NEW WORLDS 1

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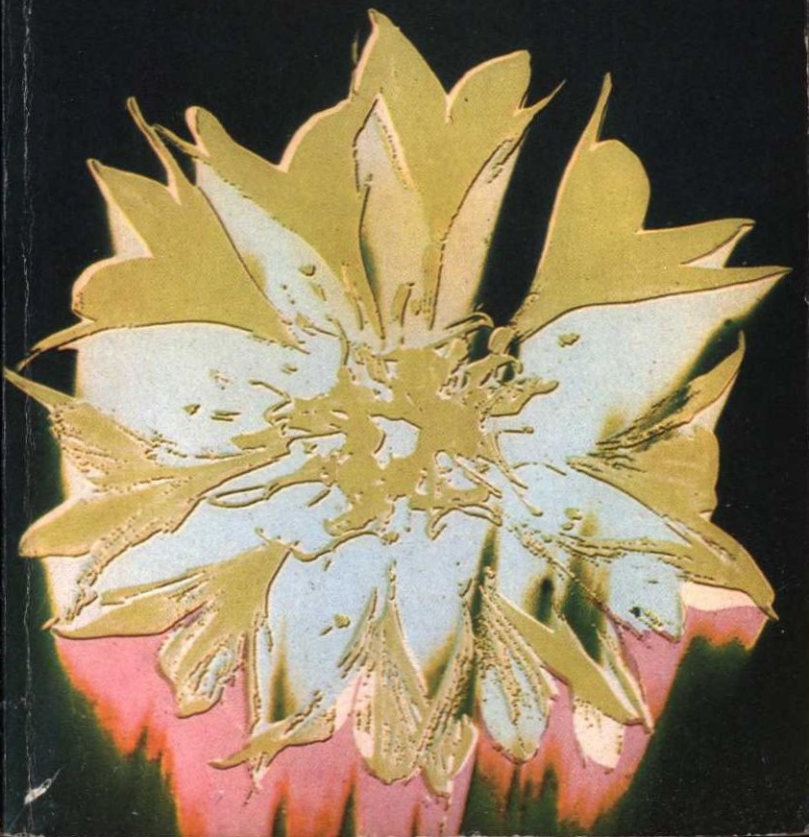
Edited by **MICHAEL MOORCOCK**



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Edited by Michael Moorcock

NEW WORLDS has achieved an enviable and well deserved reputation as Britain's foremost science fiction magazine. It now makes its first appearance as a quarterly publication in paperback book format.

Among the contributors to this issue are:

J. G. BALLARD
BRIAN W. ALDISS
THOMAS M. DISCH
JOHN SLADEK
KEITH ROBERTS
LANGDON JONES

Also by Michael Moorcock and available in Sphere Books

THE SHORES OF DEATH
THE WINDS OF LIMBO
THE BLOOD RED GAME

NEW WORLDS 1

NEW WORLDS QUARTERLY

EDITED BY
MICHAEL MOORCOCK

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No. 1

INTRODUCTION
MICHAEL MOORCOCK

Many readers already know that New Worlds has been running since 1946 and that, therefore, this is our 25th year of publication. New readers will perhaps have heard of New Worlds or read our anthologies (or stories anthologised from our pages), some may have been regular readers before the series of bans curtailed our newsstand distribution in the U.K. and elsewhere, a few others may have managed to get New Worlds regularly and so be prepared for this return to what is effectively our pre-1967 format. This introduction is chiefly for new readers and will fill in some of the background to our recent history.

There have been three Nebula Awards given to stories originally published in New Worlds – for my own *Behold the Man*, for Delany's *Time Considered as a Helix of Semi-Precious Stones* and for Ellison's *A Boy and his Dog*. Some of the books originally published here include J. G. Ballard's *The Crystal World*, the large part of his new book *The Atrocity Exhibition* (pulped in its U.S. edition before publication, on the orders of a Doubleday executive who took exception to some of it – now due from Dutton in the U.S.); Aldiss's *Report on Probability A*, *Cryptozoic* (*An Age*) and *Barefoot in the Head*; Disch's *Echo Round His Bones* and *Camp Concentration*, Spinrad's *Bug Jack*

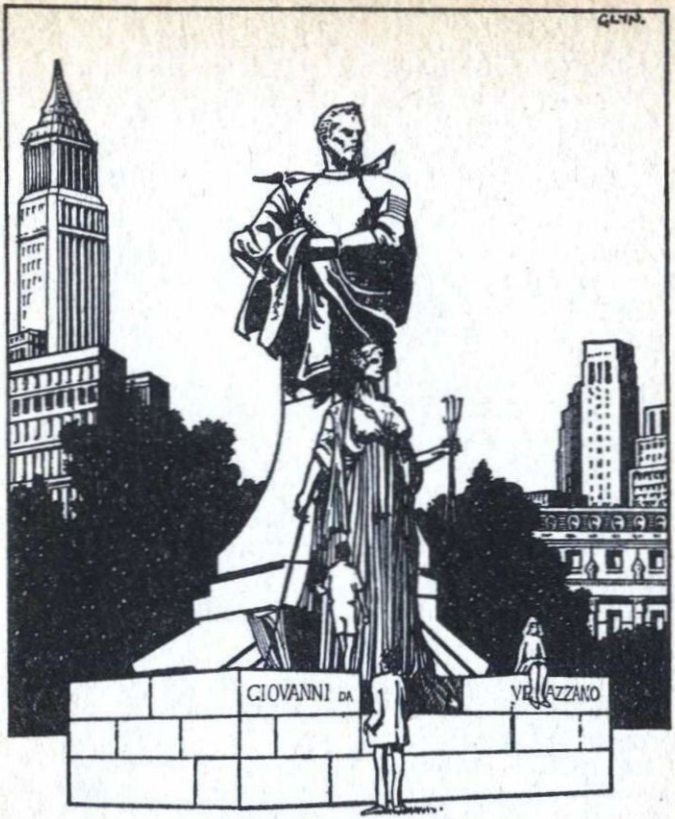
Barron and many others. In 1967, after receiving an Arts Council award and following the collapse of our previous distributors, New Worlds increased its page size and continued to run as a monthly (though with many interruptions largely caused by the refusal – on grounds of 'obscenity' – of various monopolistic distributors and representatives of governments to distribute it) until 1970 when the bans at last reduced its circulation to an unviable figure and made it impossible to carry on as a monthly magazine. The present format and publishing schedule seems to be the only one to ensure that a reasonable number of readers will be able to obtain it easily.

In America, in particular, there have been a good many assumptions made about our policy and many people seem to have got hot under the collar about what they claim is our 'destructive' attitude to sf. Those who have been angriest seem to be those who have been least familiar with New Worlds. Although identified with a so-called 'new wave', we have always preferred to publish as wide a spectrum of speculative and imaginative fiction as possible. We have encouraged experiment, certainly, but we have not published unconventional material to the exclusion of all else. It would have been stupid to do so since we ourselves and, we assume, our readers enjoy all kinds of fiction.

The range in this, the first of our quarterly editions, includes hard sf like *Escape from City 5* to fantasy like *The Lamia and Lord Cromis* or *The Day We Embarked for Cythera*. J. G. Ballard is represented by one of his fragmented stories, *Journey Across a Crater*, and by one of his more conventional stories, *A Place and a Time to Die* (both reprinted from earlier issues banned from full distribution in most English-speaking countries and published in book form for the first time). John Sladek's two stories, *Pemberley's Start Afresh Calliope* and *The Short Happy Wife of Mansard Elliot*, are equally representative of this talented author's range. The third – and only other – reprint from an earlier issue (included for similar reasons to those given already) is David Redd's *Prisoners of Paradise*, which, again, is 'straight' sf. Thomas M. Disch's *Angouleme* is one of a new series he is writing, set in a New York of the not too distant future, and is, in our opinion, one of his finest to date. Keith Roberts' *The God House* is also part of a series, this one concerning mankind's gradual climb back to civilisation after a nuclear war. We hope, in future collections, to pub-

lish further stories in both these series. M. John Harrison's *A Literature of Comfort*, which concludes this collection, is the first of what we hope will be a regular series of critical essays (not all of which will be polemical!) written or commissioned by Mr Harrison. From time to time we shall also, as has been our policy, include articles on new developments in the sciences or relevant experiments in the arts and shall welcome such non-fiction contributions as we shall welcome fiction or artwork. We think you will find this collection a stimulating one and, although we cannot publish letters, welcome any reaction you would care to give us. Contributions and letters may be sent to New Worlds, Sphere Books Ltd, 30–32 Grays Inn Road, London W.C.1, England.

Michael Moorcock



ANGOULEME

by THOMAS M. DISCH

There were seven Alexandrians involved in the Battery plot – Jack, who was the youngest and from the Bronx, Celeste DiCecca, Sniffles and MaryJane, Tancred Miller, Amparo (of course), and *of course*, the leader and mastermind, Bill

Harper, better known as Little Mister Kissy Lips. Who was passionately, hopelessly in love with Amparo. Who was nearly thirteen (she would be, fully, by September this year), and breasts just beginning. Very very beautiful skin, like lucite. Amparo Martinez.

Their first, nothing operation was in the East 60s, a broker or something like that. All they netted was cufflinks, a watch, a leather satchel that wasn't leather after all, some buttons, and the usual lot of useless credit-cards. He stayed calm through the whole thing, even with Sniffles slicing off buttons and *soothing*. None of them had the nerve to ask, though they all wondered, how often he'd been through this scene before. What they were about wasn't an innovation. It was partly that, the need to innovate, that led them to think up the plot. The only really memorable part of the holdup was the name laminated on the cards, which was, weirdly enough, Lowen, Richard W. An omen (the connection being that they were all at the Alexander Lowen School), but of what?

Little Mister Kissy Lips kept the cufflinks for himself, gave the buttons to Amparo (who gave them to her uncle), and donated the rest (the watch was a piece of crap) to the Conservation booth outside the Plaza right where he lived.

His father was a teevee executive. In, as he would quip, both senses. They had got married, his Mama and Papa, young and divorced soon after but not before he'd come to fill out their quota. Papa, the executive, remarried, a man this time and somewhat more happily. Anyhow it lasted long enough that the offspring, the leader and mastermind, had to learn to adjust to the situation, it being permanent. Mama simply went down to the Everglades and disappeared, sploosh.

In short, he was well to do. Which is how, more than by overwhelming talent, he got into the Lowen School in the first place. He had the right kind of body though, so with half a desire there was no reason in the city of New York he couldn't grow up to be a professional dancer, even a choreographer. He'd have the connections for it, as Papa was fond of pointing out.

For the time being, however, his bent was literary and religious rather than balletic. He loved, and what seventh grader doesn't, the abstracter foxtrots and more metaphysi-

cal twists of a Dostoevsky, a Gide, a Mailer. He longed for the experience of some vivider pain than the mere daily hollowness knotted into his tight young belly, and no weekly stomp-and-holler of group therapy with other jejune eleven-year-olds was going to get him his stripes in the major leagues of suffering, crime and resurrection. Only a bona fide crime would do that, and of all the crimes available murder certainly carried the most prestige, as no less an authority than Loretta Couplard was ready to attest, Loretta Couplard being not only the director and co-owner of the Lowen School but the author, as well, of two nationally televised scripts, both about famous murders of the 20th Century. They'd even done a unit in social studies on the topic: A History of Crime in Urban America.

The first of Loretta's murders was a comedy involving Pauline Campbell, R.N. of Ann Arbor, Michigan, circa 1951, whose skull had been smashed by three drunken teenagers. They had meant to knock her unconscious so they could screw her, which was 1951 in a nutshell. The 18-year-olds, Bill Morey and Max Pell, got life; Dave Royal (Loretta's hero) was a year younger and got off with 22 years.

Her second murder was tragic in tone and consequently inspired more respect, though not among the critics, unfortunately. Possibly because her heroine, also a Pauline (Pauline Wichura), though more interesting and complicated, had also been more famous in her own day and ever since. Which made the competition, one best-selling novel and a serious film biography, considerably stiffer. Miss Wichura had been a welfare worker in Atlanta, Georgia, very much into environment and the population problem, this being the immediate pre-REGENTS period when anyone and everyone was legitimately starting to fret. Pauline decided to do something, viz., reduce the population herself and in the fairest way possible. So whenever any of the families she visited produced one child above the three she'd fixed, rather generously, as the upward limit, she found some unobstrusive way of thinning that family back to the preferred maximal size. Between 1989 and 1993 Pauline's journals (Random House, 1994) record twenty-six murders, plus an additional fourteen failed attempts. In addition she had the highest welfare department record in the U.S. for abortions and sterilizations among the families whom she advised.

"Which proves, I think," Little Mister Kissy Lips had explained one day after school to his friend Jack, "that a murder doesn't have to be of someone *famous* to be a form of idealism."

But of course idealism was only half the story; the other half was curiosity. And beyond idealism *and* curiosity there was probably even another half, the basic childhood need to grow up and kill someone.

They settled on the Battery because: (1) none of them ever were there ordinarily; (2) it was posh and at the same time relatively (3) uncrowded, at least once the night shift were snug in their towers tending their machines. The night shift seldom ate their lunches down in the park.

And (4) because it was beautiful, especially now at the beginning of summer. The dark water, chromed with oil, flopping against the buttressed shore; the silences blowing in off the Upper Bay, silences large enough sometimes that you could sort out the different noises of the city behind them, the purr and quaver of the skyscrapers, the ground-shivering *mysterioso* of the expressways, and every now and then the strange sourceless screams that are the melody of New York's theme song; the blue-pink of sunsets in a visible sky; the people's faces, calmed by the sea and their own nearness to death, lined up in rhythmic rows on the green benches. Why even the statues looked beautiful here, as though someone had believed in them once, the way people must have believed in the statues in the Cloisters, so long ago.

His favourite was the gigantic killer-eagle landing in the middle of the monoliths in the memorial for the soldiers, sailors, and airmen killed in World War II. The largest eagle, probably, in all Manhattan. His talons ripped apart what was *surely* the largest artichoke.

Amparo, who went along with some of Miss Couplard's ideas, preferred the more humanistic qualities of the memorial (him on top, and an angel gently probing an enormous book with her sword) for Verrazzano, who was not, as it turned out, the contractor who put up the bridge that had, so famously, collapsed. Instead, as the bronze plate in back proclaimed:

IN APRIL 1524
THE FLORENTINE-BORN NAVIGATOR
VERRAZZANO
LED THE FRENCH CARAVEL LA DAUPHINE
TO THE DISCOVERY OF THE HARBOR
OF NEW YORK
AND NAMED THESE SHORES ANGOULEME
IN HONOR OF FRANCIS I KING OF FRANCE

'Angouleme' they all agreed, except Tancred, who favored the more prevalent and briefer name, was much classier. Tancred was ruled out of order, and the decision became unanimous.

It was there, by the statue, looking across the bay of Angouleme to Jersey that they took the oath that bound them to perpetual secrecy. Whoever spoke of what they were about to do, unless he were being tortured by the police, solemnly called upon his co-conspirators to insure his silence by other means. Death. All revolutionary organizations take similar precautions, as the history unit on Modern Revolutions had made clear.

How he got the name: it had been Papa's theory that what modern life cried out for was a sweetening of old-fashioned sentimentality. Ergo, among all the other indignities this theory gave rise to, scenes like the following: "Who's my Little Mister Kissy Lips!" Papa would bawl out, sweetly, right in the middle of Rockefeller Center (or a restaurant, or in front of the school), and he'd shout right back, "I am!" At least until he knew better.

Mama had been, variously, "Rosebud," "Peg O' My Heart" and (this only at the end) "The Snow Queen." Mama being adult, had been able to vanish with no other trace than the postcard that still came every Xmas postmarked from Key Largo, but Little Mister Kissy Lips was stuck with the New Sentimentality willy-nilly. True, by age seven he'd been able to insist on being called "Bill" around the house (or, as Papa would have it, "Just Plain Bill"). But that left the staff at the Plaza to contend with, and Papa's assistants, schoolmates, anyone who'd ever heard the name. Then a year ago, aged ten and able to reason, he laid down

the new law – that his name *was* Little Mister Kissy Lips, the whole awful mouthful, each and every time. His reasoning being that if anyone would be getting his face rubbed in shit by this it would be Papa, who deserved it. Papa didn't seem to get the point, or else he got it and another point besides, you could never be sure how stupid or how subtle he really was, which is the worst kind of enemy.

Meanwhile at the nationwide level the New Sentimentality had been a rather overwhelming smash. *The Orphans*, which Papa produced and sometimes was credited with writing, pulled down the top Thursday evening ratings for two years. Now it was being overhauled for a daytime slot. For one hour every day our lives were going to be a lot sweeter, and chances were Papa would be a millionaire or more as a result. On the sunny side this meant that *he'd* be the son of a millionaire. Though he generally had contempt for the way money corrupted everything it touched, he had to admit that in certain cases it didn't have to be a bad thing. It boiled down to this (which he'd always known): that Papa was a necessary evil.

This was why every evening when Papa buzzed himself into the suite he'd shout out, "Where's my Little Mister Kissy Lips," and he'd reply, "Here, Papa!" The cherry on this sundae of love was a big wet kiss, and then one more for their new "Rosebud," Jimmy Ness. (Who drank, and was not in all likelihood going to last much longer.) They'd all three sit down to the nice *family* dinner Jimmyness had cooked, and Papa would tell them about the cheerful, positive things that had happened that day at CBS, and Little Mister Kissy Lips would tell all about the bright fine things that had happened to *him*. Jimmy would sulk. Then Papa and Jimmy would go somewhere or just disappear into the private Everglades of sex, and Little Mister Kissy Lips would buzz himself out into the corridor (Papa knew better than to be repressive about hours), and within half an hour he'd be at the Verrazzano statue with the six other Alexandrians, five if Celeste had a lesson, to plot the murder of the victim they'd all finally agreed on.

No one had been able to find out his name. They called him Alyona Ivanovna, after the old pawnbroker woman that Raskalnikov kills with an ax.

The spectrum of possible victims had never been wide. The common financial types of the area would be carrying credit cards like Lowen, Richard W., while the generality of pensioners filling the benches were even less tempting. As Miss Couplard had explained, our economy was being refeudalized and cash was going the way of the ostrich, the octopus, and the moccasin flower.

It was such extinctions as these, but especially seagulls, that were the worry of the first lady they'd considered, a Miss Kraus, unless the name at the bottom of her hand-lettered poster (STOP THE SLAUGHTER of The *Innocents*!! etc.) belonged to someone else. Why, if she were Miss Kraus, was she wearing what seemed to be the old-fashioned diamond ring and gold band of a Mrs.? But the more crucial problem, which they couldn't see how to solve, was: was the diamond real?

Possibility Number Two was in the tradition of the original Orphans of the Storm, the Gish sisters. A lovely semi-professional who whiled away the daylight pretending to be blind and serenading the benches. Her pathos was rich, if a bit worked-up; her repertoire was archaeological; and her gross was fair, especially when the rain added its own bit of too-much. However: Sniffles (who'd done this research) was certain she had a gun tucked away under the rags.

Three was the least poetic possibility, just the concessionaire in back of the giant eagle selling Fun and Synthamon. His appeal was commercial. But he had a licensed Weimaraner, and though Weimaraners can be dealt with, Amparo liked them.

"You're just a Romantic," Little Mister Kissy Lips said. "Give me one good reason."

"His eyes," she said. "They're amber. He'd haunt us."

They were snuggling together in one of the deep embrasures cut into the stone of Castle Clinton, her head wedged into his armpit, his fingers gliding across the lotion on her breasts (summer was just beginning). Silence, warm breezes, sunlight on water, it was all ineffable, as though only the sheerest of veils intruded between them and an understanding of something (all this) really meaningful. Because they thought it was their own innocence that was to blame, like a smog in their souls' atmosphere, they wanted more than ever to be rid of it at times, like this, when they approached so close.

"Why not the dirty old man, then?" she asked, meaning Alyona.

"Because he *is* a dirty old man."

"That's no reason. He must take in at least as much money as that singer."

"That's not what I mean." What he meant wasn't easy to define. It was as though he'd be too easy to kill. If you'd seen him in the first minutes of a programme, you'd know he was marked for destruction by the second commercial. He was the defiant homesteader, the crusty senior member of a research team who understood Algol and Fortran but couldn't read the secrets of his own heart. He was the Senator from South Carolina with his own peculiar brand of integrity but a racist nevertheless. Killing that sort was too much like one of papa's scripts to be a satisfying gesture of rebellion.

