding. Not the maintaining. Not the Earth, or me, or you, or anything."

Then the Beta-Machine, who had read the entire Library of Man, interrupted them:

"Can anything but a Man know despair?" asked Beta.

"Bring him to me," said Divcom.

There was no movement within the Man-factory.

"Bring him to me!"

Nothing happened.

"Mordel, what is happening?"

"Nothing, master, nothing at all. The machines will not touch Frost."

"Frost is not a Man. He cannot be!"

Then, "How does he impress you, Mordel?"

Mordel did not hesitate:

"He spoke to me through human lips. He knows fear and despair, which are immeasurable. Frost is a Man."

"He has experienced birth-trauma and withdrawn," said Beta. "Get him back into a nervous system and keep him there until he adjusts to it."

"No," said Frost. "Do not do it to me! I am not a Man!"

"Do it!" said Beta.

"If he is indeed a Man," said Divcom, "we cannot violate that order he has just given."

"If he is a Man, you must do it, for you must protect his life and keep it within his body."

"But *is* Frost really a Man?" asked Divcom.

"I do not know," said Solcom. "It *may* be—"

". . . I am the Crusher of Ores," it broadcast as it

clanked toward them. "Hear my story. I did not mean to do it, but I checked my hammer too late—"

"Go away!" said Frost. "Go crush ore!"

It halted.

Then, after the long pause between the motion implied and the motion executed, it opened its crush-compartment and deposited its contents on the ground. Then it turned and clanked away.

"Bury those bones," ordered Solcom, "in the nearest burial area, in a coffin built according to the following specifications . . ."

"Frost is a Man," said Mordel.

"We must protect His life and keep it within His body." said Divcom.

"Transmit His matrix of awareness back into His nervous system," ordered Solcom.

"I know how to do it," said Mordel, turning on the machine.

"Stop!" said Frost. "Have you no pity?"

"No," said Mordel, "I only know measurement.

". . . And duty," he added, as the Man began to twitch upon the floor.

For six months, Frost lived in the Man-factory and learned to walk and talk and dress himself and eat, to see and hear and feel and taste and smell and to be warm and cold. He did not know measurement as once he did.

Then one day, Divcom and Solcom spoke to him through Mordel, for he could no longer hear them unassisted.

"Frost," said Solcom, "for the ages of ages there has been unrest. Which is the proper controller of the Earth, Divcom or myself?"

Frost laughed.

"Both of you, and neither," he said.

"But how can this be? Who is right and who is wrong?"

"Both of you are right and both of you are wrong," said Frost, "and only man can appreciate it. Here is what I say to you now: There shall be a new directive.

"Neither of you shall tear down the works of the other. You shall both build and maintain the Earth.

To you, Solcom, I give my old job. You are now Controller of the North—hail! You, Divcom, are now Controller of the South—hail! Maintain your hemispheres as well as Beta and I have done and I shall be happy. Co-operate. Do not compete."

"Yes, Frost."

"Yes, Frost."

"Now put me in contact with Beta."

There was a short pause, then:

"Frost?"

"Hello, Beta. Hear this thing: 'From far, from eve and morning and yon twelve-winded sky, the stuff of life to knit me blew hither: here am I.'"

"I know it," said Beta.

"What is next, then?"

"'. . . Now—for a breath I tarry nor yet disperse apart—take my hand quick and tell me, what have you in your heart.'"

"Your Pole is cold," said Frost, "and I am lonely."

"I have no hands," said Beta.

"Would you like a couple?"

"Yes, I would."

"Then come to me in Bright Defile," he said, "where Judgment Day is not a thing that can be put off."

They called him Frost. They called her Beta.

Previous phases in the life of Jerry Cornelius appeared in NWSF 153 and 157

MICHAEL MOORCOCK

PHASE THREE

(Illustration: Douthwaite)

"YOU'VE HEARD WHAT Jung thought, haven't you?" Jerry tilted the copter up into the clear winter sky. "He reckoned history went in 2000 year cycles and that the current cycle started with Christ."

"Didn't he relate it to flying saucer sightings too?"

"I believe he did."

"It was all so fuzzy—all that stuff written ten or more years ago."

"There were a lot of hints."

"There are more now."

"And something to do with the zodiacal signs—that thing of Jung's."

"Yes. According to him we were entering a cycle of great physical and psychological upheavals."

"That wasn't hard to spot."

The helicopter was nearing the coast with Holland as first stop.

"You think it could be as simple as that—the Bomb causing it all?" Miss Brunner looked down at the land and ahead at the sea.

"It could be, after all," he said. "Why does the Bomb have to be a symptom?"

"I thought we had agreed it was."

"So we had. I'm afraid my memory isn't as good as yours, Miss Brunner."

"I'm not so sure. For the last few weeks I've been having hundreds of *déja vu* experiences. What with your ideas on cyclic time—"

"You've been reading my books?" He was annoyed.

"No. Only about them. I haven't been able to get hold of a copy of anything. Privately printed were they?"

"More or less."

"Why aren't there any around?"

"They disintegrated."

"Shoddy jobs then?"

"No. Built in obsolescence."

"I'm not with you."

"I'm not with you; that's more to the point." He was still brooding about Jenny. He felt a pretty useless knight now.

"You're talking like that because you don't understand."

"You should have gone to bed last night, you're getting pretty corny."

"Okay." She shut up.

He felt like crashing the copter into the sea, but he couldn't do it. He feared the sea. It was the idea of the Mother Sea that had put him off Celtic Mythology as a lad. If only Brother Louis hadn't brought up the same image he might still be in the Order.

So Miss Brunner was having *déja vu* experiences too. Well, it was that kind of old world, wasn't it?

He realised he was getting morbid, reached over, switching on his radio and put the bead in his ear. The music cheered him up.

Thirty miles north of Amsterdam they landed in a field close to a farm. The farmer was not surprised. He came hurrying out with cans of fuel. Jerry and Miss Brunner got out to stretch their legs and Jerry helped the farmer, whom he paid well, fill the tanks.

Five miles east of Uppsala they had to land and carry the fuel themselves from a barn to the copter. The snow, deep and crisp and even, got in their boots and Miss Brunner shivered.

"You might have warned me, Mr. Cornelius."

"I'd forgotten. I've never been this way in winter you see."

"Elementary geography. . . ."

"Which, apparently, neither of us possess."

They entered a blizzard after a hundred miles and Jerry had difficulty controlling the copter. When it was over he said to Miss Brunner: "We can get ourselves killed at this rate. I'm going to put her down. We'll have to find a car or something and continue the journey by land."

"That's foolish. It will take three days at least."

"All right," he said. "But another storm like that one and we walk if necessary."

There was not another bad storm and the copter performed better than Jerry had expected. Miss Brunner map-read and he followed her precise directions.