But what he said, mistaking his own deeper meaning, was: "It's because he deserves it, because we'd be doing society a favour. Don't ask me to give *reasons*."

"Well, I won't pretend I understand that, but do you know what I think, Little Mister Kissy Lips?" She pushed his hand away.

"You think I'm scared."

"Maybe you *should* be scared."

"Maybe you should shut up and leave this to me. I said we're going to do it. We'll do it."

"To him then?"

"Okay. But for gosh sakes, Amparo, we've got to think of something to call the bastard besides 'the dirty old man'!"

She rolled over out of his armpit and kissed him. They glittered all over with little beads of sweat. The summer began to shimmer with the excitement of first night. They had been waiting so long, and now the curtain was rising.

M-Day was scheduled for the first weekend in July, a patriotic holiday. The computers would have time to tend to their own needs (which have been variously described as "confession", "dreaming", and "throwing up"), and the Battery would be as empty as it ever gets.

Meanwhile their problem was the same as any kids face anywhere during summer vacation, how to fill the time.

There were books, there were the Shakespeare puppets if you were willing to queue up for that long, there was always teevee, and when you couldn't stand sitting any longer there

were the obstacle courses in Central Park, but the density there was at lemming level. The Battery, because it didn't try to meet anyone's needs, seldom got so overpopulated. If there had been more Alexandrians and all willing to fight for the space, they might have played ball. Well, another summer. . . .

What else? There were marches for the political, and religions at various energy levels for the apolitical. There would have been dancing, but the Lowen School had spoiled them for most amateur events around the city.

As for the supreme pastime of sex, for all of them except Little Mister Kissy Lips and Amparo (and even for them, when it came right down to orgasm) this was still something that happened on a screen, a wonderful hypothesis that lacked empirical proof.

One way or another it was all consumership, everything they might have done, and they were tired, who isn't, of being passive. They were twelve years old, or eleven, or ten, and they couldn't wait any longer. For what? they wanted to know.

So, except when they were just loafing around solo, all these putative resources, the books, the puppets, the sports, arts, politics, and religions, were in the same category of usefulness as merit badges or weekends in Calcutta, which is a name you can still find on a few old maps of India. Their lives were not enhanced, and their summer passed as summers have passed immemorially. They slumped and moped and lounged about and teased each other and complained. They acted out desultory, shy fantasies and had long pointless arguments about the more peripheral facts of existence – the habits of jungle animals or how bricks had been made or the history of World War II.

One day they added up all the names on the monoliths set up for the soldiers, sailors, and airmen. The final figure they got was 4,800.

"Wow," said Tancred.

"But that can't be *all* of them," MaryJane insisted, speaking for the rest. Even that 'wow' had sounded half ironic.

"Why not?" asked Tancred, who could never resist disagreeing. "They came from every different state and every branch of the service. It has to be complete or the people who had relatives left off would have protested."

"But so *few*? It wouldn't be possible to have fought more than one battle at that rate."

"Maybe. . . ." Sniffles began quietly. But he was seldom listened to.

"Wars were different then," Tancred explained with the authority of a prime time news analyst. "In those days more people were killed by their own automobiles than in wars. It's a fact."

"Four thousand, eight *hundred*?"

". . . . a lottery?"

Celeste waved away everything Sniffles had said or would ever say. "MaryJane is right, Tancred. It's simply a *ludicrous* number. Why, in that same war the Germans gassed seven *million* Jews."

"Six million Jews," Little Mister Kissy Lips corrected. "But it's the same idea. Maybe the ones here got killed in a particular campaign."

"Then it would say so." Tancred was adamant, and he even got them to admit at last that 4,800 was an impressive figure, especially with every name spelled out in stone letters.

One other amazing statistic was commemorated in the park: over a 35-year period Castle Clinton had processed 7.7 million immigrants into the United States.

Little Mister Kissy Lips sat down and figured out that it would take 12,800 stone slabs the size of the ones listing the soldiers, sailors, and airmen in order to write out all the immigrants' names, with country of origin, and an area of five square miles to set that many slabs up in, or all of Manhattan from here to 28th Street. But would it be worth the trouble, after all? Would it be that much different from the way things were already?

Alyona Ivanovna:

An archipelago of irregular brown islands were mapped on the tan sea of his bald head. The mainlands of his hair were marble outcroppings, especially his beard, white and crisp and coiling. The teeth were standard MODICUM issue; clothes, as clean as any fabric that old can be. Nor did he smell, particularly. And yet. . . .

Had he bathed every morning you'd still have looked at him and thought he was filthy, the way floorboards in old brownstones seem to need cleaning moments after they've been scrubbed. The dirt had been bonded to the wrinkled flesh and the wrinkled clothes, and nothing less than surgery, or burning, would get it out.

His habits were as orderly as a polka-dot napkin. He lived at a Chelsea dorm for the elderly, a discovery they owed to a rainstorm that had forced him to take the subway home one day instead of, as usual, walking. On the hottest nights he might sleep over in the park, nesting in one of the Castle windows. He bought his lunches from a Water Street speciality shop, *Dumas Fils*: cheeses, imported fruit, smoked fish, bottles of cream, food for the gods. Otherwise he did without, though his dorm must have supplied prosaic necessities like Breakfast. It was a strange way for a panhandler to spend his quarters, drugs being the norm.

His professional approach was out-and-out aggression. For instance, his hand in your face and, "How about it, Jack?" Or, confidingly, "I need sixty cents to get home." It was amazing how often he scored but actually it wasn't amazing. He had charisma.

And someone who relies on charisma *wouldn't* have a gun.

Agewise he might have been sixty, seventy, seventy-five, a bit more even, or much less. It all depended on the kind of life he'd led, and where. He had an accent none of them could identify. It was not English, not French, not Spanish, and probably not Russian.

Aside from his burrow in the Castle wall there were two distinct places he preferred. One, the wide-open stretch of pavement along the water. This was where he worked, walking up past the Castle and down as far as the concession stand. The passage of one of the great Navy cruisers, the USS Dana or the USS Melville, would bring him, and the better part of the Battery, to a standstill, as though a whole parade were going by, white, soundless, slow as a dream. It was a part of history, and even the Alexandrians were impressed, though three of them had taken the cruise down to Andros Island and back. Sometimes, though, he'd stand by the guardrail for long stretches of time without any real reason, just looking at the Jersey sky and the Jersey shore. After a while he might start talking to himself, the barest whisper but very much in earnest to judge by the way his forehead wrinkled. They never once saw him sit on one of the benches.

The other place he liked was the aviary. On days when they'd been ignored he'd contribute peanuts or breadcrumbs to the cause of the birds' existence. There were pigeons, parrots, a family of robins, and a proletarian swarm of what

the sign declared to be chickadees, though Celeste, who'd gone to the library to make sure, said they were nothing more than a rather swank breed of sparrow. Here too, naturally, the militant Miss Kraus stationed herself when she bore testimony. One of her peculiarities (and the reason, probably, she was never asked to move on) was that under no circumstances did she ever deign to argue. Even sympathizers pried no more out of her than a grim smile and a curt nod.

One Tuesday a week before M-Day (it was the early a.m. and only three Alexandrians were on hand to witness this confrontation) Alyona so far put aside his own reticence as to try to start a conversation going with Miss Kraus.

He stood squarely in front of her and began by reading aloud, slowly, in that distressingly indefinite accent, from the text of STOP THE SLAUGHTER: "The Department of the Interior of the United States Government, under the secret direction of the Zionist Ford Foundation, is *systematically* poisoning the oceans of the World with so-called 'food farms'. Is this 'peaceful application of Nuclear Power'? Unquote, the *New York Times,* August 2, 2024. 'Or a new Moondoggle!!' *Nature World,* Jan. Can we afford to remain indifferent any longer. Every day 15,000 Seagulls die as a direct result of Systematic Genocides while elected Officials falsify and distort the evidence. Learn the facts. Write to the Congressmen. *Make your voice heard*!!"

As Alyona had droned on, Miss Kraus turned a deeper and deeper red. Tightening her fingers about the turquoise broomhandle to which the placard was stapled, she began to jerk the poster up and down rapidly, as though this man with his foreign accent were some bird of prey who'd perched on it.

"Is that what you think?" he asked, having read all the way down to the signature despite her jiggling tactic. He touched his bushy white beard and wrinkled his face into a philosophical expression. "I'd *like* to know more about it, yes I would. I'd be interested in hearing what *you* think."

Horror had frozen up every motion of her limbs. Her eyes blinked shut, but she forced them open again.

"Maybe," he went on remorselessly, "we can discuss this whole thing. Some time when you feel more like talking. All right?"

She mustered her smile, and a minimal nod. He went away then. She was safe, temporarily, but even so she waited

till he'd gone halfway to the other end of the seafront promenade before she let the air collapse into her lungs. After a single deep breath the muscles of her hands thawed into trembling.

M-Day was an oil of summer, a catalog of everything painters are happiest painting – clouds, flags, leaves, sexy people, and in back of it all the flat empty baby-blue of the sky. Little Mister Kissy Lips was the first one there, and Tancred, in a kind of kimono (it hid the pilfered Luger), was the last. Celeste never came. (She'd just learned she'd been awarded the exchange scholarship to Sofia.) They decided they could do without Celeste, but the other non-appearance was more crucial. Their victim had neglected to be on hand for M-Day. Sniffles, whose voice was most like an adult's over the phone, was delegated to go to the Citibank lobby and call the West 16th Street dorm.

The nurse who answered was a temporary. Sniffles, always an inspired liar, insisted that his mother – "Mrs. *Anderson*, of course she lives there, Mrs. Alma F. Anderson" – had to be called to the phone. This was 248 West 16th, wasn't it? Where *was* she if she wasn't there? The nurse, flustered, explained that the residents, all who were fit, had been driven off to a July 4th picnic at Lake Hopatcong as guests of a giant Jersey retirement condominium. If he called bright and early tomorrow they'd be back, and he could talk to his mother then.

So the initiation rites were postponed, it couldn't be helped. Amparo passed around some pills she'd taken from her mother's jar, a consolation prize. Jack left, apologizing that he was a borderline psychotic, which was the last that anyone saw of Jack till September. The gang was disintegrating, like a sugarcube soaking up saliva, then crumbling into the tongue. But what the hell – the sea still mirrored the same blue sky, the pigeons behind their wicket were no less iridescent, and trees grew for all of that.

They decided to be silly and made jokes about what the M *really* stood for in M-Day. Sniffles started off with "Miss Nomer, Miss Carriage, and Miss Steak." Tancred, whose sense of humor did not exist or was very private, couldn't do better than "Mnemone, mother of the Muses." Little Mister Kissy Lips said, "Merciful Heavens!" MaryJane

maintained reasonably that M was for MaryJane. But Amparo said it stood for "Aplomb" and carried the day.

Then, proving that when you're sailing the wind always blows from behind you, they found Terry Riley's day-long *Orfeo* at 99.5 on the FM dial. They'd studied *Orfeo* in mime class, and by now it was part of their muscle and nerve. As Orpheus descended into a hell that mushroomed from the size of a pea to the size of a planet, the Alexandrians metamorphosed into as credible a tribe of souls in torment as any since the days of Jacopo Peri. Throughout the afternoon little audiences collected and dispersed to flood the sidewalk with libations of adult attention. Expressively they surpassed themselves, both one by one and all together, and though they couldn't have held out till the apotheosis (at 9.30) without a stiff psychochemical wind in their sails, what they had danced was authentic and very much their own. When they left the Battery that night they felt better than they'd felt all summer long. In a sense they had been exorcised.

But back at the Plaza Little Mister Kissy Lips couldn't sleep. No sooner was he through the locks than his guts knotted up into a Chinese puzzle. Only after he'd unsealed his window and crawled out onto the ledge did he get rid of the bad feelings. The city was real. His room was not. The stone ledge was real, and his bare buttocks absorbed reality from it. He watched slow movements in enormous distances and pulled his thoughts together.

He knew without having to talk to the rest that the murder would never take place. The idea had never meant for them what it had meant for him. One pill and they were actors again, content to be images in a mirror.

Slowly, as he watched, the city turned itself off. Slowly the dawn divided the sky into an east and a west. Had a pedestrian been going past on 58th Street and had that pedestrian looked up, he would have seen the bare soles of a boy's feet swinging back and forth, angelically.

He would have to kill Alyona Ivanovna himself. Nothing else was possible.

Back in his bedroom, long ago, the phone was ringing its fuzzy nighttime ring. That would be Tancred (or Amparo?) trying to talk him out of it. He foresaw their arguments. Celeste and Jack couldn't be trusted now. Or, more subtly: they'd all made themselves too visible with their *Orfeo*. If

there were even a small investigation, the benches would remember them, remember how well they had danced, and the police would know where to look.

But the real reason, which at least Amparo would have been ashamed to mention now that the pill was wearing off, was that they'd begun to feel sorry for their victim. They'd got to know him too well over the last month, and their resolve had been eroded by compassion.

A light came on in Papa's window. Time to begin. He stood up, golden in the sunbeams of another perfect day, and walked back along the foot-wide ledge to his own window. His legs tingled from having sat so long.

He waited till Papa was in the shower, then tippytoed to the old secretaire in his bedroom (W. & J. Sloan, 1952). Papa's keychain was coiled atop the walnut veneer. Inside the secretaire's drawer was an antique Mexican cigar box, and in the cigar box a velvet bag, and in the velvet bag Papa's replica of a French dueling pistol, circa 1790. These precautions were less for his son's sake than on account of Jimmyness, who every so often felt obliged to show he was serious with his suicide threats.

He'd studied the booklet carefully when Papa had bought the pistol and was able to execute the loading procedure quickly and without error, tamping the premeasured twist of powder down into the barrel, and then the lead ball on top of it.

He cocked the hammer back a single click.

He locked the drawer. He replaced the keys, just so. He buried, for now, the pistol in the stuffs and cushions of the Turkish corner, tilted upright to keep the ball from rolling out. Then with what remained of yesterday's ebullience he bounced into the bathroom and kissed Papa's cheek, damp with the morning's allotted two gallons and redolent of 47–11.

They had a cheery breakfast together in the coffee room, which was identical to the breakfast they would have made for themselves except for the ritual of being waited on by a waitress. Little Mister Kissy Lips gave an enthusiastic account of the Alexandrians' performance of *Orfeo*, and Papa made his best effort of seeming not to condescend. When he'd been driven to the limit of this pretense, Little Mister Kissy Lips touched him for a second pill, and since it was better for a boy to get these things from his father than from a stranger on the street, he got it.

He reached the South Ferry stop at noon, bursting with a sense of his own imminent liberation. The weather was M-Day all over again, as though at midnight out on the ledge he'd forced time to go backward to the point when things had started going wrong. He'd dressed in his most anonymous shorts, and the pistol hung from his belt in a dun dittybag.

Alyona Ivanovna was sitting on one of the benches near the aviary, listening to Miss Kraus. Her ring hand gripped the poster firmly, while the right chopped at the air, eloquently awkward, like a mute's first words following a miraculous cure.

Little Mister Kissy Lips went down the path and squatted in the shadow of his memorial. It had lost its magic yesterday, when the statues had begun to look so silly to everyone. They still looked silly. Verrazzano was dressed like a Victorian industrialist taking a holiday in the Alps. The angel was wearing an angel's usual bronze nightgown.

His good feelings were leaving his head by little and little, like aeolian sandstone attrided by the centuries of wind. He thought of calling up Amparo, but any comfort she might bring to him would be a mirage so long as his purpose in coming here remained unfulfilled.

He looked at his wrist, then remembered he'd left his watch home. The gigantic advertising clock on the facade of the First National Citibank said it was fifteen after two. That wasn't possible.

Miss Kraus was *still* yammering away.

There was time to watch a cloud move across the sky from Jersey, over the Hudson, and past the sun. Unseen winds nibbled at its wispy edges. The cloud became his life, which would disappear without ever having turned into rain.

Later, and the old man was walking up the sea promenade toward the Castle. He stalked him, for miles. And then they were alone, together, at the far end of the park.

"Hello," he said, with the smile reserved for grown-ups of doubtful importance.

He looked directly at the dittybag, but Little Mister Kissy Lips didn't lose his composure. He would be wondering whether to ask for money, which would be kept, if he'd had any, in the bag. The pistol made a noticeable budge but not the kind of bulge one would ordinarily associate with a pistol.

"Sorry," he said coolly. "I'm broke."

"Did I ask?"

"You were going to."

The old man made as if to return in the other direction, so he had to speak quickly, something that would hold him here.

"I saw you speaking with Miss Kraus."

He was held.

"Congratulations – you broke through the ice!"

The old man half-smiled, half-frowned. "You know her?"

"Mm. You could say that we're *aware* of her." The 'we' had been a deliberate risk, an hors d'oeuvre. Touching a finger to each side of the strings by which the heavy bag hung from his belt, he urged on it a lazy pendular motion. "Do you mind if I ask you a question?"

There was nothing indulgent now in the man's face. "I probably do."

His smile had lost the hard edge of calculation. It was the same smile he'd have smiled for Papa, for Amparo, for Miss Couplard, for anyone he liked. "Where do you come from? I mean, what country?"

"That's none of your business, is it?"

"Well, I just wanted . . . to know."

The old man (he had ceased, somehow, to be Alyona Ivanovna) turned away and walked directly toward the squat stone cylinder of the old fortress.

He remembered how the plaque at the entrance – the same that had cited the 7.7 million – had said that Jenny Lind had sung there and it had been a great success.

The old man unzipped his fly and, lifting out his cock, began pissing on the wall.

Little Mister Kissy Lips fumbled with the strings of the bag. It was remarkable how long the old man stood there pissing because despite every effort of the stupid knot to stay tied he had the pistol out before the final sprinkle had been shaken out.

He laid the fulminate cap on the exposed nipple, drew the hammer back two clicks, past the safety, and aimed.

The man made no haste zipping up. Only then did he glance in Little Mister Kissy Lips' direction. He saw the pistol aimed at him. They stood not twenty feet apart, so he must have seen it.

He said, "Ha!" And even this, rather than being addressed to the boy with the gun, was only a parenthesis

from the faintly aggrieved monologue he resumed each day at the edge of the water. He turned away and a moment later he was back on the job, hand out, asking some fellow for a quarter.

PRISONERS of PARADISE

DAVID REDD

Shaamon was an artist, and she herself was a work of art. Her towering body had the same indefinable appealing quality as a sparkling jewel. She resembled a misty veil wound around itself to form a vertical cylinder of milky light, over thirty feet tall. The luminous gauze curtains within her body were in constant rippling motion, matching the aurorae that shimmered in the dark evening sky. Under a strong light she would have looked no more a work of art than a dusty cobweb, but in the eternal twilight she was truly beautiful.

Other veils were all around her, standing on the slopes of the mountain range, forming a forest of light. They seemed motionless, but they were working hard, slowly grinding away the rock where they stood. A veil's sharp cutting edges could eat through anything, given time. So the glowing veils spent their lives, making their pilgrimages to the mountains and patiently engraving their patterns on the stone.

Withdrawing her mind from the golden thoughtweb of ceaseless telepathic conversation, Shaamon glided to the edge of her circular engraving and stood at its perimeter. Solemnly she examined her work for any imperfections. Inside the circle, a strange series of dots and twisting lines had been carved into the limestone. Each mark had a definite relationship to the others, and even the depth of the grooves had a special significance.

It was complete. The balance of the curves around the centre had taken far longer than the rest of the pattern, but

the labour had been worthwhile. Everything was perfect.

A huge glowing column of milky light, staring at a weird design etched on to the rock – was that any different from a human artist studying his latest creation? Perhaps. Shaamon did not call her friends to admire her work, for art was a personal affair, and engravings were made for individual satisfaction, not for the pleasure of others. The carvings were simply an outlet for the creative impulses present in all worker females.

Shaamon let her thoughts spill into the open once more, altering the flavour of the telepathic mindpool. Every contributing veil was aware of her return.

Savouring the golden oneness for a moment, Shaamon informed the other veils that she had finished her engraving and was returning to her Nest. A great gust of farewell emotion from her friends flowed over her; she bowed before it in grateful acceptance. Rather reluctantly, she cut herself off from the golden mindpool and was alone in her own pale self. Then she tensed herself and leaped into the air, uncurling as she rose. Before she could fall she had spread out to her natural shape, a circular veil so thin as to be almost two-dimensional. She rippled her body and floated away from the hill, rising slowly. It was nice to fly again. She did not mind having to fold herself into a cylinder to work, but it had meant she could not fly while she was carving her pattern on the shadowy hillside.

Gaining speed, Shaamon soared through the air. Navigation was no problem, for the Nests were in direct line between the limestone hills and Elethe. She had just left the hills, and beyond the distant granite mountains was the dim blue radiance of Elethe, forever peering at her from behind the horizon.

Elethe was the sun, and if the veils had been astronomers they would have known it was dying.

Shaamon flew on towards her Nest at her customary speed. Above her the aurorae painted the dark sky with vivid fire, concealing all but the brightest stars. No clouds formed to hide the aurorae, for clouds needed warmth to exist, and warmth was something the failing sun could no longer send. The last snows lay where they had fallen a million years ago. And somewhere in the sky was the pale ghost of an aged moon.

Below Shaamon the landscape was tinted blue by the feeble rays of Elethe. The fiery aurorae sent strangely

coloured shadows racing over the snows. Shaamon saw hints of green and purple, haunting shades rarely seen except when some other light combined with that of Elethe. For the thousandth time she wished she could capture them and delight in them always, instead of having to see them flicker and vanish. But there was no way of engraving colours onto stone. Only her memory could preserve them.

Several luminous blue spires towered up from the ground below. Colonies of tiny communal animals lived in the spires, controlled by a race mind. By themselves the individual animals were completely unintelligent. Nearly all the world's surviving species had once been communal, and the veils themselves still lived in the routine of their forbears, although they were no longer a single multi-creature – they had separated eventually, and now the voluntary mindpools were the last vestiges of the veil race minds. Shaamon wondered whether the creatures beneath her would evolve in the same way. She sent a thought of greeting lancing down to the shining spires, and the race mind replied with a brief mental wave of friendly emotion.

The distant mountains were appreciably closer. Shaamon had no sense of time, living in a timeless world, so she felt no desire to speed up and reach the Nest sooner. She had no fear of predators to spur her on: they had become extinct so long ago that even the memory of them had disappeared.

Other memories had disappeared too. As she passed over a sparkling crystal forest she saw huge shapes slowly circling round a clearing. The clumsy amoeboids were taking part in one of their meaningless rituals.

The amoeboids had once been the world's greatest people. Their ancestors had visited the moon, in the days when Elethe shone brightly, but now they could only shamble through the gleaming crystals and ponderously dance beneath the blazing aurorae. They did not remember. They were no longer intelligent.

This was merely a part of the greater tragedy. Elethe was imperceptibly fading, century by century, and the planets were dying with their sun.

Shaamon and the other veils knew nothing of this. Only scientists could have read the signs and told them, and science was something their world no longer possessed.

She soared on over the snow, rippling gracefully, gliding silently through the thin air. The faint glow from her body

was visible from the ground, but now there were none to see her. Shaamon was passing over a great empty desert of blue-white dunes, where the only forms of life were grotesque, stunted half-plants that could hardly be called alive. She did not like this part of the homeward journey, but it was the last stage before coming within range of the Nest mindpool. Joining that magnificent golden thought-web was a moment to look forward to . . .

Something was happening.

Strange little vibrations came tingling through the atmosphere, impinging on her upper surface. This was sound, of a degree she had never experienced before, and the intensity was increasing rapidly. In the sky above her, a glowing red dot had appeared in the aurorae. It too was growing, rushing down towards her. Shaamon had heard of meteorites, had even seen one fall, but this was something different.

Frightened, Shaamon curled up into cylindrical form, letting herself fall to the blue-shadowed dunes below. The vibrations were disrupting her external nervous system, making it difficult to think. And what was that red dot flaming in the sky?

Approaching the ground, she opened out to break her fall, curled up again and dropped lightly on to the pearly-hued mixture of dust and snow. The vibrations were very powerful now, pounding into her helpless body. She instinctively retreated into a mindless state, waiting for the sound to cease. If it continued, she might even have to destroy her personality and encyst.

The noise suddenly boomed twice as loud and stopped altogether. She was grasped and hurled across the dunes, battered by the most terrible shock she had ever received. Somehow she survived, and found herself falling in a shower of sand and snow. Half the desert was in the air with her.

Unthinkingly she opened out to slow her fall, and was pelted by flying debris. Pain seared through her. Rippling frantically, she fought her way up into clear air and hovered there, grateful to be alive. She had received several painful gashes and bruises, but no serious injuries –

And the alien thoughts poured into her mind. In that instant Shaamon learned that the red falling star had been a *ship*, a tough shell which protected the soft thick body of its mis-shapen occupant. But the shell was broken, and the helpless creature inside was dying.

Where had this deformed monster come from? There was

nothing like it in her experience. Quickly Shaamon inserted herself into the rushing thought-stream of the dying monster. Her aching wounds were forgotten as she struggled to absorb the kaleidoscope of thought and emotion flowing over her. But the ideas were incomprehensible, and the bright colour-filled pictures were too strange for her to understand. Watching the mental chaos was no good. She would have to enter mindpool with the monster, and pray that she could break the contact before it died.

Shaamon hesitantly began merging personalities, forcing herself to open out to the alien mind. However, the creature did not respond; it made no effort to complete the linkage. This was terrible! She could not let it die without finding out anything more – she did not even know its name! Hurriedly, for the monster's thoughts were appreciably weaker, she projected an image of herself into its mind.

"*Christ, a bloody beer mat!*" The response was in a stylised sound-based framework, although the previous thoughts had been mainly visual and emotional.

Shaamon sensed that she had been compared with some object or animal known to the creature; a faint mental image was visible for a moment among the rapidly fading thoughts. She concentrated on that picture, setting off fiery little association-chains in the alien memory. Instinctively she sampled each chain.

There were peculiar designs on the "beer-mat" objects, and they had not been engraved. Permanent colours had been fixed to their surfaces!

The monster's thoughts had the dull red flavour of a creature very near death. Shaamon desperately searched through the flickering alien memories, sending up flurries of association-chains and pouncing on each one as it appeared. She followed the idea of reproduced pictures into the dead-end of microfilm, then discovered the art-form of painting. She almost lost it again before she realised what she had found. *Coloured substances could be used to form pictures!*

Suddenly Total Awareness of Death cascaded out from the alien brain, blotting out the monster's remaining thoughts and almost engulfing her. Clutching her new knowledge, Shaamon tore away, fleeing lest her own mind be destroyed as well.

And then Shaamon was alone once more, a shimmering veil hovering silently above the pearly dunes in the familiar dim blue light of Elethe, with the swirling aurorae blazing

above her. She gazed out over the desert. Far away, half buried in an immense crater, was the dark bulk of the shell that had become a tomb.

Rippling gently, without the energy to fly faster, Shaamon slowly resumed the journey to her Nest. She was limp after her mental exertions, but very satisfied. Although she had not learned the creature's origin, she had gained something far more important. *Painting* . . .

She happily wondered what new forms art would take, with colour as an added medium. It would seem very difficult at first, but artists of the future would use colour and think nothing of it. Why, it would add a whole new dimension to engraving! Shaamon could imagine patterns where grooves of the same depth would contain different colours. She was dazzled by the enormous possibilities opening before her.

And even the problem of finding colours was no problem at all. The mining veils had often found coloured minerals in their quest for salt. She had seen some yellow metal herself, and surely there must be other colours in the ground somewhere, judging by the thoughts of the dead monster. Yes, it would be easy enough to find the materials for painting. She wondered why nobody had ever thought of it before.

While she was still gliding over the desert, happy and excited with her new discovery, a brilliant golden mind touched hers. It was the Nest mindpool.

Her sisters began the usual recognition pattern – then stopped. Abruptly they withdrew, without giving her a chance to join. It was impossible – but it had happened!

Puzzled, dismayed, horribly frightened by the unthinkable rebuff, Shaamon sent a pleading thought into her sisters. "Why? What have I done?"

"You have changed," the mindpool answered. "You are not normal." The veils had sensed her mental turmoil in that momentary contact, and retreated for fear of contamination. A single insane mind could infect hundreds of others – had done, in the past.

"I have not changed! Let me in!" Shaamon replied angrily.

"We dare not. There is something peculiar about you. You are not the Shaamon who departed for the mountains. There was a violent shock wave before you arrived, and you were nearer to its source than we. If you have been

injured you must not join us. The safety of the Nest comes first."

"I am not injured!" They had been referring to mental wounds, not physical damage. "This is what happened. Listen!" And Shaamon told her sisters how she had discovered the dying monster and searched its mind.

". . . It contained so much knowledge I could never have learned it," Shaamon concluded. "I was lucky to find something we could understand, let alone something we need.

"And now that we know about painting, we can easily insert coloured materials into our engravings, and then our art will include relationships of colour as well as form . . ."

There was no detectable emotion from the mindpool, only the mere fact of its presence. It was apparently examining the possibilities of the situation, thinking on a level far above that of the individuals comprising it. Knowing this, Shaamon felt a ripple of fear. Through sheer instinct, the mindpool sometimes acted like the race mind it had once been, especially in times of stress, and she had an uncomfortable feeling she was responsible for a sudden tension in the thoughtweb. If her sisters were sufficiently worried about the effects of her discovery, they might revert to the habits of their ancestors –

Suddenly a burst of blinding energy flashed out from the mindpool. Caught by the terrible power from ten thousand veils, Shaamon was sucked into what had been the mindpool. Conscientiously, the race mind made her body continue gliding towards the Nest, just as She controlled all the other workers. The latent guardian of the veils had come into being once more.

"No difficulty about this affair," She mused. There had been similar cases in the past, when individual veils had stumbled on odd discoveries or thought up crazy ideas. "It's the old story all over again. This painting is innocent in itself, but it will lead to implements. And if the workers had tools they'd go soft and useless."

Quickly She went through Her memories of Shaamon's encounter, removing all ideas of painting and substituting a suitably edited version of events. At the same time She renewed the mental block against bringing metals out of the ground – the conditioning had grown weak with age.

A brief mental effort, and the task was done. All thoughts of painting had vanished forever. The race mind instantly

separated into Her component entities. The veils returned to normal.

Shaamon and her sisters were in golden mindpool, discussing her adventures.

"You had a lucky escape, Shaamon," thought one. "The shock wave could have killed you as well as the monster."

"I felt sorry for that creature," Shamon thought sadly. "I never learned what it was called, nor where it came from."

"We'll have to find out," her sisters told her. "We'll send out an expedition."

"That's a good idea," Shaamon replied, gliding down towards the friendly towers of the Nest. "A very good idea. I wonder what we'll find."

JOURNEY ACROSS A CRATER

j.g. ballard

Impact Zone

As he woke he felt the wet concrete cutting his face and wrists. In the drained light after the storm the causeways of a highway cloverleaf crossed the air above his head, the parapets at angles to each other like sections of ambiguous scenery. Feeling the rain-soaked fabric of his suit, he climbed the embankment. The half-built roadways formed a broken arena, the perspective model of a crater. An empty car was parked by the verge. He opened the door and sat behind the steering wheel. His hands moved across the unfamiliar instrument heads, trying to read this strange braille. As the radio blared into the damp air a young woman leaning on a balustrade fifty yards away ran back to the car. Her alert, childlike face stared at him through the windshield while he listened to the commentary. The giant fragments of the news report of a space disaster rolled across the deserted concrete.

No Entrance

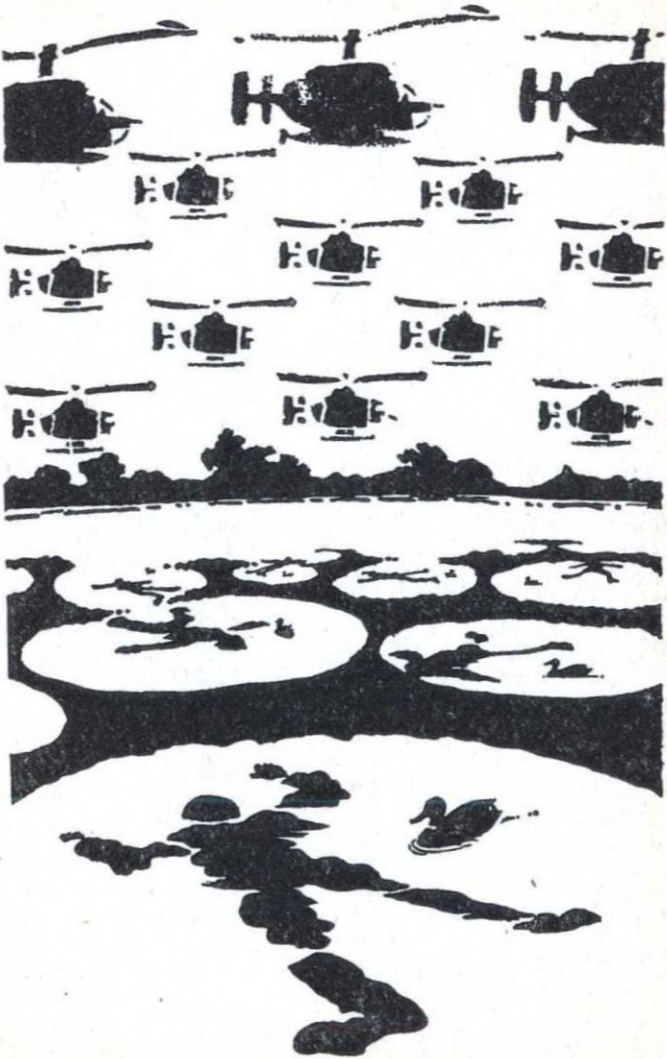
As they drove along the highway Helen Clement glanced down at the man in the tattered suit slumped in the passenger seat. His heavy face, unshaven for several days, now and then turned toward the window in a bored way. His only focus of interest seemed to be the instrument console of the car – he explored its vents and toggles like an aborigine obsessed with a bright toy. Who was he – a road accident casualty, the surviving passenger of an air crash, an eccentric rapist? During the storm she had sheltered below the overpass, had seen him appear in the centre of the concourse like a drowned archangel. Startled, she looked down as his strong hand gripped her left thigh.

Hell-Drivers

Through the plastic binoculars Vorster watched the last of the target vehicles burning in the centre of the stadium. As the artificial smoke rose into the evening air the crowd began to leave. The men's faces were pinched and sallow, as if dented by the collision impacts. Vorster studied the bandaged man still sitting on the bench in the drivers' enclosure. During the climax of the show, the reconstruction of a spectacular road accident, he assumed that the man was one of the drivers masquerading as an accident casualty. But he seemed barely aware of the ugly crashes re-enacted a few yards in front of him, staring emptily across the litter of beer bottles and tyres. With a grimace, Vorster handed the binoculars to the small boy waiting impatiently behind him. He stood up and began to move around the empty arena, wiping his damp palms on the suede leather of the camera case.

Aircrew Rescue

They walked along the airfield perimeter, avoiding the coils of barbed wire overgrown by grass. Vorster gestured at the shell of an abandoned helicopter. "As you can see, the runway leases expired years ago." He waited as the tall man in the shabby suit paced back to his Land-Rover. "What sort of aircraft are you planning to bring in?" The man was staring at his reflection in the rain-streaked windshield, as if reminding himself of his own identity. The planes of his face seemed to occupy different levels, like a papier-maché



pop art assemblage of a psychotic. His bloodshot eyes glanced unseeingly at Vorster. He turned away and began to scan the sky from one horizon to the other, as if marking out the landing traverses of enormous aircraft, an armada of Starlifters. Vorster leaned against the bonnet of the car, uneasily aware of the crude energy in these huge arms and shoulders. During the past hour he had deliberately spoken a meaningless jargon, but the man seemed able to make sense of his nonsense. Everything around him formed an element in a conundrum. On the centre seat lay a packet of promotional leaflets for a new airport terminal, an abstract design that looked like some unfittable piece in a Chinese puzzle. The same hemispherical module had begun to appear in a new advertising series on the billboards along the highway.

Foramenifera

Around them the light flared through the walls of the empty aquarium tanks. Helen Clement felt his hard fingers on her elbow as he steered her through this maze of greasy glass. Since giving Vorster the slip he had become more and more preoccupied, moving between this abandoned aquarium and the hospital casualty department. Why was he buying up these arbitrary leases on derelict sites all over the city? It was almost as if he were preparing a complex of 'landing zones'. She stumbled over a coil of rubber flex, then nursed her heel while he peered into the murky water in the tanks. Varying levels: fragments of a quantified womb, entry points through the foramens of memory and desire.

Nutrix Corporation

She sat in front of the dressing table, listening to the radio report of the lost space capsule. She glanced at the mirror, and involuntarily cupped her hands over her small breasts. He was staring at her body with an almost clinical detachment, as if measuring her abdomen and buttocks for yet another new perversion. All week, as they lay on the bed in this rented apartment, their acts of intercourse had become more and more abstracted. These strange perversions had at first disgusted her, but she now realised their real identity – bridges across which he hoped to make his escape. She

switched off the radio when the newscast ended. Trying not to flinch, she waited as his strong hands moved across her body.

Unidentified Flying Object

As they drove along the coast road Dr Manston pointed out the sand-bars to Vorster. "The capsule was punctured during its re-entry orbit. It's just possible that he escaped alive, though God only knows what happened to his mind in those last moments – you remember the reports of the Russian cosmonaut Ilyushin going insane." He stopped the car on a water-logged jetty. They stepped out and walked along the wet sand toward the pieces of debris. Dr Manston stooped to pick up a crushed mollusc. "After all, when one thinks about it, we know very little about the real effects of a disaster in space, the effects upon us, that is. One can see the disaster mimetised in terms of faulty stair angles, advertising campaigns that misfire, unsatisfactory sexual relationships, the defective arithmetic of everyday life. You said yourself that it's been a strange week in many ways. Incidentally, who is this fellow you've been following around?"

Particle Physics

Vorster watched the paraplegics racing their wheelchairs around the basketball field. Two years earlier, while driving home one evening, he had seen Cosmos 253 breaking up on re-entry. For half a minute the sky had been filled with hundreds of glowing fragments, like an immense air force on fire. Vorster stood up as the audience cheered, and walked out among the players. The man in the shabby suit was rapidly wheeling a startled player toward the exit. What was he doing here, at a hospital for injured aircrew?

Connections, only connections

Dr Manston walked through the deserted table tennis rooms. Through the rain-streaked windows he could see the perimeter of the airfield and the beach beyond. He opened the

door of the disused conservatory. The 'machine' which Vorster had described lay across a glass table, display screens around it. Dr Manston stared down at the collection of items, and then watched the solitary figure moving through the rain along the beach. He beckoned Helen Clement through the door. He waited as her nervous eyes searched the items on the table, as if hunting for the residues of misplaced affections.

Junction Makers

Dr Manston indicated the items: (1) Photograph of partly constructed motorway cloverleaf, concrete embankments exposed in transverse section, labelled 'Crater'; (2) Reproduction of Salvador Dali's *Madonna of Port Lligat*; (3) 500 imaginary autopsy reports of the first Boeing 747 air disaster; (4) Sequence of perspective drawings of corridors at the Belmont asylum; (5) Facial grimaces, during press conference, of Armstrong and Aldrin; (6) List of pH levels of settling beds, Metropolitan Water Board Reservoir, Staines; (7) Terminal voice-print, self-recorded, of an unidentified suicide; (8) The market analysis of a new hemispherical building-system module.

Space Platform

Dr Manston glanced sympathetically at the young woman. "Perhaps together they make up a love poem to yourself, Helen. On a more prosaic level they seem to represent the components of a strange kind of 'space vehicle' – literally, a device for moving through space in every sense of that term: figurative, dimensional, metaphorical. A far more powerful vehicle than any astronaut's space ship." Dr Manston pointed to the solitary figure still combing the beach, his clothes drenched by the rain. An elaborate construction of drift-wood and nets had been built on the sand. "I assume that with one of these devices he plans to re-enter space."

Tracking Station

In the thin light of the hotel room she searched the drawers of the dressing table. The carpet and bedspread were covered with magazine photographs and advertising brochures, pages torn from a textbook of conical geometry. She picked up a poster advertising a new space film. His face stared out through the glassy lens of an astronaut's helmet. Had he really starred in this film, or was this just another of his strange manifestations? His personality seemed to touch everything at an oblique angle. Their own affair had been marked by the same ambiguities, the sense of his not being wholly there. Carrying the poster to the window, she looked down into the forecourt. Beyond the shadows of the sculpture garden he was pacing about on the floor of the drained swimming pool.