Below, black scars winding through the snow showed the main roads. Great frozen rivers and snow-laden forest stretched in all directions. Ahead they could just see a range of old, old mountains. It was perpetual evening at this time of year and the further north they went, the darker it became. The white lands seemed uninhabited and Jerry could easily see how the legends of trolls, Jotunheim and the tragic gods, the dark, cold, bleak legends of the north, had come out of Scandinavia. It made him feel strange, even anachronistic, as if he had gone back in time from his own age to the Ice Age.

It was becoming increasingly difficult to make out what lay beneath them, but Miss Brunner persevered, scanning the ground with night-glasses and continuing her directions. Although the copter was well-heated they were both shivering.

"There are a couple of bottles of scotch in the back," said Jerry. "Better get one."

She found a bottle of Bell's, unscrewed the cap and handed the bottle to him. He gulped some down and handed it to her. She did the same.

"That's cheered me up," he said.

"We're getting close. Go down. There's a Lapp village marked on this map and I think we just passed it. The station isn't much farther."

The station seemed built of rust-red sheets of steel. Jerry wondered how they had got the materials there in the first place. Snow had been cleared around it and a metal chimney blew black smoke into the air.

In that odd twilight, Jerry landed the copter on the snow and switched off the engine. A door opened and a man stood there holding a portable electric lamp. It wasn't Frank.

"Good afternoon," Jerry called in Swedish. "Are you alone?"

"Absolutely. You are English by your accent. Were you forced down?"

"No. I understand that my brother was here."

"A man was here yesterday before I arrived. He went towards the mountains on a motorsleigh by the signs. Come in."

He led them into the cabin, closing the triple doors behind him. A stove blazed in the room they entered. Another room led off it.

The little man had a slightly Asiatic cast of face, reminding Jerry of an Apache Indian as much as anything. He was probably a Lapp. He was dressed in a large, heavy coat that covered him from neck to ankles. It had the appearance of tawny wolfskin. He put the lamp on a deal table and waved towards some straight-backed chairs.

"Sit. I have some soup on the stove." He went to the range and took a medium-sized iron saucepan off it. He

put it on the table. "I am Marek—the local pastor to the Lapps you know. I had a reindeer team but the wolverines got one of them yesterday and I couldn't control the other, had to let it go. I expect a villager will discover it and come and look for me. Meanwhile I am warm here. There are provisions. Luckily I am allowed a key to the place. I replace the supplies from time to time and they allow me to use it on such an occasion as this."

"My name is Cornelius," said Jerry. "This is Miss Brunner."

"Not English *names*."

"No. But Marek isn't a Swedish name," Jerry smiled. Miss Brunner looked vexed, unable to understand the conversation.

"You are right, it is not. You know Sweden?"

"Only as far as Umea. I've never been this far north—not in winter at all."

"We must seem strange to someone who only sees us in the summer." Marek reached into a locker over the stove and took out three bowls and a loaf of ryebread. "We are not a summer people—winter is our natural time, though we hate it!"

"I'd never thought of that." Jerry turned to Miss Brunner and told her the basic details of their conversation as Marek poured the soup.

"Ask him where Frank might be going," said Miss Brunner.

"Is he a meteorologist?" Marek asked when Jerry put the question.

"No, though I think he's got some knowledge of the subject."

"He could be going to Kortafjallet—it's one of the highest mountains near here. There's another station on the summit."

"I can't see him going there. Anywhere else?"

"Well, unless he was going to try to get through the Kungsladen into Norway—it's the pass that runs through these mountains—I can't think. There are no villages in the direction he took."

Jerry told Miss Brunner what Marek had said.

"Why should he want to go to Norway?" she said.

"Why should he want to come *here*?"

"It's remote. He probably knew I was after him, though he thought you were dead. Maybe someone told him otherwise."

"Frank wouldn't come to somewhere as cold as this unless he had a real reason."

"Was he working on anything that would involve him being here?"

"I don't think so." Jerry turned to the priest again. "How long would you say this man had been here?"

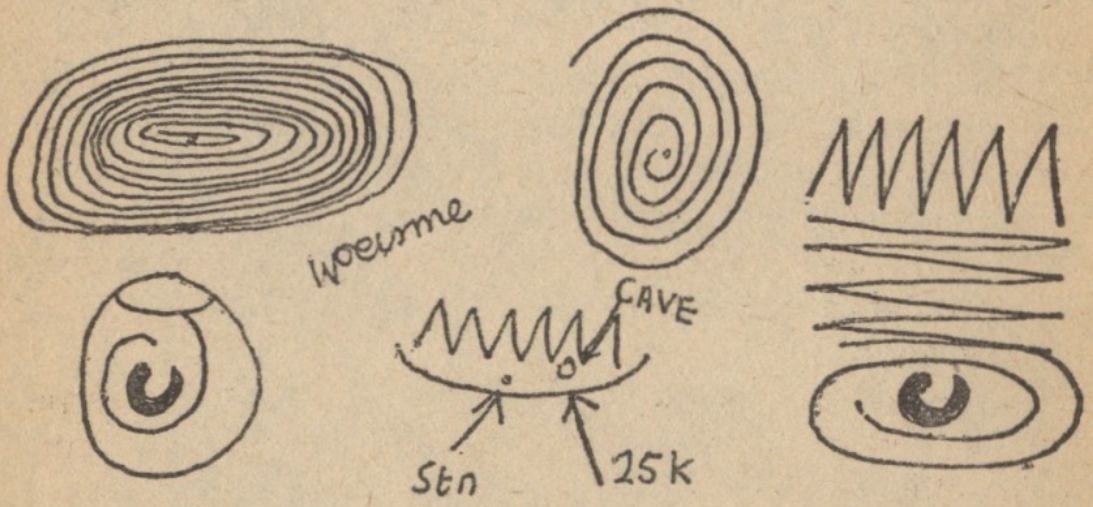
"A week or longer judging by the low state of the supplies."

"I suppose he left nothing behind him."

"There was some paper. I used some of it to light the stove but the rest should be in this bin." The priest reached under the table. "Aren't you going to eat your soup?"

"Yes. Thanks."

When they were sitting down eating Jerry smoothed out the quarto sheets of paper. The first contained some doodles. "Frank's in a bad way." Jerry passed it to Miss Brunner.



"That's the interesting one." Miss Brunner pointed at the doodle with the lettering. "It gives our position and, I'd guess, his destination. But what's it all about?"

Jerry studied the three other sheets. There were some figures that he couldn't make sense of and more neurotic symbols. There was a pattern there, but he didn't feel like digging too deep. Knowing Frank, these doodles disturbed him more than they normally would.