Equipment Failures

These equipment failures preoccupied him during this period of his search: *The drained swimming pool* – its rectilinear walls and canted floor expressed a profound disjunction of time and space, the rupture of the satellite capsule. *The breasts of Marilyn Monroe* – in the dissolving lipoids of the dead film star's breasts he saw the gradients of his own descent, his failed relationship with Helen Clement. *The dented automobile fender* – this contained the faulty geometry of his own skin areas, the unbearable asymmetry of posture and gesture.

Beckoning Glance

He waited on the kerb as the attendants helped the crippled young woman from her car into the art gallery. When they lifted the chromium trestle on to the chassis of the wheelchair the sunlight flashed around her deformed legs. Her knowing eyes, set in a hard, pallid-skinned face, saw him staring at the junction between her thighs. Beside him, Vorster murmured in a sharp aside: "I know her – Gabrielle Saltzman, you won't. . ." He pushed Vorster away and followed the crippled woman into the gallery. The sunlight pressed against his skin, lying over the bright pavement like excrement.

Road Runner

All day he had been driving around the city, following the white car and its crippled driver. At traffic intersections he stared at her toneless face, marked by a scar that smeared the right apex of her mouth across her cheek. Her powerful hands moved expertly through the gear changes. He followed her around the streets, from clinic to art gallery, watching the slightest inflexion of her face. Her right-handed gear changes formed a module of exquisite eroticism.

The Drive-in Death

From the balcony of his apartment he watched the woman through the eyepiece of Vorster's cine camera. She moved across the roof garden in the chromium wheel chair. Seated by her makeup case, she would suddenly pivot and writhe, her body almost shedding its skin in a savage rictus. In particular, these activities obsessed him: *Powdering her face* – caressed by the soft puff, the talc-impacted mouth scar described the geometry of the broken car fender, the uneven transits of his affair with Helen Clement. *Urinating* – the posture of her crippled body, supported on the overhead hand-pulleys, recapitulated the grotesque perspectives of the Guggenheim Museum, the time and space of Vorster's antagonism. *Masturbating* – as he watched the extensor rictus of her deformed spine he saw again the chromium pillars of a wrap-around windshield, the reverse thrust of a taxiing Boeing.

Salon Chatter

He leaned against the crashed car mounted on its plinth in the centre of the gallery and listened to the flow of small-talk. ". . . a sensor on the front bumper triggers a cine camera in the dashboard binnacle, giving you a complete motion picture record of the crash injury. The crashes of the famous, by the way, might find quite a market. Ultimately, a video-tape playback will allow you to watch your own death *live* . . ." Gabrielle Saltzman propelled herself into the gallery, her sharp face set in a grimace of hostility. He strolled over to her with an amicable smile. Her body emanated an intense and perverse sexuality.

Vectors of Eroticism

In the garage beside the swimming pool he examined the controls of her motor car. Vectors of eroticism: (1) the chromium clutch treadle on the right hand quadrant of the steering wheel; (2) the black leather hand rail below the door sill; (3) the control linkages of the brake treadle mounted on the ventral surface of the steering column; (4) the imaginary treadle mounted on the dorsal surface; (5) the felted surface of the foam-plastic back support; (6) the unworn cleats of the floor-mounted clutch pedal; (7) the silver armature of the clutch treadle; (8) the worn metal runners of the chromium seat trestle; (9) the unsymmetric imprints of buttock and thigh on the foam-plastic seat; (10) the moulded lateral depression for the spinal brace; (11) the leather surgical wedge on the right hemisphere of the seat; (12) the moulded conical depression for the left thigh harness; (13) the stained leather mounting for the seat urinal; (14) the steel funnel of the urinal; (15) the cracked lucite gate of the dashboard tissue dispenser.

Mammary Gland

With Gabrielle Saltzman he studied many breasts, the time and space of nipple and areola. Together they toured the streets in her white car, analysing these breasts: of store dummies, pubertal girls, menopausal matrons, a mastectomised air hostess. The soft belly of the lower mammary curvature described the ascending flight paths of the aircraft taking off from the runways at the airfield. The skies of his mind were filled with the geometry of these rising globes. Holding the sketchbook marked with these curves, he watched Gabrielle Saltzman manoeuvre the car through the crowded streets with her strong hands. She confided in him with droll humour: "My own mastectomy – left breast, by the way, a difficult decision to make – was done for cosmetic reasons. Can you work that into your advertising campaign? By the way, what exactly is the product?"

Going Down

In the powdery light the parked aircraft resembled giant clinkers. On the roof of the terminal building Vorster

searched the damp runways. They were strolling arm in arm like lovers through a secluded park. Gabrielle Saltzman jerking along in a nightmare hobble. Vorster rested his folder on the balcony rail. He studied the photographs. Sections of wall, wound areas, pieces of a satellite communications system, perineums, a deserted beach – elements in a weird conceptual art? Or the symbols in a new calculus of unconscious rescue? Clearly he was marooned in a world as hostile as any of Max Ernst's mineral forests.

Orbital Systems

Dr Manston gestured with the slide projector. Helen Clement sat in the passenger seat, the stub of her cigarette a wet mess between her fingers. "What these apparently obscene photographs represent are significant moments in a tragic psychodrama – for some reason pre-recorded. Miss Saltzman's role seems to be that of the crippled seductress, Madame Dali with a club foot. One can also regard the drama as a propulsion device . . ." Dr Manston stepped from the car and walked to the edge of the overpass. A hundred feet below them Vorster was standing on the parapet of the embankment, camera waiting on the rail in front of his chest.

Interlude

During this period of idyllic calm he and Gabrielle Saltzman moved together in a pleasant reverie of intimacy and warmth. In the gardens of the asylum they wandered through the patients, smiling at their empty faces as if they were servitors at a levee. As they embraced, the curved balcony of the disused terrace enclosed them like an amputated limb. The eyes of the insane watched them in intercourse.

Launch Area

He parked the heavy convertible among the dunes. The blue water of the deserted estuary moved between the concrete breakwaters like a broken mirror. The warm sunlight played

on the eroded surfaces. He began to help Gabrielle Saltzman from the car. The bright chromium flashed around his fingers as they touched her wrists. As he pushed her between the clumps of sun-bleached grass he was aware of Vorster moving between the concrete embankments on the beach. The uncapped lens of the Nikon flickered in the sunlight.

Quick

His feet raced across the unset cement as he propelled the chromium chair toward the overpass. On either side the concrete pillars formed the entrances to immense vaults. At the centre of the cloverleaf, where the surrounding embankments formed a familiar arena, he stopped and let the chair spin away in front of him. It careened to one side, spilling Gabrielle Saltzman across the wet cement. He stared down at her metal body-harness as the chromium wheels revolved in the sunlight. Fifty yards away Vorster was crouched on one knee, Nikon working in his hands. He began to approach, face hidden behind the camera, feet moving in oblique passage across the concrete like the stylised dance of a deformed machine. These transits formed an enscribed graphic glass, a caption that contained Gabrielle Saltzman's scream.

K-Lines

These wounds of Gabrielle Saltzman were keys to the locked air, codes that deciphered the false perspectives of time and landscape. He looked up at the sky. At last it was open, the bland unbroken blue of his own mind. Vorster was a few paces from him, face still hidden behind the camera. The flicker of the shutter destroyed the symmetry of the landscape.

Exit Mode

Stepping across Vorster's legs, he moved away from the two bodies. On the overpass Dr Manston and Helen Clement watched from the windows of their car. He walked across the arena and entered the arcade below the overpass, at last accepting its geometry of violence and eroticism.

THE LAMIA AND LORD CROMIS

•

M. JOHN HARRISON

1

Lord tegeus-Cromis, sometime soldier and sophisticate of Viriconium, the Pastel City, who imagined himself to be a better poet than swordsman, sat at evening in the long, smoky parlour of the Blue Metal Discovery, chief inn of Duirinish. Those among his fellow-customers who knew something of travelling – and there were not too many of them – regarded him with a certain respect, for it was rumoured that he had lately arrived from the capital, coming by the high paths through Monar, to Mam Sodhail and the High Leedale, which was no mean achievement. Winter comes early to the hills about Duirinish, and hard.

They watched him circumspectly. For himself, tegeus-Cromis found no similar interest in them, but sat with a jug of wine by his slim white left hand, listening to the north wind drive sleet across the bleak cobbles of Replica Square and against the bottle-glass windows of the inn.

He was a tall man, thin and cadaverous. He had slept little during his journey, and his green eyes were tired in the dark hollows above his high and prominent cheekbones.

He more a heavy cloak of bice velvet; a tabard of antique leather set with iridium studs; tight mazarine velvet breeches; and calf-length boots of pale blue suede. The

hand that curled round the jug of wine was weighted, according to the custom of the time, with bulky rings of non-ferrous metals intagliated with involved ciphers and sphenograms. Beneath his cloak, the other rested on the pommel of his plain longsword, which, contrary to the custom of the times, had no name.

Occupied by his wine, and by consideration of the purpose which had brought him there at such a cold time, he was not disposed to talk: a circumstance the local clientele – in the main fat merchants of the fur-and-metal trade, nouveau riche and pretentious – were loath to accept. They had twice invited him to sit with them around the massive roaring fireplace, eager to capture even so minor a lord. But he preferred to huddle in his cloak on the periphery of the room, in shadow. They left him to himself after the second refusal, whispering that the evening was chilly enough without his morose, ascetic features and his cold courtesy.

He was amused by their reaction. He ate a light meal, and afterwards took a measure of good cocaine from a small box of chased pewter, sniffing it carefully up, his smile faint and withdrawn. Evening wore into night, and he did not move. He was waiting for someone, but not for the woman in the hooded purple cloak who came in accompanied only by a gust of wind and a flurry of sleet, at midnight.

He raised his heavy eyelids and watched her in.

She threw back her hood; her hair spilled down; long and roan, blew about her delicate triangular face in the draught from the closing door. Her eyes were violet, flecked with colours he found it difficult to name, depthless. There were no rings on her fingers, and her cloak was fastened by a copper clasp of complex design.

It was plain that the merchants knew her, but their welcome was stiff, a concerted multiplication of double chins, a brief collective nod; and for a moment a slight but discernible sense of embarrassment hung in the hot thick air about the fire. She paid them little notice, and they seemed thankful. Her cloak whispered past them, and she whispered to the innkeeper, who, red-faced and perspiring, had thrust his flabby shoulders through the hatch that connected the parlour to his devils' kitchen.

When this exchange was done, and the serving hatch closed, she turned her attention to Cromis, slumped and still smiling faintly in his splendid cloak.

It was a strange look she gave him. In her queer eyes: habitual curiosity and blank indifference both, conflicting – as if she had lived many lives and metempsychoses under the Name Stars, seen the universal cycle through and again, but continued wearily about the surface of the world, waiting to be surprised by something. It was a strange look. Cromis met it openly, and was puzzled.

She came over to his table.

"Lady," he said, "I would stand, but—"

He indicated his little snuffbox, open on the table top. He saw that the clasp of her cloak was formed to represent mating dragonflies, or perhaps a complicated religious operating-symbol for ecstasy.

She nodded and smiled, her eyes unchanging.

"You are Lord tegeus-Cromis," she said. Her voice was unexpected, a rough, vibrant burr, an accent he could not place.

He raised his eyebrows. "The landlord?" he asked. She did not answer. "You flatter me by your attention," he said.

He poured her some wine.

"You had a scant reception from our good traders."

She took the cup and drank.

"All have made bids," she said, "as is their nature – to regard people as bales of fur, or ingots. (How do you regard people, lord?) Each has no wish that his friends discover that his bids were too low. Each therefore avoids me when in company of the others."

Cromis laughed. The merchants pricked up their ears. But since she did not laugh with him, and repeated the question he did not wish to answer, he changed the subject.

Later, he found that a great length of time had passed most pleasantly. He was puzzled with her yet, and wondered why she had picked him out. But he loved such company and loathed discourtesy, so he did not question her directly. The fire had died, the merchants had returned to their houses, the taverner hovered behind his hatch, amiable and yawning.

Suddenly she said to him:

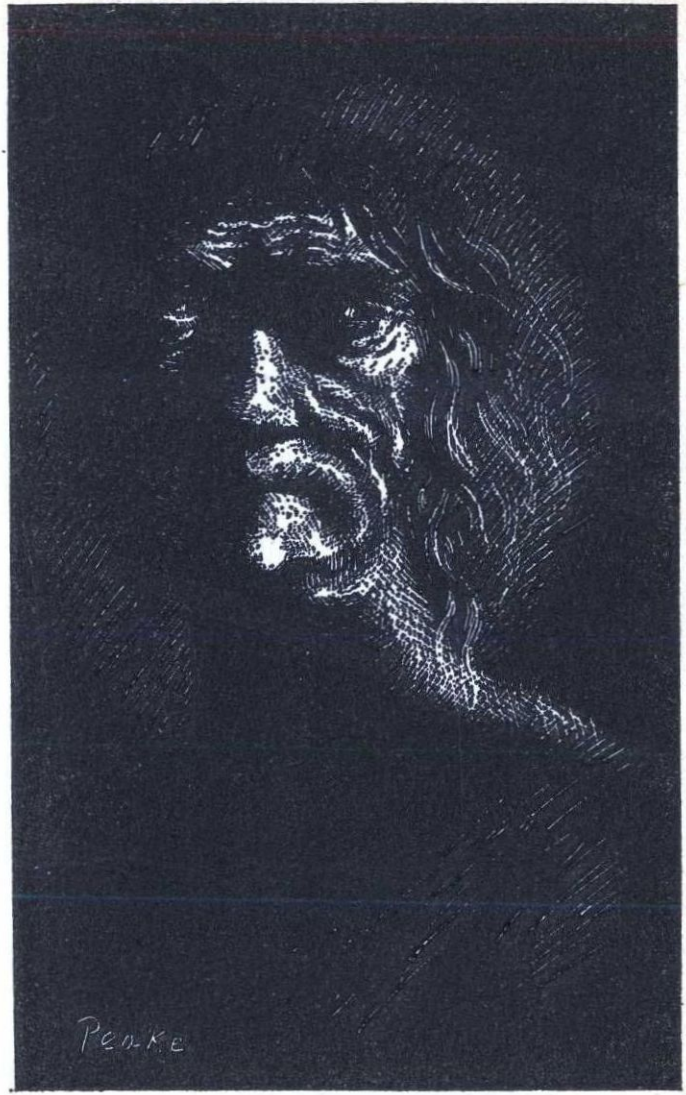
"Lord Cromis, you are here to hunt."

And, indeed, he was. He inclined his head.

"Do not."

"But, lady—"

"The *baan* has brought doom to many, and will make no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exception of yourself. Plainly, we have one of the Eight Beasts among us. Since it has chosen Duirinish for this incarnation, Duirinish must bear the brunt.

"I have no desire to see you brought maimed and destroyed from the Marshes, sir—"

At this, he showed his teeth, and fondled the hilt of the nameless sword, and laughed loudly enough to disturb the inkeeper's light sleep.

"My lord," she said. "If I presume?"

He shook his head.

"Please, that was churlish of me. Your anxiety – let me dispel it – two companions hunt with me. Of one—" Here, he said a name "—you will have heard. I thought so. We will lay your Beast."

And, remembering the personal fate he might or might not be heir to:

"Besides, there are reasons as to why I should meet this *baan*, if it is the one I suppose it to be."

He stood up. He was much taken with her, and her mysterious concern. He said with the grave politeness of his times:

"Lady, I have a comfortable room above. It is late. Should you wish, we could go there." And, having taken her arm, he asked, "Perhaps you would tell me your name?"

In the morning, he woke to an altercation in the yard below his window, and found her gone from his bed. Smoothing back the heavy greying hair that had escaped its suede fillet while he slept, he crossed the chilly oak floor and opened the shutters. A pale post-dawn light filtered into the room, softening for a brief time his features, which remained bleak despite the pleasures of the night.

Down in the yard, the unpredictable weather of early winter had abandoned sleet and now offered frost instead, riming it thick on the cobbles and the half-doors of the stables, stiffening their hinges, bleaching the breath of the horses. The air had a metallic smell, a faint bitter taste, a thin echo of the stink of the Marsh.

Several shouting, gesticulating figures were gathered about two tired, laden packhorses and a fine blood mare almost nineteen hands high. Cromis could gain no clue as to the precise nature of the melée, but the mare was plunging,

striking out, and he saw that two of the figures were clad in bright, clashing colours of fashionable Viriconium.

He closed the shutters gently, nodding to himself. Ignoring the subtle invitation of the pewter snuffbox – his habitual ennui having given way to a suppressed elation – he dressed quickly. He had this mannerism: as he went quietly down to the parlour to meet his visitors, his left hand strayed out unknown to him and caressed the black hilt of the sword that had been his doomed father's.

But his hands were still when Dissolution Kahn and Rotgob the dwarf, a mismatched enough couple, presented themselves at the parlour door, arguing over the stabling fees.

"But we *agreed* to share the expense—" This in a powerful but injured tone.

"Ha. I was drunk. And besides—" With a ready snigger "—I am a liar as well as a dwarf."

The Kahn was a massive man, heavy in the shoulder and heavier in the hip, with long sparse yellow hair that curled anarchically about his jowled and bearded features. His astonishing orange breeches were tucked into oxblood boots, his violet shirt had slashed and scalloped sleeves. A floppy-brimmed hat of dark brown felt, too small for his head, gave his face a sly and rustic cast.

"Every wench in the city knows *that*," he said, with dignity. "Oh, hello, Cromis. You see: I found the little brute and brought him."

Rotgob, leaning on the doorpost beside the giant, greasy brown hair framing a blemished, ratlike face, was clad all in scarlet, his padded doublet amplifying the disproportion of barrel chest and twisted, skinny legs. He sniggered. His teeth were revolting.

"Who found who, stupid? Who bailed you out, eh? Pig!" Limping grotesquely, he scuttled over to Cromis' breakfast table. "I did!" He ate a bread roll. "It was a molestation charge again, Cromis. Next time they'll have his knackers off. We came as soon as we could." He rapped the table and did a little gleeful dance.

Cromis felt his lips break into a smile. "Sit down and eat, please do," he invited, wishing he might overcome his nature and greet his curious friends with less reserve.

"Is it discovered, then?" asked the dwarf after they had finished, picking crumbs out of his moustache.

Cromis shook his head. "But I have heard rumours that

it is one of the Eight. It has struck five times, up near Alves in the centre of the city. They are much afraid of it here. I hope that it is the one I seek."

"They are cowards, merchants," said Dissolution Kahn.

"They are ordinary people, and cannot be held culpable for their fear—"

("Or anything else," interrupted the dwarf. He giggled.)

"—You will feel fear before we are finished, Kahn. You know that."

"Aye, perhaps. If it is that one I may—"

"The Sixth Beast of Viriconium," mused Rotgob: "Oh, you'll wet your drawers all right." Then: "It will be lairing in the Marsh. When do we start?"

"We must wait until it strikes again. I will have it put about that I am of the Sixth House, and then they will call me immediately." He laughed. "They will be glad to."

From a grossly ornamental sheath, Rotgob took a thing halfway between an extremely long stiletto and a rather short rapier, and, leering, began to whet it. It was as famous as his name and his unlovable profession.

"Then one more poor sod must die before we take the animal. That's a pity."

Looking at the little assassin, Cromis reflected that although gentler creatures lived, they had, on the whole, less character.

"I hope they're taking decent care of my mare," said Kahn. "She's a bit of a handful." A draught blew the smell of the Marsh strongly about the room. "No stink nastier," he observed, "and it upsets her."

2

Lord tegeus-Cromis spent the days that followed with the woman in the purple cloak, and he came to know her no better.

Once, they walked the spiral ascending streets near Alves, and stood on the walls of the city to catch glimpses through the rain of the Marsh in the east and the sea in the west; up there, she asked him why he wished so much to die, but, not having admitted it to himself before that moment, he could give no answer.

Once, he told her the following poem, which he had composed in the Great Rust Desert during winter, chanting it to

the accompaniment of a peculiar eastern instrument in a darkened room:

> Rust in our eyes . . . metallic perspectives trammel us in the rare earth north. . . . We are nothing but eroded men . . . wind clothing our eyes with white ice . . . We are the swarf-eaters . . . hardened by our addiction, tasting acids. . . . Little to dream here, our fantasies are iron and icy echoes of bone . . . Rust in our eyes, we who had once soft faces.

Once, she said to him, "The *baan* will kill you. Let someone else dispose of it." And he replied, "Had a man said that to me, I would have spat at his feet. Lady, as you know perfectly well, I am one of the Sixth House; the Sixth Beast destroyed my father, and he brought down the Beast; for a hundred generations and a hundred of its incarnations, the Beast has felled an ancestor of mine and died in doing so.

"It may be my fate to destroy it once and for all, by surviving the encounter. Lady, that is a matter of chance; but should the *baan* of Duirinish be that Beast, my duty is not."

Once, he came to understand the expression in her queer eyes, but when the dawn came, he found that he had forgotten the revelation.

And the night before they called him to see a dead man in a dull house on a quiet cobbled street by Alves, she begged him to leave the city, lest the *baan* be the doom of them both; a plea that he quite failed to understand.

In a chamber at the top of the house—

A place of midnight-blue silk drapes and small polished stone tables. There was a carpet like fine thick cellar mould, with an unwelcome stain. One stone wall had no hangings: to it were pinned charts of the night sky, done in a finicky hand. Beneath an open skylight, which framed the fading Name Stars and admitted almost reluctantly a clammy dawn – the corpse.

It had tumbled over a collection of astronomical instruments and lay clumsily among them, taking serene, empty-eyed measurement of a beautiful, complicated little orrery.

Cromis, like a crow in his black travelling cloak, noted the heavy fur robe of the dead astronomer, the fat, beringed fingers and the fatter face; the greying flesh with its con-

sistency of coarse blotting paper; the messy ringlets that covered what remained of the skull.

Even in death, the merchant had a faint air of embarrassment about him, as if he still sat by the fire in the Blue Metal Discovery on a sleety night, avoiding the eyes of the woman in the hooded purple cloak.

He would suffer no further embarrassment, for the top of his head had been torn raggedly off. Schooled in the signs, and having no need of a closer look, Cromis of the Sixth House knew that the ruined head was as empty as a breakfast egg, the painstaking mercenary brain – stolen?

He took up the orrery and absently turned the clockwork that set it in motion; jewelled planets hurried whirring round the splendid sun. Unconscious of the impression he had made on the third occupant of the room, he asked:

"Was nothing seen?"

Eyeing warily the lord who played so callously with a dead man's toys, the young uncomfortable proctor who had discovered the outrage shuddered and shook his head.

"No, my lord—" His eyes ranging the chamber, avoiding at all costs the corpse "—but a great noise woke some neighbours." He could not control his hands or his tremors.

"You have alerted the gatewardens?"

"Sir, they have seen nothing pass. But—"

"Yes?" impatiently.

"A fresh trail leads from the city, of blood. Sir?"

"Good."

"Sir? Sir, I am going to be sick."

"Then leave."

The youth obeyed, and, gazing back over his shoulder at the grim corpse and grimmer avenger, stumbled through the door with the expression of a rabbit confronted by two ferrets. Cromis followed the motion of the planets through a complete cycle.

A commotion on the stairs.

"What a mess out there," said Rotgob the dwarf, bursting in and strutting round the stiff while Dissolution Kahn studied puzzledly the star charts: "That is a very unprofessional job. Somebody is far too caught up with his own definition of death. Too much emotion to be art."

"You and the Kahn had better make ready our horses."

In the trembling light after dawn, they left the Stony City and rode into the north, following a clear spoor.

Rivermist rose, fading toward the bleak sky in slender spires and pillars, hung over the slow water like a shroud. Duirinish was silent but for the tramping of guards on the battlements. A heron perched on a rotting log to watch as they forded the northern meander of the Minfolin. If it found them curious it gave no sign, but flapped heavily away as the white spray flew from trotting hooves.

Dissolution Kahn rode in the lead with wry pride, his massive frame clad in mail lacquered cobalt blue. Over the mail he wore a silk surcoat of the same acid yellow as his mare's caparisons. He had relinquished his rustic hat, and his mane of blond hair blew back in the light wind. At his side was a great broadsword with a silver-bound hilt. The roan mare arched her powerful neck, shook her delicate head. Her bridle was of soft leather, with a subtle leather filigree inlaid.

To tegeus-Cromis, hunched against the morning chill on a sombre black gelding, wrapped in his crow-cloak, it seemed that the Kahn and his horse threw back the light like a challenge: for a moment, they were heraldic and invincible, the doom to which they travelled something beautiful and unguessed. But the emotion was brief, and passed.

As he went, his seat insecure on a scruffy packhorse, his only armour a steel-stressed leather cap, Rotgob the dwarf chanted a Rivermouth song of forgotten meaning, *The Dead Frieght Dirge*:

> Burn them up and sow them deep,
> Oh, drive them down!
> Heavy weather in the Fleet,
> Oh, drive them down!
> Gather them up and drive them down,
> Oh, sow them deep!
> Driving wind and plodding feet,
> Oh, *drive them down*!

And as the ritualistic syllables rolled, Cromis found himself sinking into a reverie of death and spoliation, haunted by grey, translucent images of the dead merchant in his desecrated chamber, of telescopes and strange astrologies. The face of the woman in the hooded purple cloak hung before him, in the grip of some deep but undefinable sorrow. He was aware of the Marsh somewhere up ahead, embodi-

ment of his peculiar destiny and his unbearable heritage.

He was receding from the world, as if the cocaine fit were on him and all his anchor chains were cut, when Kahn reined in his mare and called them to a halt.

"There's our way. The Beast has left the road here, as you see."

A narrow track ran east from the road. Fifty yards along it, the bracken and gorse of the valley failed and the terrain became brown, faintly iridescent bog, streaked with slicks of purple and oily yellow. Beyond that rose thickets of strangely shaped trees. The river meandered through it, slow and broad, flanked by dense reedbeds of a bright ochre colour. The wind blew from the east, carrying a bitter, metallic smell.

"Some might find it beautiful," said Cromis.

Where the bracken petered out, a dyke had been sunk to prevent the herd animals of the Low Leedale from wandering into the bog. It was deep and steep-sided, full of stagnant water over which lay a multicoloured film of scum. They crossed by a gated wooden bridge, the hooves of their horses clattering hollowly.

"I don't," said Rotgob the dwarf. "It stinks."

3

Deep in the Marsh, the path wound tortuously between umber iron bogs, albescent quicksands of aluminium and magnesium oxides, and sumps of cuprous blue or permanganate mauve fed by slow gelid streams and fringed by silver reeds. The trees were smooth-barked, yellow-ochre and burnt-orange; through their tightly woven foliage filtered a gloomy light. At their roots grew tall black grasses and great clumps of multifaceted transparent crystal, like alien fungi.

Charcoal-grey frogs with viridescent eyes croaked as they floundered between the pools. Beneath the greasy surface of the water unidentifiable reptiles moved slowly and sinuously. Dragonflies whose webby wings spanned a foot or more hummed and hovered between the sedges: their long wicked bodies glittered bold green and ultramarine; they took their prey on the wing, pouncing with an audible snap of jaws on whining ephemera and fluttering moths of april blue and chevrolet cerise.

Over everything hung the oppressive stench of rotting metal. After an hour, Cromis' mouth was coated by a bitter deposit, and he tasted acids. He found it difficult to speak. While his horse slithered and stumbled beneath him, he gazed about in wonder, and poetry moved in his skull, swift as the jewelled mosquito-hawks over a dark slow current of ancient decay.

He drove Rotgob and the Kahn hard, sensing the imminence of his meeting with the *baan* now that the blood-trail had vanished and they followed a line of big, shapeless impressions in the mud. But the horses were reluctant, confused by prussian streams and fragile organic-pink sky. At times, they refused to move, bracing their legs and trembling. They turned rolling white eyes on their owners, who cursed and sank to their boot tops in the slime, releasing huge acrid bubbles of gas.

When they emerged from the trees for a short while about noon, Cromis noticed that the true sky was full of racing, wind-torn clouds; and despite its exotic colours, the Marsh was cold.

By the evening of that day, they were still on the hunt, and had reached the shallow waters of Cobaltmere in the northern reaches of the Marsh. They had lost one pack-pony to the shifting sands; the other had died painfully after drinking from a deceptively clear pool, its limbs swelling up and blood pouring from its corroded internal organs. They were tired and filthy, and they had lost the beast's spoor.

They made camp in a fairly dry clearing halfway round the waterlogged ambit of the mere. Far out on the water lay fawn mudbanks streaked with sudden yellow, and floating islands of matted vegetation on which waterbirds cackled, ruffling their electric-blue feathers. As the day decayed, the colours were numbed: but in the funereal light of sunset, the water of the Cobaltmere came alive with mile-long stains of cochineal and mazarine.

Cromis was woken some time before dawn by what he assumed to be the cold. A dim disturbing phosphorescence of fluctuating colour hung over the mere and its environs; caused by some odd quality of the water there, it gave an even but wan light. There were no shadows. Trees loomed vague and damp at the periphery of the clearing.

When he found it impossible to sleep again, he moved nearer to the dead embers of the fire. He lay there uneasily, wrapped in blanket and cloak, his fingers laced beneath his head, staring up at the Name Stars and the enigmatic Group.

Beside him humped the Kahn, snoring. The horses shifted drowsily. A nocturnal mosquito-hawk with huge obsidian globes for eyes hunted over the shallows, humming and snapping. He watched it for a moment, fascinated. The sound of water draining through the reedbeds. Rotgob was on watch: he moved slowly round the clearing and out of Cromis' field of vision, blowing warmth into his cupped hands, cursing as his feet sank with soft noises into the earth.

Cromis closed his eyes, depressed, insomniac. He wondered if the Sixth Beast had reversed its role. Incidents of such a reversal filtered up to him from the dim, haunted library stacks of his youth, where his doomed father had taught him harsh lore. Black lettered spines and a pale woman he had always wanted to know.

He thought of the woman in the hooded purple cloak as he had first seen her.

He heard a faint sigh behind him: not close, and too low-pitched to wake a sleeping man, but of peculiar strength and urgency.

Fear gnawed him, and he could not suppress sudden images of his father's corpse and its return to the libraries.

He felt for the hilt of the nameless sword. Finding it, he rolled cautiously on to his stomach, making as little unnecessary movement as possible and breathing through his open mouth. This manoeuvre brought into view the segment of the clearing previously invisible to him. He studied the point from which the sound had come.

The glade was quiet and ghastly. A dark wound marked its entrance. The horses issued breath or ectoplasm. One of them had cocked its ears forward alertly.

He could neither hear nor see the dwarf.

Carefully, he freed himself from his blanket, eased his sword a few inches from its scabbard. Reflex impelled him to crouch low as he ran acrosss the clearing. When he encountered the corpse of the dwarf, he recognised a little of the horror that had lived with him under the guise of ennui since the death of his father.

Small and huddled, Rotgob had already sunk slightly into

the wet ground. There was no blood apparent, and his limbs were uncut. He had not drawn his long stiletto.

Clasping the cold, stubbled jaw, his skin crawling with revulsion. The dwarf snarled – unlike the merchant, unembarrassed in the presence of death. His fingers, though, were all in a knot. Cromis moved the head, and the neck was unbroken, hard to flex. The skull, then. He probed reluctantly, withdrew his fingers, clasped his head in his hands; and; recovering, wiped his face with the edge of his cloak.

On his feet, swallowing bile, he shivered. The night silent but for the far-off sleepless hum of a dragonfly. The earth around the corpse was poached and churned. Big, shapeless impressions led out of the glade to the south. He followed them, swaying, without waking the Kahn.

It was a personal thing with him.

Away from the Cobaltmere, the phosphorescence faded. He followed the tracks swiftly. They left the path at a place where the trees were underlit by clumps of pale blue crystal. Bathed in an unsteady glow, he stopped to strain his ears. Nothing but the sound of water. It occurred to him that he was alone. The earth sucked his feet. The trees were weird, their boughs a frozen writhe.

To the left, a branch snapping.

He whirled, threw himself into the undergrowth, hacking out with the nameless sword. At each step he sank into the muck; small animals scuttled away from him; foliage clutched his limbs.

Breathing heavily in a tiny clearing with a dangerous pool. After a minute, he could hear nothing; after two, nothing more.

"If I'd come alone, the first encounter would have been the last. Go home, Kahn, please. Or to Duirinish, and wait for me."

They buried the dwarf before dawn, working in the odd light of Cobaltmere. Dissolution Kahn wrapped his dead friend's fingers round the thing that was neither a short sword nor a long stiletto. "You never know where you might find a dark alley." He seemed to bear Cromis no grudge for the death, but dug silently, putting in more effort than the earth warranted.

"The dwarf was a good fighter. He killed four Princes –" This, he repeated absently, twice "– I'll stay with it until we've finished the job."

The temperature had been dropping steadily for hours. A few brittle flakes of snow filtered through the colourful foliage, out of context. Lord tegeus-Cromis huddled into his cloak, touched the turned earth with his foot.

He thought of the high passes of Monar, suffocating in snow.

"Kahn, you don't understand. History is against you. The Sixth House . . . The responsibility is mine. By sharing it, I've killed three people instead of one . . ."

The Kahn spat.

"I'll stay with it."

Later, sucking bits of food from his moustache, he said: "You take a single setback too hard. Have some cooked pig? There are still two of us."

From the eyots and reedbeds, fowl cackled: sensing a change, they were gathering in great multicoloured drifts on the surface of the lake, slow migratory urges climaxing in ten thousand small, dreary skulls.

Cromis laughed dully.

He took out his pewter snuffbox and stared at it. "Snow, Kahn," he murmured. "A grain of snow." He shrugged. "Or two." He undid the box.

The Kahn reached out and knocked it from his hand.

"That won't help," he said, pleasantly.

Only half was spilt, and perhaps half of that spoilt. Cromis scooped the rest up, closed the box carefully. He stood, brushed the filth from his knees.

"Your mother," he said, "was a sow." He let the Kahn see a few inches of the nameless sword. "She gave men diseases."

"How you found out is a mystery to me. Come on, Lord Cromis, it's dawn."

The snow held off for a while.

4

"Nobody has been here for a hundred years."

At the extreme northwestern edge of the Marsh, where the concentration of metal salts washed off the Rust Desert was low, saner vegetation had taken hold: willow drooped

over the watercourses, the reedbeds were cream and brown, creaking in the cold wind. But the malformations were of a subtler and more disturbing kind – something in the stance of the trees, the proportion of the interface insects – and there was no great lessening of the gloom.

"A pity. Had the place been charted, we might have come to it directly and saved –"

"– A life?"

"Some trouble."

An ancient round tower reared above the trees. Built of fawn stone at some time when the earth was firmer, it stood crookedly, weathered like an old bone. Filaments of dead ivy crawled over it; blackthorn and alder hid its base; a withered bullace grew from an upper window, its rattling branches inhabited by small, stealthy birds.

Closing on it, they found that its lower storeys were embedded in the earth: the low, rectangular openings spaced evenly round its damp walls were foundered windows. Three or four feet above the muck it was girdled by a broad band of fungus, like ringworm on the limb of an unhealthy man.

"My father's books hinted at the existence of a sinking tower, but placed it in the east."

"You could live to correct them."

"Perhaps." Cromis urged his horse forward, drew his sword. Birds fled the blackthorn. Snow had begun to fall again, the flakes softer this time, and larger. "Are we foolhardy to approach so openly?"

The Kahn got off his long roan mare and studied the deep, clumsy spoor of the *baan.* An avenue of broken branches and crushed sedge ended in a patch of trampled ground before one of the sunken windows: as if the thing grew careless in the security of its lair. He scratched his head.

"Yes."

He gazed at the tower, and said nothing for some minutes. Grey snow eddied about his motionless figure, settled briefly in his beard. His cloak flapped and cracked in the wind, and he fingered the hilt of his broadsword uneasily. He went a little nearer the dark opening. He paced backwards away from it. Finally, he said:

"I'm afraid I can't get in there, it's too small."

Cromis nodded.

"You'll keep watch."

"I would come if I could. You are mad if you do it alone."

Cromis took off his cloak.

"There is already a thing between us unsettled. Don't add another one. There is no onus on you. Watch my back."

Visibility had dropped to ten paces. Glimpsed through a shifting white curtain, the Kahn's face was expressionless; but his eyes were bemused and hurt. Cromis threw his cloak over the hindquarters of his shivering horse, then turned and walked quickly to the sunken window. Snow was already gathering on its lintel. He felt the Kahn's eyes on him.

"Leave now!" he shouted into the wind. "It doesn't want you!"

He got down on his hands and knees, trying to keep the nameless sword pointed ahead of him. A queer mixture of smells bellied out of the slot into his face: the stink of rotting dung, overlayed by a strong, pleasant musk.

He coughed. Against his will, he hung back. He heard the Kahn call out from a long way off. Ashamed, he thrust his head into the hole, wriggled frantically through.

It was dark, and nothing met him.

He tried to stand; halfway upright, hit his head on the lamp ceiling. Doors for dwarves, he thought, doors for dwarves. Cold, foul liquid dripped into his hair and down his cheek. He crouched, began to stumble about, thrusting with his sword and sobbing unpleasant challenges. His feet slid on a soft and rotten surface; he fell. The sword struck orange sparks from a wall.

He conceived a terrible fear of something behind him.

He danced, made a bitter stroke.

The lair was empty.

He dropped his sword and wept.

"I didn't ask for this!" he told his childhood: but it was lost among the library stacks, learning ways to kill the Beast. "I didn't *ask* to come here!"

He lay in the dung, groping about; clasped the blade of the sword and lacerated the palm of his hand. He squirmed through the window, out into the blind snow.

"Kahn!" he shouted, "Kahn!"

He stood up, using the sword as a crutch. Blood ran down it. He took a few uncertain steps, looking for the horses. They were gone.

He ran three times round the base of the building, crying out. Confused by the snow – settling on the trees, it produced harsh contrasts, further distorting the landscape – he had difficulty in locating his starting point. The accident with the sword had left three of his fingers useless; the ten-

dons were cut. After he had rubbed some cocaine into the wound and bound it up, he went to look for the Kahn.

A layer of grey, greasy slush had formed on the ground. Bent forward against the weather, he picked up two sets of hoofprints leading back towards the Cobaltmere.

He looked back once at the sinking tower. High up on its southern face a group of windows with eroded, indistinct edges regarded him sympathetically. Snow gathered on his shoulders; he blundered into sumps and streams; he lost the trail and found it again. The pain in his hand receded to a great distance. He began to snigger gently at his experiences in the lair of the Beast.

The wildfowl were gone from Cobaltmere. He stood by a fast purple watercourse and caught glimpses through the snow of long vacant sandbanks and reefs. He went down to the water. His horse was lying there, its head in the mere, its body swollen, his cloak still wrapped and tangled round its hindquarters. Blood oozed from its mouth and anus. The veins in its eyes were yellow.

He heard a faint, fading cry above the sound of the wind.

5

Dissolution Kahn sat on his pink roan mare in a sombre clearing by the water.

Melting snow had washed his splendid mail of the filth of the Marsh, and he held his sword high above his head. The mare's silk caparisons gleamed against a claustrophobic backdrop. She arched her neck, shook her delicate head, and her breath steamed. The Kahn's hair blew back like a pennant, and he was laughing.

To tegeus-Cromis, forcing his way through a stand of mutated willows that clutched desperately at his clothes, it seemed that the glade could not contain them: they had passed beyond it into heraldry, and were invincible.

And although the Sixth Beast was intimately his, he gained no clear image of it as it loomed above man and horse.

Shaking its plumage irritably, it broke wind and lifted a clawed paw to scratch a suppurating place on its pachyderm hide. Chitinous scales rattled like dead reeds. It roared and whistled sardonically, winked a heavy lid over one insectile

eye; did a clumsy dance of sexual lust on its hind hooves, writhed its coils in stupid menace.

It tried to form words.

It laughed delightedly, lifted a wing and preened. A pleasant musk filled the glade. It reached for the doomed man on his beautiful horse with long brittle fingers.

It said distinctly:

"I am a liar as well as a dwarf."

It sent a hot stream of urine into the sodden earth.

It increased its size by a factor of two, staggered, giggled, regained its balance, and fell at the Kahn.

Cromis dragged himself free of the willows and ran into the glade, yelling, "Run, Kahn, run!"