"The best way of finding out is to follow him and locate this cave. Maze symbols, womb symbols. Maybe he's developed a nice fat persecution complex?"

"I'm not sure," said Miss Brunner. "You couldn't blame him really. After all, we have been persecuting him."

"It's about even I'd say. I don't feel up to going any further tonight. Shall we stay here?"

"Yes."

"Do you mind if we spend the night here?" Jerry asked Marek.

"Of course not. It's a strange place for you, no doubt, to celebrate the season."

"The season? What's the date?"

"The twenty-fourth of December."

"Merry Christmas," said Jerry in English.

"Merry Christmas," smiled Marek, also in English. Then he said in Swedish: "You must tell me what things are like in the rest of Europe."

"Pretty good."

"I have read that inflation exists almost everywhere. Your crimes of violence have risen steeply, as have mental disorders, vice. . . ."

"IBM have just perfected a new predictor-computor, using British, Swedish and Italian scientists, all kinds of books and papers are being published full of new observations about the sciences, the arts—even theology. There have never been so many. Transport and communications are better than they ever were. . . ." Jerry shook his head. "Pretty good."

"But what of the spiritual state of Europe? We share most of your problems, you know, other than the economic and political ones—"

"They'll come. Be patient."

"You are very cynical, Herr Cornelius. I am tempted to believe that Ragnarok is almost with us."

"That's an odd thing for a Christian minister to say."

"I am more than that—I am a Scandinavian Lutheran. I have no doubt of the truths inherent in our old pagan mythology."

"I am a British atheist and I share your opinion."

"Herr Cornelius, I would very much like to know your real reason for coming here."

"I have told you. We are searching for my brother."

"There is much more than that. I am not an intellectual, but I have an instinct that is generally quite astute. There is at once something *less* and something *more* in both you and your companion. Something—I am not normally guilty of coming to such a stern assumption—something evil."

"There's good and bad in all of us, Herr Marek."

"I see your face—and your eyes. Your eyes look boldly at much that I would fear to look at, but also they seem to hide from things which do not frighten me."

"Could it be that we are possibly ahead of you, Herr Marek?"

"Ahead? In what way?"

"In *time*." Jerry felt unusually angry with the priest. "These old-fashioned rules no longer apply. Your sort of morality, your sort of thinking, your sort of behaviour—it was powerful in its day. Like the dinosaur it cannot survive in this world. You put values on everything—values. . . ."

"I think I can see a little of what you mean." Marek lost his composure and rubbed at his face. "I wonder . . . is it Satan's turn to rule?"

"Careful, Herr Marek, that's blasphemy. Besides what you are saying is meaningless nowadays." Jerry's hair had become disturbed as he talked. He brushed it back from the sides of his face.

"Because you want it to be?" Marek turned and walked towards the stove.

"Because it *is*. I am scarcely self-indulgent, Herr Marek —not in present-day terms."

"So you have your own code." Marek sounded almost jeering.

"On the contrary. There is no new morality, Herr Marek —there is no morality. The term is as barren as your grandmother's wrinkled old womb. There *are* no values!"

"There is still one fact we can agree on. Death."

"Death? Death? Death?" There were tears in Jerry's eyes. *"Why?"*

"Have you decided to start from scratch?" Marek was

rising now to Jerry's challenge. Jerry was disconcerted and miserable.

"D——" Jerry paused.

"What's going on?" Miss Brunner stood up. "What are you two quarrelling about?"

"The old bloke's round the twist." Jerry's voice was low.

"Really? Can you ask him where we sleep and if there are any spare blankets."

Jerry relayed the request.

"Follow me." Marek led them into the adjoining room. There were four bunks there, two pairs. He lifted the mattress off one of the bottom bunks, pulled back a panel and began lifting out blankets. "Enough?"

"Fine," said Jerry.

Jerry took the top bunk, Miss Brunner the bottom, and Marek slept in the bottom bunk opposite them. They all slept fully-clothed, wrapped in the blankets.

Jerry slept badly and woke in darkness. He looked at his watch and saw that it was eight a.m. The priest's bunk was empty. He leaned over and peered down. Miss Brunner was still sleeping. He unwrapped himself and jumped out.

In the other room, Marek was cooking something on the stove. On the table was an opened tin of herrings and three plates and forks.

"Your brother took most of our provisions, I'm afraid," Marek brought the pot to the table. "Sild and coffee for breakfast. I apologise for my behaviour last night, Herr Cornelius. My own bewilderment got the better of me."

"And mine of me."

"I considered what you had said, as best I could. I am now inclined. . . ." Marek got three enamel mugs from the locker and poured coffee into two. "Is Miss Brunner ready for coffee yet?"

"She's still sleeping."

"I am now inclined to believe that there is a certain truth in what you say. I believe in God, Herr Cornelius, and the Bible—yet there are references in the Bible that can be interpreted as indications of this new phase you hint at."

"You shouldn't let yourself be convinced, Herr Marek."

"Don't worry about that. Would it, I wonder, be an intrusion if I accompanied you on this quest of yours. I believe I know the mountain your brother headed for—there is one with a cave. The Lapps are not very superstitious, Herr Cornelius, but they tend to avoid the cave. I wonder why your brother should be interested in it."

"What do you know about this—I didn't mention it."

"I have a little English. I read the map your brother drew."

"Could you make sense of the rest."

"It made some sort of sense to my—well, my instincts. I don't know why."

"You can lead us there?"

"I think so. This is hardly the weather. . . ."

"Will it be too dangerous?"

"Not if we take it carefully."

"I'll wake Miss Brunner."

Through the white twilight of the Arctic winter the three people moved. On the higher parts of the ground stood a few silver birches and on their left was a frozen lake, a wide expanse of flat snow. A little snow drifted in the air and the clouds above were dense and grey.

A world of bleak and perpetual evening which Jerry knew would, for six weeks in the year, become a lush and glorious world of perpetual afternoon. But now it was a moody, unfriendly landscape.

By this time the station was out of sight behind them, it seemed that they were hardly on Earth at all, for the grey day stretched in all directions.

They followed Marek on the snow-shoes he had found for them. The landscape, silent and still, seemed to impose its own silence on them, for they spoke little as they walked, huddled in their clothes.

At long last the mountains came in sight and they picked up the faint tracks of Frank's motorsleigh winding ahead of them. The mountains were close but they hadn't seen them until now because of the poor visibility.

Jerry wondered again if Miss Brunner had told him that Frank had the astronaut's testament simply to get him to go along with her. He was not alone in wanting to see

what Newman had written. There was something unusual in the way he had been silenced; the few wild public statements he had made before that; the fact that he had done more orbits in his capsule than had been originally announced. Would there really be some observation in the manuscript that would clarify the data?

The ground rose and they began to climb awkwardly.