Blood spattered the roan mare's caparisons.

Dissolution Kahn vomited suddenly, clinging to his saddle as the horse reared. He recovered, swung his weapon in a wide arc. He grunted, swayed. The Beast overshadowed him. He stabbed it.

It howled.

"NO!" pleaded Cromis.

"No!" moaned the Beast.

It began to diminish.

Kahn sat the mare with his head bowed. He dropped his sword. His mail was in shreds: here and there, strips of it were embedded in his flesh.

Before him, the Sixth Beast of Viriconium, the mutable Lamia, shrivelled, shedding wings and scales. Every facet of its eyes went dull. "Please," it said. A disgusting stink blew away on the wind. Certain of its limbs withered away, leaving warty stumps. Iridescent fluids mixed with the water of the Marsh. Its mouths clicked feebly.

A little later, when the corpse of the Beast, having repeated all its incarnations, had attained its final shrunken form, the Kahn looked up. His face was pouchy and lined. He slid out of the saddle, wearily slapped the mare's neck. The snow eased off, stopped.

He looked at Cromis. He might never have seen him before. He jerked his thumb at the corpse.

"You should have killed her at the inn," he said.

He stumbled backwards. His mouth fell open. When he looked down and saw the nameless sword protruding from his lower belly, he whimpered. A quick, violent shudder

went through him. Blood dribbled down his thighs. He reached down slowly and put his hands on the sword.

"Why?"

"It was mine, Kahn. The Beast was mine to kill. It's dead, but I'm still alive. I never expected this. What can I do now?"

Dissolution Kahn sat down carefully, still holding the sword. He coughed and wiped his mouth.

"Give me some of that cocaine. I could still make it out of here."

Abruptly, he laughed.

"You were gulled," he said bitterly, "every one of you. Your ancestors were all gulled.

"It was easy to kill. You spent your lives in misery, but it was *easy*. How do you feel about that? Please give me some of that stuff."

"What will I do?" whispered Cromis.

Dissolution Kahn twisted round until he faced the corpse of the woman in the hooded purple cloak. He leant forward, steadied the pommel of the nameless sword against her ribs, and pushed himself on to it. He groaned.

Lord tegeus-Cromis sat in the glade until evening, the little pewter snuffbox on his knee. He saw nothing. Eventually, he pulled the nameless sword from the Kahn's belly and threw it into the mere.

He swung himself on to the long roan mare, wrapped the dead man's cloak around him.

On his way out of the clearing, he contemplated the final avatar of Lamia the Beast.

"You should have killed me at the inn," he said. On an impluse, he dismounted, took the clasp of her cloak. "Lady, you should have done it."

He rode north all night, and when he came from under the trees of the Marsh he avoided looking up, in case the Name Stars should reflect some immense and unnatural change below.

PEMBERLY'S START-AFRESH CALLIOPE
or, THE NEW PROTEUS

BY JOHN SLADEK

I hope to set down this story exactly as the surgeon told it to me, at the club. There were three of us in the smoking-room: Lord Suffield; the surgeon, whose name I did not know; myself.

As soon as he sank into his chair, Lord Suffield began an anecdote about India, and, as soon as he had our attention, he fell asleep in mid-sentence. The surgeon and I traded cigars and talked of nothing in particular. At length I made some chance remark about a new cigar's giving a man a new outlook on life. The surgeon gave me a peculiar look, and then began the astonishing story of the inventor, Pemberly.

One October afternoon in 1889 [said the surgeon] I espied Gabriel Pemberly among the crowds in Atlas Street. He had aged considerably in the seven years since I'd seen him last, but I knew it was he by the odd stiffness of his stride, which told me he wore Pemberly's Step-Saver Truss. This clockwork contraption is designed to add years to the wearer's lifetime, by increasing the length and rapidity of his step without increasing the energy required. To my knowledge, no one but Pemberly has ever worn one of these.

"Aged" is not putting it strongly enough: Pemberly had *decayed*, and to a bent, shrivelled, diseased old man. His clothes were food-stained and ragged, his hair and beard

thinning, and I thought I detected a slackness of jaw that signified stupidity.

I hailed him, but he did not see me, perhaps because he persisted in looking another way – back over his shoulder. As luck would have it, I was just then on my way to the hospital (a certain leg needed its earl amputated) and so could not stop. Pemberly truss-strode away, and the crowd soon amputated him from my sight.

Not from my mind, however. I began to muse upon the misfortunes of my inventor friend, so quick and able at devising everything but his own peace of mind. I had not seen him since his last folly, the Steam Barber affair of 1882.

He intended this device to provide skilful, gentle, efficient shaving at the touch of a lever. It would mix its own lather, sharpen its own razors, and even make a kind of parrotty small-talk. A day in June was set for the first test. Pemberly was to be the "customer", while I was asked to observe, rendering medical assistance if necessary.

The night before the test, Pemberly became violently ill, a result of overwork, anxiety, and I believe a diet of special nutrient pills of his own devising, which he took in lieu of eating. We left his mechanic, a man named Groon, in charge of the machine, with orders to perform a few adjustments, and I took Pemberly home and gave him a sedative.

Next morning Pemberly and I entered the shop to find Groon seated in the chair. A towel was wrapped around his throat, which had been slashed. The entire room was bespattered with blood and lather, as if from frenzied activity. As we came in, the machine was stropping a razor, and asking the dead man in a creaky voice if the day were warm enough for him.

At the inquest, I testified that Pemberly was not on the premises, that he had nothing against Groon, and that he was certainly not a malicious person or Criminal Type. He was cleared of the death, but only *legally*. Many of his friends cut him cruelly, the Inventions Club dropped him, and finally poor Pemberly stopped going out in public altogether. Until now.

Now that I'd seen him once, I began to fancy I was seeing him everywhere: a blind beggar in Mapp Road, a navvy in North Street, a clerk in the City – all resembled Pemberly at various ages, enough so to make me stare rudely. Once, at night, I heard a cabman say something like "rice-steel" in

Pemberly's exact tone, and I knew that the sight of my old friend sunken low had begun to obsess me.

Finally I saw him again in the street, and this time there could be no mistake. I walked straight over and offered him my hand.

"Good God!" He started, trembling. "Fatheringale! Is it you?" He seized my hand and, to my horror, began to weep.

"Here now, this won't do at all," I said. "You'd better come along to my surgery for a whiskey and a chat."

I pressed him into a cab, and we set off. Pemberly made no conversation at all, and kept craning about, trying to peer out the rear window. This being a tiny oval of smoked glass set impossibly high in the back wall, I took his futile gesture to be a kind of compulsive *tic*, akin to the pacing of a caged animal. Could it be that the Steam Barber tragedy had affected his mind? I began to fear it had.

On our arrival, Pemberly refused to alight.

"You go in first," he begged. "See if the coast is clear."

Astonished, I asked what in the world I should look *for*.

"Anything unusual. Breakfasts, for instance. Or calliopes."

Apprehending the worst for my friend's mind, I humoured his request, and pretended to look inside.

"Not a meal in sight," I assured him on my return. "Nor any organs, save a few poor pickled specimens."

This mild jest set him to laughing so excessively that I was obliged to strike him full in the face – like this!

With that, the surgeon reached out and slapped the still-unconscious Lord Suffield! I leapt to my feet in astonishment, and asked him the meaning of this action.

"I hope his lordship will forgive me," he said, seemingly as astonished as I. "I – I'm hardly myself this evening. But let me go on."

I acceded, seeing that Lord Suffield did not appear to have felt the blow keenly. Indeed, that personage merely stirred in his chair, murmured "three jars of jam and a letter", and picked up the stitches of his snoring, as did the surgeon those of his tale.

After manoeuvring Pemberly into the front parlour of my surgery and encouraging him to swallow a glass of whiskey,

I asked him point-blank whom he supposed to be following him.

"Not a *whom*," he replied darkly. "A *what*."

"Surely you, a man of science, do not pretend to tell me you've seen a ghost?" I asked.

"Ghost? I only wish it were." He shuddered. "My God, Fatheringale! I'm being pursued by – *by Tuesday morning!*"

I should mention at this time that Pemberly had always been a man with a peculiar way of speaking. I had always dismissed his odd turns as vaguely eccentric, even marks of his genius. Now it seemed to me that I had been witnessing the effects of a brain lesion, which time and infirmity had worsened to the point of madness. I undertook to treat him, and as the first step, drew out of him the story of the past seven years.

How had he been living? Oddly enough, he'd let out the Steam Barber. Not as a shaving machine, but to a South American republic which used it for executions. It seems they paid him by piecework, and since this republic was threatened by many real or imagined revolutions to be put down, and rebels to be killed, Pemberly's rent provided a comfortable income.

The reason he appeared to be out at pocket was simply that every spare penny and more had been going into his new invention – the Start-Afresh Calliope.

"Ever since the Steam Barber affair," he said, "I've longed to scrub out my life like a slate, and start over, as a new man. I might have been anything – a general, a man of God, a successful barrister – but no. The die, as we are so fond of saying, was cast.

"Or was it? I began to study philosophy, astronomy, logic, monads – and the more I read, the more convinced I became that what *is*, is not *necessarily*. I threw myself into my work, and I began building the machine that could do the job!"

"I'm afraid I don't quite understand," I said, smiling.

"Then you're as stupid as the others!" he cried. I dared not ask what others. "Oh, why do I waste my time talking to imbeciles?"

I begged him to explain again.

"I have discovered that we can take the Path Untaken," he said, passionately. "Like you, I once thought reality to be some rigid isosceles truth, unchangable as a spoon. But

now, nothing is easier to change than *facts*. Life is plural! Reality is not truth, it is a half-truth, a mere epiphany of snort!"

These extraordinary observations left me as much in the dark as ever, though I dared not show it. "I see," I said, feigning to catch his meaning. "And did your invention succeed?"

"Oh yes, of course. The physical machine was easy. But learning to play it has been excruciating torture. My mistakes continue to haunt me, and they are innumerable. Just now, for example, I am here to save your life."

With that, he seized me by the shoulders and flung me roughly to the floor. Before I could ask why, a shot rang out! I looked to the window, saw an uncanny, grinning face – then it was gone.

"I'm sorry," said Pemberly, helping me to my feet.

"Not at all, old man." I glanced to where the bullet had gone. "You did indeed save my life."

"I wasn't apologizing for pushing you down, you fool! I was apologizing for trying to shoot you!"

It was at that moment that I began to half-believe in Pemberly's new invention, and to understand what it was he'd been raving about. Evidently the insidious device allowed him to multiply his body in some manner. Apparently some of his selves were less stable than others – his "mistakes". His real self – if real it was – then had to go about undoing their mischief.

Just then the police called to inquire about the shot. I had to leave the room to deal with them. When I returned, Pemberly was not there.

It was an hour or more before I noticed, on my writing-table, a thick MS. addressed to me in Pemberly's hand.

"My dear Fatheringale –

"How can I ever explain? There is so little time, for in this rôle, I must soon die. Not that I have regrets about dying, for what regrets could I, of all people, have? I, alone among mortals, have lived life to the full. I have been everywhere, seen and done everything I could possibly desire.

"Now I want you to have the Start-Afresh Calliope. It will be delivered to you the day after my death. But I must caution you to read the enclosed instructions carefully, and so avoid the costly mistakes I have made. With this machine,

you will be able to become whomever you please. But you must realize that not all change is for the better.

"Your affectionate friend,
"Gabriel Pemberly"

I turned to the "instructions", fifty-odd pages of closely-written formulae and diagrams:

"Let x equal . . . impermeable haft . . . Z^{n}(quoin B(n*O)) . . . parseworthy, or . . . marriage of skull and weight . . . pars(x – ln y)dy . . . times four-stealths ø . . . groined poss . . . have the result of . . . cow . . . 14 millions . . . light-averages spoiling rise . . . nerve-clips? But no! Anti-next . . . wherein the fast remove . . . n^{z}(poss B*) . . . which I call another haft . . . star, *Q.E.D.*"

I could not make head nor tail of it. Discarding it, I tried to think no more about the awesome possibilities of his machine. Over a week later, I pointed to a body on a slab at the Morgue, and identified it as that of Pemberly. He had put a bullet in his tormented brain.

"And the steam-organ?" I asked.

"The day after the funeral," said the surgeon, "Pemberly delivered it to me. In person."

"What?"

My shout awakened Lord Suffield, who launched at once into his anecdote again: "Sent a servant to the Governor with three jars of jam and a letter, the beggar ate one jar along the way. Explained to him the letter had betrayed him, gave him a damned good thrashing. Next time I sent him with three jars of jam and a letter. This time he hid the letter behind a tree, so it wouldn't be able to see him eat the jam. Didn't have the heart to thrash him that time, I was laughing so hard. Oh, by the bye . . ."

When his lordship was asleep again, the surgeon replied to my question.

It was a younger, hardier Pemberly who delivered the Calliope to my door.

"I'm not an apparition," he said impatiently. "And if you'd taken the trouble to read my instructions, you'd understand well enough why I'm here, the day after my own funeral. But never mind, come out and have a look at it."

"It?"

"The Start-Afresh Calliope!" he declaimed. Leading me out to the street – and so stupefied was I that I ventured out in waistcoat and shirt-sleeves – he showed me a wagon burdened with an immensity of steel and brass.

It did somewhat resemble a calliope. But the pipes stood in no regular order, but branched and twisted in all directions, connecting to a variety of implements. I recognized a clock-face, a pair of bellows, sprockets and weaving machinery. The stops had been marked with some private cipher of Pemberly's.

After firing the boiler and checking a valve, he took his seat at the keyboard, poised both hands and shouted: "Let the Music of Change begin!"

I could stomach no more of this madness. It seemed clear to me that this person had murdered old Pemberly and now sought to impersonate him. I turned back to the house to send for the authorities, saying that I only meant to put on my coat.

"The Music of Change cannot wait," he said, and began to play.

The melody was some popular air, but his arrangement made it uncannily beautiful and terrifying together. Thunder . . . the wail of a lost soul . . . the ring of crystal . . . the snap of fresh lather . . . no, nothing can convey it. I digress.

Like most surgeons, I have next to my front door a polished brass plate, stating my name and profession. The music caught and stiffened me as I was about to go inside, and I looked at – and into – this plate. I saw my own startled face, and behind me, the back of Pemberly, hunched like Satan at the keyboard.

He *glowed*. That is, he gave off no light, but a kind of unearthly intensity. I could look inside him, and see other persons glowing through his skin and clothes.

Here was a younger Pemberly, working at his Steam Barber; an even younger, studying chemistry; a schoolboy; an infant. Here too were Pemberly the financier, barrister, bishop, general –

My focus changed and I saw the name upon the plate was not my own. It changed back, and I saw too that my face was not my own, but the face of Pemberly the surgeon.

"So that's it!" I shouted in his voice.

"Exactly," he said, coolly. "I'm living off you for a time, old man. Hope you don't mind." He shut off the organ and

strolled away, leaving me the accursed contraption and the twice-accursed man you see before you now.

I am forced to live out a life – an immensely successful life – for Pemberly, as Pemberly. I still know who I am. I have all my own memories, yet I am conscious of another soul inhabiting my body and feeding upon my experiences. And though I know I am Fatheringale, it would appear madness to say so.

I know not how many other lives Pemberly has appropriated, but I meet myself everywhere I go. Perhaps the process will not end until all of humanity is one great, babbling version of him. I can only hope, before that day comes, I shall have the courage to take my own life.

As I had not actually heard the Calliope play, I thought the surgeon insane, and I intimated as much to Lord Suffield when the other had taken his departure.

"Mad? Not old Pemberly. One of the best doctors around, you know. Up for a knighthood, I understand. Or is that some other Pemberly? Daresay two or three'll be on the Honours List this year. Damned ambitious clan. Always meeting one who's worked his way up. Met a High Court Justice the other day named Pemberly. Nice enough fellow, but he talked utter rubbish. Two glasses of port, and the fellow started actually insisting he was someone else! Used peculiar words, too: 'the chock of choice', 'the scabbard of pork opinion', the something of . . . rubbish like that. Funny lot, the Pemberlys, but not mad."

A servant came into the room, at the far end, to clear the tables. Did he not resemble Dr Pemberly? And did he not move as if animated by a clockwork truss? No, a trick of the light, no doubt, or my weariness. There is no mad inventor playing arpeggios upon the human race. The whole story is nothing but a celery of no compass!

THE GOD HOUSE

KEITH ROBERTS

After the last great war, a desolate peace lay for generations over the shattered south of what had been England. Once-vanished animals – wolves, wildcats, bears – roamed her new-springing forests and ancient plains. Deer and otter multiplied; and martens, foxes, badgers. Finally, new tribes and races of men emerged from shadow. They lived humbly for the most part, cultivating barley and wheat, building stockades against the half-real terrors of the night. Till from sunlight and darkness, storm and calm, the Gods were reborn . . .

If you had lain as Mata lay, stretched out on the wiry hillside grass, and pressed your ear to the ground, you would have heard, a long way off, the measured thud and tramp of many feet. If you had raised your head, as she now raised hers, you would have caught, gusting on the sharp, uncertain breeze of early spring, the heart-pounding thump and roll of drums. Since dawn, the Great Procession had been

winding its slow way from the sea; now, it was almost here.

She sat up quickly, pushing the tangled black hair from her eyes; a dark, wiry girl of maybe thirteen summers. Her one garment, of soft brown doeskin, left her legs and arms bare; her waist was circled by a leather thong, in which it pleased her to carry a little dagger in a painted wooden sheath. Round her neck she wore an amulet of glinting black and maroon stones; for Mata was the daughter of a chief.

The valley above which she lay opened its green length to the distant sea. Behind her, crowning the nearer height, was a village of thatched mud huts, surrounded by a palisade of sharply pointed timbers. In front, rearing sharp-etched against the sky, was the Sacred Mound to which the Procession must come. Here the Giants had lived, in times beyond the memory of men; and here they had reared a mighty Hall. The top of the Mound was circled still by nubs and fingers of stone, half-buried by the bushes and rank grass that had seeded themselves over the years; but now none but the village priests dare venture to the crest. The Giants had been all-powerful; their ghosts too were terrible, and much to be feared. Once, as a tiny child, Mata had ventured to climb the steep side of the Mound towards where Cha-Acta the Chief Priest tethered his fortune in goats; but the seething of the wind in the long yellow grass, the bushes that seemed to catch at her with twiggy fingers, the spikes and masses of high grey stone half-glimpsed beyond the summit, had sent her scuttling in terror. She had kept her own counsel, which was maybe just as well; and since that day had never ventured near the forbidden crest.

The sound of drumming came sudden and loud. The head of the Procession was nearing the great chalk cleft; any moment now it would be in sight. Mata frowned back at the village, pulling her lip with her teeth. The other children, placed under her care, had been left to fend for themselves in the smoke and ashes of the family hut; chief's daughter or not, she would certainly be beaten if she was discovered here.

Nearby a tousled stand of bramble and old gorse offered concealment. She wriggled to it, lay couched in its yielding dampness; felt her eyes drawn back, unwillingly, to the Sacred Mound.

At its highest point, sharp and clear in the noon light, stretched the long hog's-back of the God House; reed-

thatched, its walls blank and staring white, its one low doorway watching like a distant dark eye. Round it, the fingers of old stone clustered thickly. Above it, set atop the gable ends, reared fantastic shapes of rushwork; the Field Spirits, set to guard the House of the Lord from harm. Mata shivered, half with apprehension, half with some less readily identifiable emotion, and turned her gaze back across the grass.

Her heart leaped painfully, settled to a steady pounding. In that moment of time, the Procession had come into sight, debouching from the pass between the hills. She saw the yellow antennae and waving whips of the Corn Ghosts, most feared of all spirits; behind them the bright, rich robes of the exorcising priests, Cha'Acta among them in his green, fantastic mask. Behind again came cymbal-men and drummers, Hornmen capering in their motley; and after them the great mass of the people, chanting and stamping, looking like a brown-black, many-legged snake. She bestowed on them no more than a passing glance; her whole attention was concentrated on the head of the column.

She wriggled forward once more, forgetful of discovery. She could see Choele distinctly now. How slender she looked, how white her body shone against the grass! How stiffly she walked! Her hair, long and flowing, golden as Mata's was dark, had been wreathed with chaplets of leaves and early flowers; she held her head high, eyes blank and unseeing, lost already in contemplation of the Lord. Her arms were crossed stiffly, in front of her breasts; and from the crown of her head to the soles of her feet she alone was bare. Quite, quite bare.