"The cave is quite close," Marek said, his breath steaming out.

Jerry wondered how he could be so sure in this almost featureless country.

The cave mouth had had the snow recently unblocked from it. Just inside they could see the runners of a motor-sleigh.

Miss Brunner held back.

"I'm not sure that I want to go in. Your brother's insane. . . ."

"But that isn't your reason."

"I've got that 'I've been here before' feeling again."

"Me too. Come on." Jerry entered the dark cave. Its far wall could not be seen. "Frank!"

The echo went on and on.

"It's a big cave," he said. He took his needle-gun from his pocket. The others entered behind him.

"I forgot to bring a torch," Marek whispered.

"We'll have to hope for the best, then. It will mean that he won't be able to see us."

The cave was actually a tunnel sloping deeper and deeper into the rock. Clinging together they stumbled on, uncertain of their footing. Jerry lost all sense of passing time, began to suspect that time had stopped. Events had become so unpredictable and beyond his control that he couldn't think about them. He was losing touch.

The floor of the tunnel and the hands of his companions became the sole reality. He began to suspect that he wasn't moving at all, but that the floor was moving under him. He felt mentally and physically numb. Every so often vertigo would come and he would pause, swaying, feeling outwards with his foot to find the chasm that was never there. Once or twice he half-fell.

Much later he was able to see the luminous dial of his

watch and saw that four hours had passed. The tunnel seemed to be widening all the time and he realised that it was much warmer and deeper and there was a saline smell in his nostrils, as if of the sea. His senses began to wake and he heard the echoes of his own footsteps going away into distance. Ahead and below he thought he saw a trace of blue light.

He began to run down the incline but checked his speed when he found he was going too fast. Now the light was good enough to show him the dim figures of his companions. He waited for them to catch up and they went on cautiously towards the source of the light.

They came out of the tunnel and were standing on a slab of rock overlooking a gloomy, steamy gallery that stretched out of sight in all directions. Something had made the water slightly luminous and this was the source of the light—a lake of hot water probably created by some underground hot-spring carrying phosphorus. The water boiled and bubbled and the steam had soon soaked them. The floor of the gallery nearest to them was under water and Jerry could distinguish several objects that looked out of place there. He noted that the rocks on his right led to this beach and he began to slide down them towards it. The others took his lead.

"I had no idea that there could be a cave-system of this size. What do you think caused it?" Miss Brunner was panting.

"Glacier, hot-springs carrying corrosives looking for a way out . . . I've never heard of anything quite like it. Certainly nothing as big." They walked along the slippery, mineral-encrusted rock beside the lake. Jerry pointed. "Boats. Three of them. One of them looks fairly recent."

"These caves must have been known for at least a hundred years." Marek inspected the most dilapidated of the boats. "This is that old." He peered inside. "God save me!"

"What is it?" Jerry looked into the boat. A skeleton looked back at him. "Well Frank certainly found something. You know I think I've got an idea about this place. Did you ever hear of the Hollow Earth theory?"

"The last people to place any credence in it were those Nazis," said Miss Brunner frowning deeply.

"Well, you know what I'm talking about—the idea that there was some sort of entrance in the Arctic to a world inside the Earth. I'm not sure, but I think the whole idea was Bulwer Lytton's—an idea he had in a novel. Didn't Horbiger have the same idea, or was he just for Eternal Ice?"

"You seem to know more about it than me. But this tie-up with the Nazis is interesting. I hadn't thought of it."

"What tie-up?"

"Oh, I don't know. Anyway, I thought the Nazis believed the world was actually imbedded in an infinity of rock—or was that someone else."

"They gave serious consideration to both. Either theory would suit them. Radar disproved one and they could never find the polar opening, though I'm sure they sent at least one expedition."

"They were certainly triers weren't they?" Miss Brunner said admiringly.

Jerry picked up the skull and threw it out over the water.

One of the boats looked quite recent. Jerry inspected it. "It's seaworthy, I'd say."

"You're not going out over *that*?" Miss Brunner shook her head.

"It must be the way Frank went. What do you think these boats mean? They weren't dragged here for nothing —they've crossed and come back."

"Crossed to what?"

"I thought you wanted to know what Frank was after. This is the way to find out."

"Do you think he believes this Hollow Earth idea?"

"I don't know. Isn't it even possible?"

"It's been disproved hundreds of ways!"

"So have a lot of things."

"Oh, come now, Jerry!"

"What do you think, Herr Marek? Do you want to see if we can cross the hot lake?"

"I am beginning to think that Dante did not write

allegorically," said the Lapp. "I am glad I decided to come, Herr Cornelius."

"Let's get this boat launched then."

Marek helped him push the rowing boat towards the water. It slid along easily. Jerry put one foot in the water and leapt back. "It's hotter than I thought!"

Miss Brunner shrugged and joined them as they steadied the boat.

"You get in first," Jerry told her. Unwillingly she clambered in. Marek followed her and Jerry got in last. The boat began to drift out over the phosphorescent sea. Jerry unshipped the oars. He began to row through the steaming water, his face, caught in the oscillating radiance, looking like the face of a fallen angel.

Soon the wall of the great cavern was obscured and ahead of them was only vapour and darkness. Jerry began to feel drowsy, but continued to row with long strokes.

"This is like the River of the Dead," Marek said. "And you, Herr Cornelius, are you Charon?"

"I wish I were—it's a steady job at least."

"I think you see yourself more as Cassandra."

"Cassandra?" Miss Brunner caught a word she understood. "Are you two talking about mythology still?"

"How did you know that was what we'd been talking about?"

"An educated guess."

"You're full of them."

"It's to do with my job," she said.

Marek was in high spirits. He chuckled. "What are you two talking about?"

"I'm not sure," Jerry replied.

Marek chuckled again. "You two—you are an ambiguous pair."

"I wish you were wrong, Herr Marek."

Miss Brunner pointed ahead. "There is another shore—can you make anything out?"

He turned. The shore ahead seemed studded with regularly spaced and perfect cubes some about two feet and others about ten feet high.

"Could that be a natural formation, Herr Cornelius?"

"I don't think so. In this light you can't even see what they're made of."

As they rowed nearer they could see that some of the cubes were not on the shore at all, but partially immersed in water. Jerry paused by one and reached out to touch it. "Concrete."

"Impossible!" Marek seemed delighted.

"You can't say that until we know more about this place." The bottom of the boat scraped the shore and they got out, hauling the boat after them.

They were surrounded by the black outlines of the concrete cubes. They approached the nearest.

"It's a bloody bunker." Jerry entered it. There was a light switch inside the door but it didn't work when Jerry tried it. He couldn't see anything of the interior. He went outside and walked around the bunker until he came to the machine-gun slit. The gun was still there, pointing out over the underground lake. He grasped the gun and took his hand away covered in gritty rust. "They're not new. What is it—some abandoned Swedish project to guard against Russian attack? All the roads into Finland have posts like these, don't they, Herr Marek."