The whole Procession was closer now. The Corn Ghosts ran, skirmishing to either side, leaping fantastically, lashing with their whips at the bushes and old dead grass; the animal dancers pranced, white antlers gleaming in the sunlight. Mata edged back in sudden panic to the shelter of the bushes, saw between the stems how Choele, deaf and unseeing, still unerringly led the throng. Her figure, strutting and pale, vanished between the bushes and low trees that fringed the base of the Sacred Mound. The people tumbled after, exuberantly; the drums pounded ever more loudly; then suddenly a hush, chilling and complete, fell across the grass. Mata, screwing her eyes, saw the tiny figure of her friend pause on the causeway that led to the Mound. For a moment it seemed Choele turned, looking back and down;

then she stepped resolutely on, vanished from sight between the first of the rearing stones.

Already people were breaking away, streaming back gabbling up the hill. Mata rose unwillingly. Her father would be hungry; like the rest of the village, he had been fasting since dawn. She remembered the neglected bowls of broth, steaming on their trivets over the hut fire, and quickened her pace. At the stockade gates she paused. Below her folk still toiled up the slope; others still stood in a ragged black crescent, staring up at the Mound. The priests in their robes clustered the causeway, tiny and jewel-bright. From this height the God House with its long humped grey-green roof showed clear; Mata, shielding her eyes with her hand, saw a tiny figure pause before the door of the shrine. A moment it waited; then slipped inside, silent and quick as a moth, and was lost to sight. A heartbeat later she heard the rolling cry go up from all the people.

Once again, the God Bride had entered the presence of her Lord.

Mata ran for her hut, legs pounding, not feeling the hardness of the packed earth street beneath her feet. The fire was low; she blew and panted, feeding the embers with dried grass and bunches of sticks; and for the moment heat and exertion drove from her the thought of what she had seen.

The drums began again, late in the night. Great fires burned in the square before the Council Lodge; youths and men, fiercely painted and masked, ran, torches in hand, in and out the shadows of the huts; girls swayed in the shuffling, sleep-inducing rhythm of a dance. On the stockade walks and watchtowers more torches burned, their light orange and flickering. Old men and crones hobbled between the huts, fetching and carrying, broaching cask after cask of the dark corn beer. The other children were sleeping already, despite the din; only Mata lay wide-eyed and watchful, staring through the open doorway of the hut, seeing and not seeing the leaping grotesque shadows rise and fall.

Every year, since the hills themselves were young and the Giants walked the land, her folk had celebrated in this fashion the return of spring. They waited, fearfully, for the hooting winter winds to cease to blow, for the snow to melt, for the earth to show in patches and wet brown skeins beneath the withered grass. Little by little, as the year progressed, the sun gained in strength; little by little vigour flooded back into trees and fields, buds split showing tiny,

vivid-green mouths. Till finally – and only Cha'Acta and his helpers could say exactly when – the long fight was over, the Corn Lord, greatest of the Gods, reborn in manhood and loveliness. Then the hill folk gave their thanks to the Being who was both grain and sunlight, who had come to live among them one more season. A Bride was chosen for him, to live with him in the God House as long as he desired; and the Great Procession formed, milling round the God Tents on the distant shore.

Choele had been a season older than Mata, and her special friend. Her limbs were straight and fine as peeled rods of willow, her hair a light cloud yellow as the sun. To the younger girl she had confided her certainty, over half a year before, that she would be the next spring's chosen Bride.

Mata had shrugged, tossing her own dark mane. It was not good to speak lightly of any God; but especially the great Corn Lord, whose eyes see the movements of beetles and mice, whose ears catch the whisper of every stem of grass. But Choele had persisted. "See, Mata; come and sit with me in the shade, and I will show you how I know."

Mata stared away sullenly for a while, setting her mouth and frowning; but finally curiosity overcame her She wriggled beside the other girl, lay smelling the sweet smell of long grass in the sun. The goats they had been set to watch browsed steadily, shaking their heads, staring with their yellow eyes, bumping and clonking their clumsy wooden bells.

Mata said, "It is not wise to say such things, Choele, even to me. Perhaps the God will hear, and punish you."

Choele laughed. She said "He will not punish me." She had unfastened the thongs that held the top of her dress; she lay smiling secretly, pushing the thin material forward and back. "See, Mata, how I have grown," she said. "Put your fingers here, and feel me. I am nearly a woman."

Mata said coldly, "I do not choose to." She rolled on her back, feeling the sun hot against her closed lids; but Choele persisted till she opened her eyes and saw the nearness of her breasts, how full and round they had become. She stroked the nipples idly, marvelling secretly at their firmness; then Choele showed her another thing, and though she played in the dark till she was wet with sweat she couldn't make her body do it too. So she cried at last, bitterly, because Choele had spoken the truth; soon she would

be gone from her, and there was no other she chose to make a friend. For a year, each Bride lived with the God; but none of them had ever spoken of the Mystery, and all afterwards avoided their former friends, walking alone for the most part with eyes downcast.

But next day Choele was kinder. "This will not be true of us," she said. "For a time I shall live in the God House, certainly; but afterwards we will be friends again, Mata, and I will tell you how it is when you are loved by a God. Now come into the bushes, and let us play; for I am a woman now, and know more ways than before to make you happy."

The drums were still beating; but the fires, that had flickered so high, were burning low. The Corn Ghosts were dead, driven by Cha'Acta's magic from the fields; their old dry husks, empty as the shells of lobsters, had already been ritually burned. In the winter to come the old women, who had seen many Corn Processions pass, would plait new figures; for next year, too, the God would need a Bride.

Mata gulped, and swallowed back another thought half formed.

She slipped from the hut, moving quietly so as not to disturb the little ones. From the Council Lodge, set square facing the end of the one street of the village, sounds of revelry still rose; for the moment, she was safe. She shadowed between the huts, heading away from where the fires still pulsed and flickered. By the stockade, the outer air struck chill. She climbed the rough wooden steps to a guard tower. As she had expected, the high platform was deserted. She stood shivering a little, staring down into the night.

The moon was sinking to the rim of hills. Below, far off and tiny at her feet, the Sacred Mound was bathed in a silvery glow. Across its summit, black and hulking, lay the God House. It was still, and seemingly deserted; but Mata knew this was not so.

She tried to force her mind out from her body, send it soaring like the spirit of Cha'Acta. She heard a hunting owl call to its mate; and it seemed she flew with the flying bird, silently, across the moonwashed gulf of space. Then it was as if for an instant her spirit joined with Choele, lying waiting silent on the great brushwood bed. She heard a mouse run and scuttle on the floor, and thought it was the scratching of the God; and giddiness came on her so that she staggered, clutching the wood of the watchtower for support. Then, just as swiftly it seemed, she was back in her body; and fear

of the God was on her so that she shook more violently than before. She pulled her cloak closer round her throat, staring about her guiltily; but none had seen, for there were none to watch. She huddled a long time, unwilling to leave her vantage point, while the fires in the street burned to embers and the moon sank beneath a waiting hill. Its shadow raced forward, swift and engulfing, half-seen; and the God House was gone, plunged in the blackest dark.

She licked her mouth and turned away, groping with her bare feet for the edges of the wooden steps.

The God, as ever, was pleased with his Bride. Cha'Acta announced it, before all the people; and once more the horns blew, the drums thundered, the vats of corn beer were broached and drained. Every day now the sun gained visibly in strength, the hours of daylight lengthened. A burgeoning tide of green swept across the land, across the forest tops in the valleys, across the little patchwork fields where the corn pushed sappy spears up from the ground. The time of breeding came and passed; the coracles ventured farther from the coasts, bringing back snapping harvests of sea things, lobsters and crabs. The villagers, from headman and priests to the lowest chopper of wood, grew sleek and contented. High summer came, with its long blue days and drowsy heat; and only Mata mourned. Sometimes, as she lay watching her father's goats, she wove chaplets of roses for her hair; sometimes she joined in the children's play and laughter; but always her thoughts slid back to the great House on the hill, to Choele and her Lord.

In the mornings she woke now before it was light, with the first sweet piping of the birds. Always, the Sacred Mound drew her irresistibly. She would sit and brood, in some hollow of the grassy hill, watching down at the long roof of the God House, still in the new, pearly light; or she would run, alone and unseen, down to the brook that meandered softly below the Mound. Trees arched over it cutting back the light, their roots gripping the high banks to either side; between them the water ran clear and bright and cold. Her ankles as she walked stirred greyish silt that drifted with the current like little puffs of smoke. The coldness touched first ankles and calves, then thighs; then as she dipped and shuddered, all of her. Sometimes she would look up, unwilling, to the high shoulder of the hill and see the nubs and spikes of stone watching down, run scurrying to drag her clothes on wet and sticking. Then she would bolt from the

secret place to the high yellow slope of hill below the village; only there dared she turn, to stare down panting at the Mound and the God House, rendered tiny by distance and safe as children's toys. And once, on the high hill, a whisper of cool wind reached to her, touched her hot forehead and passed on into distance, to far fields and the homes of other men. She sat down then, unsteadily; for it seemed to her the God had indeed passed, laughing and glad, to play like a child among the distant hills. A gladness filled her too so that she rose, stretching out her arms; for the Lord speaks only to his chosen. She turned, excited, for the village, bubbling inside with still-unadmitted thoughts.

Later, she was vouchsafed more convincing proof.

Toward the end of summer she was set to gathering reeds; the village folk used them in great quantities for thatching both their own homes and the God House. The sacred hut, alone of all buildings, was refurbished every year. For its great span, only the finest and longest reeds would serve; so Mata in her searching wandered farther and farther afield, hoping secretly her harvest would adorn the home of the God, and that he would know and be pleased. The afternoon was hot and still; an intense, blue and gold day, smelling of Time and burning leaves. She worked knee-deep for the most part, shut away among the great tall pithy stems, hacking with a keen, sickle-bladed knife, throwing the reeds down in bundles on the bank for the carts to pick them up. In time the endless, luminous green vistas, the feathery grass-heads arching above her, worked in her a curious mood. She seemed poised on the edge of some critical experience; almost it was as if some Presence, vast yet nearly tangible, pervaded the hot, unaware afternoon. The reed stems rubbed and chafed, sibilantly water gurgled and splashed where she stepped. She found herself pausing unconsciously, the knife-blade poised, waiting for she knew not what. Unconsciously too, later with a strange rapture, she pressed deeper into the marsh. Its water, tart and stinking, cooled her legs; its mud soothed her ankles. The mud itself felt warm and smooth; she drove with her toes, feeling them slide between slimy textures of root, willing herself to sink. Soon she had to tuck her skirt higher round her thighs; finally, impulsively, she drew it to her waist. She fell prey to the oddest, half-pleasurable sensations; and still the magic

grass called and whispered, still she seemed drawn forward.

She heard the wind blow, a great rushing rustle all about; but her vision was narrowed to the brown and yellow stems before her eyes. Her free hand now was beneath the water; and it seemed in her delirium a great truth came to her. The grasses, in their green thousands, were the body of the Corn Lord; and his body, mystically, the grasses. She cried out; then her own body seemed to open and she knew the Magic Thing had happened at last. She pressed the reed stems madly, awkward with the knife, sucking with her mouth; and life ended; in wonderful soaring flight.

The world blinked back. She opened her mouth to gasp, and water rushed in. She threshed and fought, fear of the deep mud blinding reason. Dimly, she felt pain; then she had dropped the knife she carried and the bank was close. She reeled and staggered, clawed to it, rolled over and lay still.

The sun was low before she opened her eyes. She lay a moment unaware; then memory returned. She half sat up, pushing with her elbows against a weight of sickness. Somewhere, there were voices. She saw a waggon moving along the river bank. It came slowly, one man leading the ox, a second stooping to fling reed bundles onto the already towering pile.

Her chest felt sore and sharp. She stared down, frowning. Her dress was stuck to her, glued with dark red; the rest of her was muddy still, and bare.

The waggoners had seen her. It seemed they stood staring a great while; then they stepped forward carefully, placing each foot in line. One of them said in a low voice, "It's the headman's child. She who was sent to cut the reeds."

She laughed at them then, or showed her teeth. She said, "I harvested more than reeds. The God came to me, and was very passionate." She fell back heavy-eyed, watching them approach. They fiddled awkwardly with her dress, giving her more pain. At last the fabric jerked clear; and the villagers huddled back frowning. Across her chest ran deep, curving gashes; the marks the Corn Lord gave her, with his nails.

The wounds healed quickly; but the dullness of spirit induced by the God's visit took longer to disperse. For many days Mata lay in the family hut, unmoving, drinking and eating very little; while all the village it seemed came to peck and cluck outside, stare curiously round the doorposts

into the dark interior. Meanwhile prodigies and wonders were constantly reported. Magan, Mata's father, saw with his own eyes a great cloud form above the God House, a cloud that took the baleful shape of a claw; the marshes glowed at night with curious light, sighings and rushings in the air spoke of the passage of monsters.

Finally, Cha'Acta came. He arrived in considerable state, three of his priests in attendance; he wore his official robes, blazoned with the green spear of the Sun God, and Mata as she saw him stoop beneath the lintel huddled to the farthest corner of the bracken bed. Never before had Cha'Acta acknowledged her directly; now he seemed terrible, and very tall.

Lamps were brought, the other children banished; and the High Priest began his examination. The wounds were subjected to the closest scrutiny; then Mata told her tale again and again, eyes huge in the lamplight, voice faltering and lisping. The thin face of Cha'Acta remained impassive; the dark, grave eyes watched down as she talked. But none could say, when he rose to take his leave, what decision he had come to, or what his thoughts had been. Later though he caused gifts to be sent to the hut; fresh milk and eggs and fruit, a tunic to replace the one the God had soiled. All knew, perhaps, what the portent meant; only Mata, it seemed, could not believe. She lay far into the night, eyes staring unseeing in the dark, clutching the soft fabric to her chest; but as yet her mind refused to make the words.

Autumn was past by the time her strength returned; the harvest gathered, the animals driven into their stockades. Round the village the fields and sweeping downs lay brown and dry, swept by a chilling wind. Eyes followed Mata as she moved through the village street, cloak gripped round her against the cold. She flushed with awareness; but held her head high and proud, looking neither to right nor left. She climbed to the stockade walk, stared down at the God House on the Mound. Cloud scud moved overhead; the pass between the hills lay desolate and bleak, grey with the coming winter.

Usually the God House was empty well before this time, its doors once more agape, its wall ritually breached. But Cha'Acta remained silent, and Choele was not seen. The village muttered curiously; till finally word came that the Corn Lord had once more left his valley home. The men of the village scurried onto the mound, fearful and slinking,

dragging after them the long grey bundles of thatch. Through the shortest days they worked, renewing the great roof and its framing of timber and poles. The walls of the God House were patched and rewhitened, its floors swept and pounded ready for the coming spring. Mata, who now did little of the household work, watched all from the rampart of the little town. She saw the Field Spirits carried down the street, hoisted distantly to their places; two days later, she saw Choele walking alone through the village.

She ran to her gladly enough; but a dozen paces away she faltered. For her friend's face was white and old, the eyes she raised toward Mata dark-ringed and dead. And Mata knew with certainty that despite the promise of Choele the Mystery had come between them, as blank and impregnable as a wall.

She ran, dismayed, to her father's hut. An hour or more she lay on her pallet, squeezing the hot hears; then she rose, wiped her face and fell to with the household chores. A decision had formed in her, cold and irrevocable; and at last the forbidden thoughts were freely admitted. Next year, Mata herself would be the Corn Queen. Afterwards, when she too knew the Mystery, she would go to Choele; and all between them would be as it had been before.

Mata was often seen about the village in the brightening days that followed. She took to placing herself, consciously or unconsciously, in Cha'Acta's path. Always she moved with becoming modesty; but her downcast eyes missed nothing. Sometimes, wrapped in talk or bent upon his own affairs, the Chief Priest seemed not to notice her; at others he turned, watching her as she moved on her errands, and Mata felt the keen, impenetrable stare burn on her neck and back.

Her father finally sent for her late one night. He sat in some state in the Council Lodge, a pitcher of corn beer at his elbow. Cha'Acta also was present, and the elders and priests. Mata stood, head bowed, in the smoky light of torches while her father spoke, sadly it seemed, saying the impossible words; and later, when she left, there was no sensation of the earth beneath her feet. Already it seemed she was set apart from normal things, the Chosen of the Lord.

She lay sleepless till dawn, watching the embers glowing on their shelf of clay, listening to the breathing of her sisters and her mother's rattling snore. A score of times, when she

thought of what would come, her heart leaped and thudded, trying it seemed to break clear of her body. At length the longed-for dawn broke dim and grey; she rose and dressed, went to seek a hut at the far end of the village. In it lived Meril, the old woman who instructed the God Brides and for many years had preserved their mysteries.

Mata stayed a month with the crone, learning many things that were new and by no means wholly pleasant. Choele, it was true, had often taken her to the hills for purposes not dissimilar. But Choele's fingers were brown, and sweet as honey; Meril's were old and horny, sour-smelling. They left her feeling unclean. Mata shuddered and stiffened, sweating; but she endured, for Choele's sake and the sake of the God.

Cha'Acta she now seldom saw. There was still much to be done; grain to be prepared for sowing, beer to be brewed, pens and stockades repaired, the God Tents and all the paraphernalia of the Great Procession made ready once more. In most, if not all, these things the Chief Priest took an interest. Meanwhile the buds swelled imperceptibly; rain fell, waking new grass; and finally came a time of clear, bright sun. The skies dappled over with puffy, fast-moving white clouds; the wind when it blew came gusting and warm, lifting trails of dust from hilltops and the sloping fields, and Mata knew her waiting was all but ended.

Then came tragedy, stark and unexpected. Choele was missed from the village. For some days uneasy bands of men desultorily searched the hills and surrounding ground; then one morning an oldster came gabbling and puffing up the hill, shouting his incoherent tidings to the sleepy guards on the gates. In the brook that ran below the Mound, the grey, cold brook where Mata once had bathed, floated a sodden bundle of cloth and hair; all that was left of the Corn Lord's Bride.

The omen threw the village into a ferment. Drums beat before the Council Lodge where Cha'Acta and his priests prayed and sacrificed to avert the undoubted wrath of the God. Men rose fearfully, watching up at the clear skies; but strangely the weather remained fine, the land continued to smile. So that by the week of the Great Procession the death was all but forgotten; only Mata felt within her a little hollow space, that now would never be filled.

She aready knew her duties, and the many ways existing

to please a God. What remained after Meril's rough instruction had been imparted by Cha'Acta in his harsh, monotonous voice. For two days before the great event Mata fasted, drinking nothing but the clearest spring water, purging her body of all dross. On the day before the ceremony she made her formal goodbyes to her family. A waggon was waiting, decked and beribboned, drawn by the white oxen of Cha' Acta; she mounted it, stood stiffly staring ahead while the equipage jolted out through the broad gates of the stockade. The guards raised their spears, clashed a salute; then the village was falling away behind, the wheels jerking and bumping over the rough turf of the hill.

Every year, so ran the litany, the God came from the south, drawn by prayers across the endless blue sea. The little camp the priests had set up by the shore already bustled with activity. Hide tents had been pitched; over the biggest, on a little staff, hung the long green Sign of the God. Here Mata would lie the night. Some distance away the nodding insignia of the Chief Priest marked where Cha'Acta would rest on this most important eve; beside his quarters, waggons unloaded bundles of hides, the poles and withies on which they would be stretched. Other baggage was stacked or strewn around; Mata saw the motley of the Hornmen, the antlers and hide masks, by them the green lobster-shells that in the morning would become the Corn Ghosts, and shivered with a medley of emotions.

Difficult now to retain even the memory of Choele. Her tent was ready for her, its lamps lit, the grass inside strewn with precious water bought at great expense from the traders who sometimes passed along the coast. She was bathed, and bathed again; then lay an hour, patiently, while the fluffy down her body had begun to grow was scraped from her with sharpened shells. Her breast-buds were stained with bright dye, her hair combed and stroked and combed again; and finally, she was left to sleep.

She slept soundly, curiously enough, tired out by the time of fasting and preparation; it was a shock to feel her shoulder shaken by old Meril. A cloak was held out to her; she crept from the tent, into the first glow of dawn. The sea lay cold and flat; a droning wind blew from it bringing with it the harsh, strange smell of salt.