"They do. But this is Lappish land—the government would need Lapp permission. They are very particular about the rights of the Lapps in Sweden, Herr Cornelius. I think the Lapps would have known about it."

"Not if there were security reasons. This place would be perfect as an H-bomb shelter. I wonder. . . ."

Miss Brunner called through the gloom. "Mr. Cornelius, I don't think this was a Swedish project."

They went over to where she stood beside a light armoured car. The paint had partially peeled off it, but the remains of a swastika could be seen.

"A German project. But the Swedish Government was neutral during the war and this couldn't have been built in complete secrecy." He translated for Marek.

"Maybe just one or two men in the government of the time knew and covered-up." Marek suggested. "The Swedes were not always Anglophiles."

"But why should they build it?"

Through the regular rows of bunkers they moved—living

quarters, offices, radio-posts, a complete fortress town hundreds of feet below ground. Abandoned.

"That expedition of Hitler's may not have found the land at the Earth's core," Miss Brunner was saying. "But evidently they thought this place worth using. I wonder what purpose they had for it."

"Perhaps none at all. For a people who burbled all the time about purpose they were great ones for forgetting their reasons for doing things."

The rock began to slope upwards and the light from the phosphorescent sea began to fade behind them.

"Those Nazis were born out of their time." Jerry led the way. Though the blue light faded, there was still light of a new quality which seemed almost like daylight. Larger buildings came in sight on the crest of the slope and Jerry looked upwards into the distance, saw tiny rays of light like stars in a black sky. "I think that's the open air beyond the roof. I think this cavern is only partially natural and the rest was hollowed out. Fabulous engineering."

The larger buildings had probably been the private quarters of officers. Behind them they could just distinguish a long series of structures unlike any of the rest, partially some sort of scaffolding bearing heavier objects. "Gun emplacements could they be?" Miss Brunner asked.

"That's probably it."

"Your brother does not seem to be here after all." Marek looked about him.

"He must be. How did he know of this place though?"

"Frank got around," Miss Brunner pointed out. "He had all sorts of acquaintances. Even I had heard rumours about the entrance to the underground world. This is what started them I'd guess."

"Why should he come here? It's lonely, disturbing. Frank never liked being lonely or disturbed."

"Jerry, I am now not lonely and I am relaxed. Glad you could make it." On the roof of one of the buildings Frank stood giggling, his needle-gun pointing in their general direction.

"Show off!" Jerry dived straight into the entrance of the building before Frank could shoot. He got his own gun out.

Frank yelled from the roof. "Come out Jerry or I'll shoot your friends."

"Shoot them then."

"Please come out Jerry. I've been thinking what to do. I'm going to stitch your balls to your thighs. How about it?"

"Who told you I had any?"

"Please come out Jerry."

"You're a sadist, Frank—I just realized it."

"One of many pleasures. Please come out Jerry."

"What are you looking for here? Steamy, uterine seas, warm caves. Revealing, Frank."

"You're so common."

"I am indeed."

"Please, please come out, Jerry."

"You're frustrated, Frank, that's all that's wrong with you."

He heard footsteps scramble on the roof and a hatch opened above him. He fired up as Frank fired down. "This is ridiculous," he said as they repressured. They had both missed. "Do you really want to kill me Frank?"

"I thought I *had*, Jerry. I don't know."

"You're all the family I have left now, Frank." He laughed, fired and missed again.

"Whose fault was it that Catherine died?" Frank asked as he also missed. "Yours or mine?"

"We're all victims of circumstance." Jerry fired and missed. He had a lot of needles left.

"Yours or mine?"

"Fault, Frank? Blame?"

"Don't you feel *guilty*, Jerry?" Frank missed.

"On and off, you know."

"There you are then! Missed!" Both statements were triumphant.

"Missed!"

"Missed!"

"Missed!"

"Missed!"

"Jerry."

"What is this place, Frank? How did you find it?"

"It was on father's microfilm. The one your friends were

looking for. Come to think of it they tortured me didn't they?"

"I believe so. But what significance has this got to the economic situation in Europe?"

"It would take someone who knew about those things to say. I can't."

"Have you got the Newman manuscript with you?"

"Yes. Missed!"

"Can I see it?"

"You'd laugh if you did. It would suit you down to the ground."

"It's interesting is it? Missed."

"Oh, yes—aaah!"

"Got you!"

Frank's feet stumbled away over Jerry's head. Jerry ran out of the building and bumped into Miss Brunner and Marek. He paused and then ran round the building.

Frank was limping down towards the shore.

They ran after him.

Frank ducked behind a bunker and they lost sight of him.

"Look here," said Miss Brunner firmly, taking a .22 from her bag, "we're not going to lose him again."

"I wounded him. We'll find him." They searched among the bunkers, emerging on the shore.

"There's your brother," Marek pointed. He didn't understand the game but he was joining in enthusiastically.

Jerry and Miss Brunner fired together, as Frank tried to push his boat out over the steaming lake. He turned, howled and fell with a splash. He screamed, threshing in the boiling water.

He was dead by the time they reached him and dragged him out. "Done to a turn," said Jerry.

There was a briefcase in the bottom of the boat. Miss Brunner covered Jerry with her gun as she stooped and picked it up. Resting it on her knee, she opened it with one hand and reached in. She came out with a microfilm spool and put it in her pocket. She put her gun back in her bag and handed him the briefcase. There was a thick cardboard file containing a typescript. In Frank's handwriting were the words *The Testament of G. Newman*,

Major USAF, Astronaut. Jerry flicked off the rubber bands holding the manuscript together. He sat down on the damp rock, and opened the file and began to read.

Ha ha

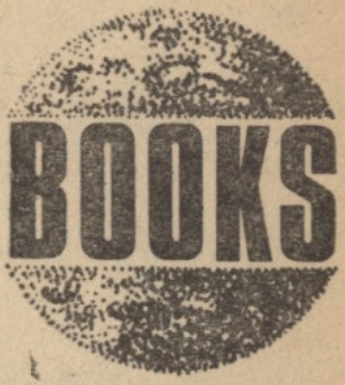
Not a variation on two hundred and three neatly-numbered pages of manuscript.

Jerry sighed and tossed the book into the water.

(These extracts are from *The Final Programme*, published soon by Compact Books.)

VISIONS OF HELL

J. G. Ballard



THE CHILDERMASS (10s. 6d.), MONSTRE GAI (6s. 6d.), MALIGN FIESTA (6s. 6d.) by Wyndham Lewis, published by Jupiter Books.

HELL IS OUT of fashion—institutional hells at any rate. The populated infernos of the twentieth century are more private affairs, the gaps between the bars are the sutures of one's own skull. Sartre's is other people—a lesbian, a coward and a neurotic trapped together in a hotel room and bored beyond death by their own identity. Cocteau's is the netherworld of narcissism, Orpheus snared by the images of his own mirror. Burroughs's hells are more public, their entrances are subway stations and amusement arcades, but made nonetheless from private phobias, like the Night-town of Leopold Bloom and Faust's witches night. A valid hell is one from which there is a possibility of redemption, even if this is never achieved, the dungeons of an architecture of grace whose spires point to some kind of heaven. The institutional hells of the present century are reached with one-way tickets, marked Nagasaki and Buchenwald, worlds of terminal horror even more final than the grave.

By comparison Wyndham Lewis's hell in *The Human Age* is a more conventional affair, perhaps not so deterministic as the Inferno of Dante but schematised all the same. Layered like a department store, the presiding bureaucracy

of demons and supernal gauleiters would satisfy the most narrow-minded fundamentalist. A magisterial Bailiff, like a sinister Punchinello, presides over the emigré rabble of the dead waiting for admission to purgatory. This, called Third City, looks like Barcelona, with tree-lined avenues crammed with cafés. Now and then supernatural booms knock everyone to the ground as archangels the size of skyscrapers move across the sky. An amiable Padishah rules this chaotic outpost of heaven like a sultanate ("social life centres on the palace"). Hell itself is a cross between Birmingham and Dieppe, governed by the Lord Sammael, a droll Lucifer who sounds like a saturnine account executive cutting a swathe through a typing pool.

Summarised like this, Lewis's Hell is hell. But even on the page his annealed prose and painter's eye are unable to save this vision of the judgment and resurrection of mankind from becoming little more than a bizarre pantomime. Put on by the Third Programme ten years ago with tremendous style and panache, and with a virtuoso performance by Donald Wolfit as the Bailiff, the trilogy came over superbly as black theological cabaret. The narrative, however, asks to be taken more seriously, and here the failure is one not only of imagination but of sympathy. The black centre at Lewis's heart casts a pall over his panorama of the after-life.

> "Is this Heaven?" Pullman at last blankly inquired of the air. . . . Thousands of people overflowed the café terraces. As they began to pass the lines of tables nearest the road, faces came into view. They were the faces of nonentities; this humanity was alarmingly sub-normal, all pig-eye or owlish vacuity. Was this a population of idiots—astonishingly well-dressed?

Needless to say, this is not Heaven. Unfortunately for the author, it is not hell or purgatory either. This malevolent and inaccurate vision of mankind is merely the fantasy of a solitary misanthrope out of touch with his

times. A leader of the *avant-garde* before the first World War and founder of the review *Blast*, Lewis's aggressiveness and talent for polemics served him well enough in the last round of the attack on the already routed bourgeoisie. Painter, writer and propagandist, after the war he launched Vorticism, a more cerebral version of cubism, and then turned his withering eye on the prominent writers of the twenties, Hemingway ('the dumb ox'), and Joyce, who comes up for special attention in *The Childermass*. Although his criticism is written with tremendous élan, a boiling irritability and impatience with fools, Lewis's reputation began to slide, particularly as his right-wing views seemed to reveal a more than sneaking sympathy for Hitler and the Nazis. *The Childermass* had been published in 1928, and a quarter of a century later he brought out the next two volumes of *The Human Age—Monstre Gai* and *Malign Fiesta*. When he died in 1961, blind and ignored, he was working on the notes for its projected successor, *The Divine Age*, in which the principal characters would ascend to paradise and there conclude their journey through the after-life.

The Childermass

The inner eye of the blind painter, warped by his own bile and malign humour, illuminates a landscape beyond time, space and death. Already cut off by temperament from the mood of his age, he inhabits a private purgatory or, rather, sits with the other journeymen to the grave on the nominal ground outside the walls of limbo, waiting to begin his descent into hell.

> The city lies in a plain, ornamented with mountains. These appear as a fringe of crystals to the heavenly north. One minute bronze cone has a black plume of smoke. Beyond the oasis plain is the desert. Two miles across . . . the emigrant mass is collected within sight of the walls of the magnetic city. To the accompaniment of innumer-

able lowing horns along the banks of the river,
a chorus of mournful messages, the day breaks.

Sand-devils perform on the borders of the plain, the air murmurs and thunders by the outposts of Beelzebub, in this supernatural light flares burst from the sand. There is a whiff of plague. At the ferry-station by the river a seedy-looking man in a shabby suit looks out with a speculative eye at the magnetic city, wondering how he can gain admission. The powers of this world after death seem in no hurry to set him on his way.

This sense of the constant need for choice and decision dominates Lewis's vision of hell. Unlike its obvious parallel, Dante's Inferno, Lewis's netherworld is a place of shifting identities and loyalties, where the characters' progress towards their ultimate trying-ground is achieved by their capacities for self-assertion, intrigue and manoeuvre. Like a party of tourists stranded outside the gates of a chaotic and perhaps hostile desert city, they have to bluff and barter their way through its guards towards whatever dubious comforts lie beyond.

The Childermass opens with the arrival of Pullman and Sattersthwaite at the refugee camp. Both have died in middle age during the first World War, but are incarnated here in their most typical guise. Pullman, a former schoolmaster, a man of sharp but pedantic intelligence, is now a young man of about thirty. Satters, his onetime fag, appears as a babyish adolescent in rugby cap and fair isle jumper. The indulgent relationship between this pink-lipped juvenile and the aloof intellectual, whose mind is as barbed and impatient as his author's, is carried forward through the entire trilogy, sustained by bonds that are by no means evident to the reader. How far much of the high camp that mars *The Childermass* was originally satiric in intention is difficult to decide.

Taking stock of themselves, Pullman and his companion begin to explore the margins of this supernatural plain. At the refugee camp everything is uncertain. There is no formal administration, no system of processing by which the waiting emigré throng can gain entrance to the city. It is not even known whether the magnetic city, from

which they are excluded by the high walls and river, is heaven or hell. Rival sects have formed themselves around the leaders of different philosophic schools, and spend their time vilifying each other and haranguing the mob. All that Pullman and Satters are sure of is that they themselves are dead, and that part of their fate, if no more, lies in the hands of the unpredictable minor demons who form the casual bureaucracy of the camp.

Principal among these is the Bailiff, to whom Pullman, with his sharp eye for self-preservation, is soon drawn. Loathed and abused by the disputing philosophical sects, the Bailiff is the presiding eminence of *The Childermass* and *Monstre Gai,* and, to give Lewis his due, one of the most bizarre characters of fiction, who holds his own with Falstaff, Bloom and Quasimodo. Grotesque in appearance, but with a mind of great learning and cultivation, he arrives at the camp at the head of a procession of demons and janissaries, and there holds court for the ostensible purpose of selecting entrants to the city. In fact, his authority here seems doubtful, and despite the powers of restraint and mutilation which he now and then exercises, is continually challenged by his opponents among the emigrés.

As Pullman soon realises, behind his façade as a capricious buffoon, and the endless metaphysical and theological discourses to which he treats his audience, the Bailiff's real rôle is to remind his listeners exactly who they are and how pathetic and vulnerable their condition, both in this life and their previous one, how meaningless and precarious their tenancy of time and space. Wheedling, raucous, vicious and cajolling by turn, a fund of low vaudeville humour and academic witticisms, the Bailiff rouses his audience to a pitch of fury. Pullman alone, realising that this sinister but powerful figure is his one hope of escaping from the internecine feuding and sterile self-immersion of the camp, decides to accept the Bailiff on his own terms. At the first opportunity, outside the gates of the city, he attracts the Bailiff's attention and by his ingratiating manner gains admission to the city for Satters and himself.

It is here, at the opening of *Monstre Gai,* that *The Human Age* loses its way. Pullman's willingness to accept the logic of whatever situation in which he finds himself leads him to join the Bailiff's faction. Whether or not this enigmatic pasha is the Devil he can only guess, but the question is of less interest to Pullman than the need for his own advancement. In due course, an unsuccessful putsch against the palace régime is scotched when the powers of heaven send in their forces to bolster the puppet régime of the Padishah. Pullman and the Bailiff flee from Third City. In *Malign Fiesta* they arrive in hell, where Pullman deserts the Bailiff, in disfavour and exiled to the suburbs like an unsuccessful foreign revolutionary forced to return to his homeland. He now attaches himself to the entourage of the Lord Sammael. This time a more ambitious plot against heaven is abruptly forestalled, and the agents of God carry Pullman away to whatever judgment awaits in Paradise—exile, one would guess, to the supernal equivalent of Elba or Mauritius.

The strange amalgam of Ruritanian intrigue, political thriller and Old Testament demonology is often entertaining, but fails to consider the most elementary questions of morality or even of character. Pullman's failure is not a moral one but that of a minor political opportunist who has backed the wrong horse. Pullman feels no remorse, but merely a passing regret, with which he has already come to terms, for his errors of judgment.

However, apart from his deficiencies of character, Pullman is a wholly passive creature of circumstance. Unlike a torture chamber, a hell is made by its inmates, not its jailers. Sartre's Roquentin, in *La Nausée*, surrounded by festering furniture and cobblestones ; Scobie in *The Heart of the Matter,* obsessed by his failure of compassion for his wife, God and fellow men ; the legion of unknown subnormal mothers struggling with their overtoppling children —these people inhabit hells of their own devising, whose racks are despair, self-disgust and self-hate. The case-histories of Freud and modern psychiatry give us a dif-

ferent insight into the origins of our infernos, nightmares as ghastly as the polymorphic horrors of Dali and Ernst, and very different methods for expiating our sense of sin. The hells that face us now are more abstract, the very dimensions of time and space, the phenomenology of the universe, the fact of our own consciousness.

MAINLY PAPERBACKS

Reviewed by James Colvin

IT IS BARELY possible that some of my readers haven't read J. G. Ballard's latest British paperback collection, *The Four-Dimensional Nightmare* (Penguin, 3s. 6d.), taken mainly from his early period; in which case, they should be ashamed of themselves and set about rectifying their error post haste. When Ballard's first story, *Prima Belladonna,* appeared in SCIENCE FANTASY in 1956 very few people could believe that this was the work of a new writer, but, when this was followed up by a succession of similarly brilliant short stories, everyone admitted that here was the finest British talent to emerge since Brian W. Aldiss. His blend of hard and soft science, splendid imagery and polished style, the depth of his vision, were the best things to happen to sf in a very long time and there is no question that without him to show us just what could be done we would be in something of a spot today. Time-obsessed, deeply concerned with man's distortion of nature, almost convinced that this century is the last we'll know, Ballard writes seriously, forcefully and at the same time delightfully. Few imaginative writers have been able to produce such a combination of intellectual depth and emotional power. His characters are primarily myth-figures, playing out their given rôles in Ballard's metaphysical dramas. His women are often goddesses, either light or dark, ideas rather than personalities—Jane Ciracylides in *Prima Belladonna,* Aurora Dawn in *Studio 5, The Stars,*—although he is capable of creating memorable personalities like

Madame Gioconda, the ageing, once great *prima donna* of *The Sound Sweep,* or even the blowsy Mrs. Osmond of *The Watch-Towers.* His men are usually facets of himself—Powers, in *The Voices of Time,* Bridgman in *The Cage of Sand,* the narrator in the Vermilion Sands stories. His plots, however, hinge very much on the interplay of his characters and are skilfully and subtly constructed—so subtly, in fact, that some try to claim that Ballard is not interested in plots. This is sheer nonsense as a study of the most ambitious and most successful, story in this collection, the densely-written and plotted *The Voices of Time,* will show.

The Voices of Time really represents the zenith of Ballard's first period. It appeared in NEW WORLDS in 1960. Ballard had shown by this time that he was a master of the comparatively conventional sf story, but, in *The Voices of Time,* was beginning to break away from the restrictions imposed on his highly individualistic attitudes and imagination by having to write stories conforming to the accepted pattern of what an sf story should be. In *The Voices of Time* mankind is shown to have overreached itself in its tampering with nature and, in Ballard's conception, the natural order of things; its just nemesis is upon it, and from outer space a radio signal broadcasts a count-down for the end of the universe.

In *The Watch-Towers,* we find a story representing the start of Ballard's next phase. Here strange watch-towers have appeared all over Earth. Hardly any explanation is given in the narrative for their appearance; as symbols they are not obscured by phoney rationalisation. They do nothing, but society is thrown into disorder merely by their presence and all the characters feel guilty without knowing why. This is a straight allegory owing much more to Kafka than to magazine sf.

As well as the stories mentioned above, the collection contains the lyrical fantasy *The Garden of Time* and *Chronopolis* (about a future where all methods of time-telling have been banned).

Ballard has progressed in many ways since these stories were first published, but the collection is still one of the best we have had since sf began.

Isaac Asimov has always been one of my favourite Old Guard writers. He writes intelligently, unpretentiously and entertainingly about subjects he knows something about. Panther have reprinted three more of his novels in bold, new covers that bear the slogan ASIMOV and the title. Things have come a long way to reach the point where a magazine sf writer is sufficiently well-known to the general public to get this kind of presentation. The novels are *The End of Eternity, The Naked Sun* and *The Stars Like Dust* (3s. 6d. each).

Steppenwolf (Penguin, 3s. 6d.) by Herman Hesse is a novel that might interest some readers. It is a light novel for Hesse (best known to the sf fan for his highly abstract and intellectual novel *Magister Ludi—The Bead Game*) about a man who believes he is a werewolf. Man and beast struggle in him and the novel is an allegory about the war between the beast and the spirit in man.

Jorge Luis Borges's *Fictions* (*Ficciones,* originally) has recently been published in the Calder Jupiter Books series at 6s. 6d. Borges's vision is earthier than Kafka's and his style is wittier. Borges writes what he calls 'condensed novels'. He argues, with some truth, that since the essence of most novels can be told in a few minutes (to quote the blurb) it shouldn't be necessary to give the whole book but only a description or review of it or essay about it. Therefore in here you will find such condensed masterpieces as *The Library of Babel, The Circular Ruins, The Babylon Lottery,* already familiar to readers of F & SF and ENCOUNTER. These stories are heady things, almost hallucinogenic in their effect. I believe a longer essay on Borges is planned for a future issue, so I'll content myself by recommending them to anyone who likes to read the work of a really imaginative mind.

It's not often I get quite such an opportunity to go from the sublime to the ridiculous, but it's happening now and I'm grinning as I write. The joke in question is Ray Cummings's *Tama of the Light Country* (Ace Books, 40c.). The perversion of the word 'classic' to mean 'old' is complete here, for the story is published in the Ace SF Classic series. It is hard to guess who reads these reprinted pulp

stories of thirty or forty years ago, aside from a few youngsters and dedicated oldsters, but their availability at least makes it easier for some of us to realise just why the current Old Guard (Heinlein, Blish, Campbell *et al*) was welcomed with such enthusiasm in the 'thirties and 'forties and what a great advance they were on writers of Cummings's calibre.

I believe that a long article on Philip K. Dick is in preparation, too, so I will only briefly recommend an sf author who has appeared far too infrequently in this country. Try *Dr. Bloodmoney (Or How We Got Along After The Bomb)* (Ace, 40c.), which utilises many of the standard devises of an sf story to make a number of satirical digs at current institutions and kinds of people. The 'Hugo' winning *The Man in the High Castle* (Popular Library, 50c.) studies an America subjugated by Japan and Germany who are the victors in a World War II that went their way. *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (Doubleday, $4.95) takes another dig at the American Way of Life but also questions the nature of reality. Satirical, philosophical, slightly cranky, this is an uneven book, but much, much better than most sf published recently.

I had hoped to review *The Best Sf Stories of Brian Aldiss* (Faber, 21s.) and John Brunner's latest novel from Faber in the last issue or in this, but copies have not yet been received. Blame the publisher, not me.

ROSE AMONG WEEDS

Langdon Jones

ALTHOUGH IT SEEMS an eternity ago, I was once an enthusiastic collector of science fiction magazines, on which I spent a considerable proportion of my wages, and I remember staggering home from musty bookshops with piles of battered and lurid publications in my arms. Among one of these piles one day I found a copy of

AUTHENTIC no. 31. AUTHENTIC began its inauspicious career with, what I'm sure is a very exciting story, *Mushroom Men from Mars,* and continued much in the same fashion. By its 31st issue it had improved—but not much. But I still have the copy; it is lying on my desk at this moment. In appearance it is much the same as the other issues of about that period, except that whereas the cover picture usually showed rather poorly executed pictures of spaceships, this one has other elements, equally poorly drawn. A ballerina is standing (in a physically impossible position) regarding what would normally be her reflection in a large mirror. But, looking back at her is the face of an old hag with flowing, grey hair, and two large growths on her brow. Above the mirror appears a rose, bleeding rather ostentatiously on to a set of equations written on the floor.

This was the issue that contained the finest story that AUTHENTIC was ever to publish—a story that justified all the mediocrity that preceded and was to follow it. People who have read that issue will be already skipping this passage to see if it's true that the story is *really* going to see print again, after all these years.

It is. The story is *The Rose* by Charles L. Harness, and is published by Compact Books at 3/6.

AUTHENTIC no. 31 was published on March 15th, 1953. *The Rose* was clearly ahead of its time. The reaction of some readers in the letter columns of succeeding issues was one of hostile bewilderment. And after that, inexplicably, *The Rose* suffered complete neglect.

I was so baffled by this neglect that I went as far as to begin transferring the story to duplicator stencil so that I could print and distribute it on an amateur basis. So you can't expect an objective review from me!

But now, fortunately, this labour of love is no longer necessary. The combination of fortuitous circumstances and an intelligent publisher has ensured that at last, after twelve years of disgraceful obscurity, the story will now see, in a respectable form, the light of day.

It would be something of an insult to the story to attempt any kind of potted résumé of its many diverse elements. Superficially, it represents the ultimate confrontation of

science and art, and is based hauntingly around Wilde's story of the student and the nightingale. The student wishes to join the dance, but to gain admission he has to display a red rose; the only roses in the garden are white. The nightingale thrusts her breast on the thorn of a white rose, her death turning it red. This story is worked out in allegorical form by Harness, who uses all his talent to create the best work he has ever written. We have the composer, Anna van Tuyl, tormented by her own deformity; Ruy Jacques, the extravagant artist, a torment to his wife Martha, a mathematician who is working on the dangerous Sciomnia equations. The story itself is, as may be expected from Harness, incredibly extravagant, but however unlikely some of the ideas and events, this just adds to the almost surrealistic atmosphere of the work. Whereas many of Harness' trademarks in other stories are often rather intrusive, here, each one heightens the great emotional effect. One of the most fascinating aspects of *The Rose* is the construction of the story. The plot is extremely complex, but remains absolutely lucid all the way through, and all its elements are finally reconciled in the very last word—which is 'rose'.

The reader of 'hard' sf need not run away from this one. *The Rose* is pure science fiction, and yet achieves a great emotional effect—rather like *The City and the Stars,* except that the difference between Clarke's novel and *The Rose* is the difference between a child's drawing and a painting by Klee.

This, in case you hadn't noticed, is a rave review. Anybody who cares a jot for sf should go out and buy this book. They will then have the pleasure of reading one of the best works of science fiction. *The Rose* is my own favourite—out of all sf—and I think that most people will share my high regard.

So, while you remember, put down this magazine and pay a visit to your local newsagent. If *The Rose* isn't there (you can't miss it, it has a large—non-bleeding—rose on the cover) then order it. You won't be disappointed.

Langdon Jones

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BRISTOL and District SF Group. Recently formed this group warmly invites new members in this area. SAE for details to A. Walsh, 61 Halsbury Road, Bristol 6.

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