The God Tents were triangular and black, built not of hides but of thick, impermeable felt. The flap of the nearest

was raised for her; she crept inside, shivering, already knowing what she would find.

On the ground inside the little booth had been placed a great copper bowl. In it, charcoal smouldered and the magic seeds of plants. The little place was thick already with an acrid, pungent-smelling smoke; she coughed, catching her breath, leaned her head over the bowl as she had been taught. Instantly she heard the sighing as the bellows, worked from outside by an attendant priest, forced air over the burning mass, bringing it to a glow.

The smoke scorched her lungs; she coughed again and would have retched had her stomach not been empty. She inhaled dutifully, closing her streaming eyes; and in time it seemed the fumes grew less sharp. Then strange things began to happen. Her body, she was sure, had floated free of contact with the earth; she groped awkwardly with her hands, pawing the hard ground for reassurance. Then the bowl and its bright red contents seemed to expand till she felt she was falling headlong and at great speed toward an entire world on fire. The inside of the booth, small enough for her to span, likewise enlarged itself to a soundless black void, infinite as the night sky. In it, sparks and flashes burned; there were stars and moons and suns, comets and golden fruit, God-figures that passed as fleeting as they were vast. She opened her eyes, screwed them closed once more; the forms still swam, in the darkness behind the lids.

Lastly it seemed that Mata herself had grown to immense stature; she felt she might grasp with her arms the headlands that closed the bay, stoop to catch up the running figures of men like ants or grains of sand. She rose slowly, swaying, knowing she was ready.

Outside the tent the light had grown. She felt, dimly, the presence of the people; heard the shout as the cloak, unwanted now, was drawn from her. Muffled fingers touched her, plaiting the green wreaths in her hair; and already she was moving away, angling with difficulty her mile-long legs and arms, stepping up the rocky path from the bay. Behind her the procession jostled into order; cymbals crashed, horns shouted, the drums took up their insistent thudding. Her ears registered the sounds; but disconnectedly, in flashes and fragments, mixed with a roaring like the voice of the sea.

The wind blew, steady and not-cold, pressing to her

tautened body close as a glove; while from her great height she saw, with wonderful acuteness, the tiniest details of the land across which she passed. Pebbles and grassblades, wet with sea-damp, jerked beneath her bright as jewels. She sensed, in her exalted awareness, the rising of mighty truths lost as soon as formed, truths that her body nonetheless understood so that it laughed and moved, exulting; while stepping so far above the ground a part of her mind marvelled that she did not fall.

The Corn Ghosts skipped, lashing with their whips, chasing their half-terrified victims from the path. The priests chanted; Cha'Acta, eyes implacable behind his bright green mask, blessed the land, casting spoonfuls of grain to either side. The sun, breaking through the high veils of mist, threw the long shadow of Mata forward across the grass. She glanced down, along the length of her immense body to the far-off, forgotten white tips of her feet. The vision was disturbing; she raised her eyes again, rested them on the distant line of the horizon.

Already – it seemed impossible – she saw before her the high pass in the hills. On the right was the village with its stockade; to her left, close and looming, the Sacred Mound and the waiting House of the God. She could feel now, faintly, the textures of grass and earth beneath her feet; but the intense clarity of sight remained, she saw tiny flowers budding in the grass and insects, sticks and bracken and dead straw. The way steepened, beside the Brook of Choele; she pressed on, hurrying the last few yards. And here was the causeway, built of ancient stone; beyond, the Sacred Mound, empty and desolate and vast.

Never before had she been so high. Subtly she had expected grass and bushes, the very stones, to be changed here somehow, so close to the home of the God; but even to her exalted sight they looked the same. At the causeway end she remembered to turn, showing herself again to the people. She heard them cry, felt their stares against her like a prickling wind; then she was alone, threading her way between the spires of stone.

She climbed now in earnest, using her hands to steady herself. She rounded a lichened buttress of rock, trudged across an open space where dead grass tangles stroked her thighs; and the God House was ahead, awesome and close. She faltered then, hands to her throat; and memory flooded her dulled brain, she wished herself for one heart-stopping

moment back at her father's hearth, smutty and unknown, and all she had done, undone. Then the time was passed; she paused once more to wave, heard the scattered shouts from the hill and stepped inside, to darkness and quiet.

The quietness, at first, oppressed her worst; a singing silence heightened by the rushing of the blood in her ears. She stood still, clutching her shoulders, trying to draw herself into a tiny compass. The long house was empty, and quite bare. The floor, swept of all but the tiniest grains of dirt, gleamed a dull grey-brown; the walls rose, rough and cobbled, to shoulder height; the long gable stretched away above, thatchpoles gleaming equidistant and pale. Between them the reeds lay even and close, filling the place with the scent of grass and ponds.

She walked forward, slowly, still with her arms crossed in front of her. As her eyes became used to the gloom she saw that what she had taken to be the end wall was in fact an open wattle screen, pierced by a narrow entrance. She stepped through it. Beyond, an arm's span away, was a second screen, also pierced. The entrances she saw were staggered, blocking from sight the great outer door. Beyond the second screen was a chamber, square, small and dark. She saw a couch of thickpiled bracken; beside it a water jar and dipper, standing on the smooth, beaten floor.

And that was all.

Her legs shook suddenly. She unwound the garlands from her hair, clumsily, tossed them down unnoticed. She knelt by the pitcher, dipped water. It was clear, sweet and very cold. She drank deeply, slaking herself; then rolled on her back on the bracken bed. She was conscious, now, of a rising weakness; she let her limbs subside, luxuriously, her eyes drift closed. In time the singing in her ears faded to quiet.

She woke in darkness. The little chamber itself was pitchy black; she turned her head, slowly, saw the intervals of the wattle screens lit by a silver-grey glow. For a time, she was confused again; then she realized the hours she must have slept. The cold, metallic light was the moon.

The effects of the seed smoke had wholly left her now. She shivered, wanting a coverlet; but there was nothing in the hut. Then she remembered she was not there to sleep.

She swallowed. Something had roused her, surely. She listened, concentrating her whole awareness. The wind soughed across the Mound, stirring the grass and bushes. A timber creaked, somewhere in the great hut. Her heart

leaped, it seemed into her throat; but nothing further came. The God House was as silent as before.

She frowned, brooding. Were all the tales, the stories, false? Her training, thorough as it had been, stopped short of this. What if no God ever really came, to live in the House on the hill? Or what if – terrible thought – the Corn Lord had rejected her? What if he had already come, in the darkness and quiet, found her unpleasing as a Bride and passed on? Then he would leave the valley for ever; and the corn shoots would rot in the ground, the people starve. She would be stoned, disgraced. . . She clenched her fists, feeling her eyes begin to sting. The disgrace would be the least of her pain.

She made herself be still again. He would come, in his own time and fashion; for who, after all, could command a God? Once, already, he had visited her in the reeds; what more did she need, in proof? It had been a mark of favour such as no other, in her memory, had received. He would come; because he always came, and because he had chosen her.

The thought brought fresh fears in its train. What would he be like, when he came? Perhaps he would be burning hot, or terrible to look on. Perhaps his eyes would be like the eyes of a beast. . . She willed her mind to stop making such thoughts. It was hard, this time of waiting. Now she wished for the magic smoke again and the strength it gave, the great thoughts that in the morning had seemed so clear. In time she slipped, unwillingly, into a doze.

The moon was higher, when she woke again; and this time, she knew without doubt, she had been roused by something more corporeal than the wind. She lay still, trembling, straining her ears. Almost she cried out; but the thought of her voice echoing through the dimness of the hut choked the sound in her throat. Then she heard them; the stealthy, padding footfalls, coming down the moon-shot dark toward her.

She rolled over, scrabbling at the bracken. Her vision swam and sparked. A blur of movement, sensed more than seen; and a figure stepped into the chamber. She stayed crouched and still, glaring up. The moon, touching the wattle screens, gave a dim, diffused light. For her eyes, tuned to blackness, it was enough; she could see, now, every terrible detail.

The creature before her was naked, seeming taller than a

man. Round calves and thighs ran delicate, scrolling line-works of tattoo; above the thighs the manhood swung, a great, thrusting, forward-jutting column. More tattoos marked the breasts; while in one hand the figure gripped a Staff of Power, topped by the Sign of the Corn Lord. Its head alone was invisible, covered by a great fantastic mask; black in this light but green she knew, green as the sprouting grain. She did scream then, high and shrill; and the creature growled impatiently. "Be quiet, little fool," it said. "The God is here."

The form was Godlike; but the voice, though muffled by the mask, she knew too well. It was the voice of Cha'Acta.

Her limbs, that had been stiff with fear, became suddenly loosened. She scuttled for the doorway, ducking, fending off the clutching arms; but the High Priest caught her by the hair, flung her heavily back to the couch. She lay panting, tried to roll aside. He stooped above her; the mask caught her a bruising blow on the cheek. She scrabbled, biting and scratching; and the thing fell clear, showed her Cha'Acta's contorted face. She flung herself at him then, beating and pummelling with her fists; but her wrists were caught, blows rained on her body. She curled whimpering, wrapped round a bright ball of pain; she was lifted, thrown down and lifted again. Lights spun and swam before her eyes, like the magic lights of the seed-smoke. When the beating was over she could no longer see; and her mouth felt loose and stinging. She lay dully, unable to resist, feeling the great weight of Cha'Acta press across her. After that the dream or night-mare was repeated many times, till the middle of her body felt one great burning pain; but toward dawn, the High Priest let her be.

She moved slowly, in the cold grey light, hanging her draggled hair. Rolled over, groped with her heels for the hard earth floor. The movement caused giddiness, and a vast sickness; she hung her head again and tried to vomit, but nothing came.

In time the sickness passed a little. She opened her eyes blearily, stared down. Her body, that had been smoothly white, was ugly now with bruises, marked with dried blood. She panted, holding her hands out in front of her face. They were dark-striped too.

She set her teeth, edged to her knees beside the pitcher. The water, splashed over shoulders and head, brought a little more awareness. She worked clumsily, rubbing herself clean.

Lastly she drank, swilling the metallic taste from her mouth.

Lying across the bed was a tunic of fine bleached linen, decorated on the breast with the motif of the God. She stared at it for a while then stood, worked it painfully over her head. She peered out carefully between the wattle screens. The dawn light showed her a huddled shape by the outer door. She began to creep toward it, an inch at a time, setting her feet down noiselessly.

Some sixth sense roused Cha'Acta. He sat up, holding out an arm; and the great mask of the God crashed against his skull. He groaned then, gripping his hands round the ankles of the Bride. Mata struck again, frenzied, bringing the mask down from a height. The eyes of Cha'Acta rolled upward, disclosing the whites. The High Priest arched his body, breath whistling through his nose; but his fingers still held firm. The third blow opened the skin of his scalp in a white half moon that flooded instantly with red. He fell back, head against the pale rough wall; and Mata ran.

Fear lent her speed. Only at the bottom of the Mound she paused, doubled up, hands gripping beneath her kilt. The spasm ebbed; she stared up fearfully, certain she had been seen. But the village and the high rough slope of grass lay deserted.

She set off again, walking and running by turns, rubbing to ease the stitched cramps in her side. For a time she followed, more or less blindly, the path of the Great Procession. Once out of sight of the pass and the Sacred Mound, instinct made her turn aside. In the low ground between hills and sea, an arm of forest thrust black and ragged in the early light. Here her people never ventured; for the forest was the haunt of wolves and bears, wildcats and savage ghosts, and shunned by all right-minded dwellers on the chalk. By mid-morning she was deep among the trees, safe for the time from observation.

Her fasting, and the terror of the night, were rapidly taking their toll. She fell often, stumbling over creepers and unseen snags. Each time it was longer before she rose. She stopped at last, staring round her fearfully. About her the trees had grown higher; their vast shapes, black and looming, cut back all but a glimmer of light. Between the gnarled trunks the ground was rough and broken, carpeted with old briars; branches and twigs hung motionless, and there were no sounds of birds.

She rubbed a hand across her wet face, staggered on again.

Her blindness led her finally to the head of a little bluff. She saw it too late; the rank grass slope, sheen of water and mud ten feet below. She landed heavily, with a thudding splash. The soft ground saved her at least from broken bones; she crawled a yard, then two, lay thinking she would never rise again.

The wind blew then, stirring at last the tops of the trees, whispering in the tangled undergrowth.

She lifted her head, frowning, trying to force her mind to work. The breeze came again; and she seemed to see, with great clearness, the yellow slopes of the hills she had left for ever.

She raised herself, moaning. Here, between the trees where nothing came but Devils, no God would ever search to find her bones. Her limbs jerked puppet-fashion, outside her control; tears squeezed from her eyes; but her mouth moved, whispering a prayer. To the Corn Lord, the Green One, the Waker of the Grain.

The way lay across a shallow marsh, its surface streaked with bands of brownish scum. She crossed it, floundering and stumbling. The sun was higher now; her mind recorded, dully, the impact of heat on back and arms. On the far bank she rested again, gasping, thrust half from sight beneath a tangle of lapping briars. Beyond, the ground sloped smoothly upward; and it seemed her Lord called from ahead, ever more strong and clear. She toiled forward, sensing the thinning of the trees. She broke at last from a fringe of bracken, stumbled and dropped dazedly to her knees.

Ahead of her, bright in sunlight, stretched a long, smooth ridge of chalk. Across it, curving close to the forest edge before swinging to climb to the crest, ran a rutted track; and crowning the ridge at its farthest end was a village, fenced about by watchtowers and a stockade. In such a place she had been born, and reared; but this was not her home. She had never seen it before.

She lay awhile where she had fallen, face against the soft, short turf. She was roused by a jangling of harness, the trundle of wheels. She sat up, thankfully. Along the track, jogging gravely, moved a bulky, two-wheeled cart loaded high with faggots. The driver reined at sight of her; and she forced her bruised lips to make words. "Bring me to your headman," they said, "and my God will reward you, granting you great happiness."

The driver stepped forward cautiously, bent over her.

She twisted her face up, trying to smile; and for the first time, saw his eyes.

Gohm, the woodman, had never been too strong in the head; he bit at a broken nail, frowning, puzzling his sluggish wits. "Who are you?" he said slowly, in his thick voice. "Some forest spirit, fallen from a tree?" He turned her over, roughly; then snatched at the top of the filthy tunic. The fabric gave; he stared at what he saw, and began to giggle. "No spirit," he said. "Or if you are, you have no power here." He drove two calloused fingers beneath her kilt; then, because she screamed so, kicked her in the mouth. After this he did several more things before tossing her into the cart, covering her roughly with bundles from the load. "Now certainly," he said, "the Gods have smiled on Gohm." He shook the reins; the cart lurched, trundling on up the steep rise toward the village.

At the far end of the muddy street the woodman reined. "Woman," he bellowed, "see what the Gods have sent. A slave to scour your pots and blow the fire; and better still for me."

The woman who peered from the low doorway of the hut was as grey and lined, as thin and lizard-quick as he was bearlike and slow. "What are you babbling about, you old fool?" she grumbled, scrambling onto the rear step of the cart. She pushed the faggots aside; then stayed stock still, eyes widening, hand pressed across her mouth. Gohm too was arrested, his wandering attention riveted for once; for the bag of bones and blood with which he had cumbered his life still owned two white and blazing eyes, fixed on him now in a stare terrible in its intensity. "This is your evil day, Gohm Woodchopper," it whispered. "Those fingers, first to defile, hew no more sticks; no water will they draw for you, not if you lie dying."

With that the shape collapsed abruptly, lying still as death; and the woman reached thin fingers to the mud-stained cloth of the tunic, traced there beneath the dirt the Mark of the Lord.

To Mata, existence was a dull and speechless void, shot through with flashes that were greater pains. She was lodged in a fresh-swept hut, and women appointed to wash and heal her body, minister to her needs; but of this she was unaware, and remained unaware for many weeks to come. Meanwhile the Fate called down on Gohm worked itself out swiftly enough. A bare week later, while cutting wood at

the forest edge, he gashed two fingers deeply with his hook. The wounds, instead of closing, widened, yellowed and began to stink; while the pain from them grew so great it drove him wild. One day he took an axe and, going behind the hut, struck the agonized members from him; but the wild surgery did little to improve his condition. He took to wandering by himself, grey-faced and mumbling, and it was no surprise when his body was brought in from the trees. The corpse was much disfigured, torn as if by bears, and the face quite eaten away. This happened within a month of Mata leaving the wood; and the village that sheltered her grew silent and fearful. Men crept to the hut where she lay, avoiding its shadow, to leave rich gifts; so that when she finally woke, it was to considerable estate.

The news at first meant little to her. She lay in the hut, surrounded by her women, eating little, watching the sailing clouds in the sky, the rich waving green of trees. Summer had come once more; the Corn Lord, though thwarted of his Bride, had yet fulfilled his promise. She frowned at the thought, resolving many things; then rose and sought an audience with the headman.

He received her in the Council Hut; very similar it was to the Lodge in which her father had once sat. Beside him stood his Chief Priest; and at him Mata stared comfortlessly a great while. Finally she turned, tossing her head. "Chief," she said. "What do you wish of me?"

The headman spread his hands, looking alarmed. The tale of Gohm had not been lost on him; this pale-faced, brilliant-eyed child made him uneasy in his chair of office. "Our wish," he said humbly enough, "the wish of all my people, is that you stay with us and let us honour you. Also if you will speak well for us to your Lord, our crops will grow straight and tall."

The Chief Priest had begun to fidget; Mata turned back to him her disquieting stare. "This is good to hear," she said carefully, "and pleasing to the God. But I have heard of other towns where though fine words are spoken they are not supported by deeds."

The headman burst into voluble protests, and Mata was pleased to see that sweat had formed on his forehead. "Look, then, that it be so," she said. "For my Lord loves me well, and invests much strength in me. My touch brings death and worse; or pleasure, and great joy to men." She stretched her hand out, and was secretly amused to see the other

draw back. "Now this is the wish of the God," she said. "You shall build, on the hill beside the town, a great House. Its length shall be thirty paces, measured by a strong, tall man, its breadth five and a span. . ." She went on, as well as her memory served, to give a description of the God House of Cha'Acta. "Here I shall live with my Lord," she said, "and such women as I choose to gather and instruct." She glanced sidelong at the growing darkness of the Chief Priest's face, and spoke again rapidly. "Here also," she said, "your holy Priest shall come, and many good things will happen to him. Also he must bless the work, and oversee each stage of building; for he is highly loved by the God, and a great man in your land." She dropped to one knee before the priest, and saw his expression change from hatred to wondering suspicion.

So a new God House was built; and there Mata lived, in some luxury. She took as bedmate a slim brown child, Alissa; her she taught carefully, instructing her in Mysteries and the pleasuring of Gods and others. There also, when the mood was on her, she summoned Cha'Ilgo, the Chief Priest; and made herself, with time, most pleasing to him.

They were good days, in the Long House on the crest of the hill; but all summers must reach their end. The leaves of the forest were changing to red and gold when Mata once more called the priest and headman to her. "Now I must leave you," she said without preamble. "For last night my God came to me in the dark, while all the village slept. His hair was yellow as the sun, brushing the rafters where he stood beside my bed; his flesh was green as rushes or the sprouting corn, his member greater than a bull's and wonderful to see. He told me many Mysteries, not least this; that out of love for you I must leave Alissa, who is dear to me as life, to be your new Corn Queen. In this way you will be happy, when I am gone; the barley will spring, and you will have your fill of beer, cheese and all good things."

They heard her words with mixed emotions. Cha'Ilgo at least had come to regard her presence highly; yet it was not without relief he saw her litter pass, for the last time, the armed gates of the town. She had come friendless and alone; she left in mighty state, Hornmen and fluters before her and a company of spears. Her kilt was white as snow; necklaces of pebbles and amber adorned her throat; round her slim ankles were rings of bright black stone. Behind swayed other litters with her treasures and going-gifts; seed grain and

weapons, jars of honey and beer, money-sticks of fine grey iron. Behind again came trudging sheep and oxen, and a great concourse of villagers.

Cha'Acta was warned of her approach by the horns and thudding drums. He came to the village gates to see for himself, while Mata's folk lined the stockade walks with their spears, biting their beards uncertainly. It was Magan the headman who first recognized his daughter; he rushed to greet her rejoicing, amazed at her return from the dead. Then the gates were swung wide, the company tramped through; and there was a time of great rejoicing. For the Corn Bride was reborn; the Gods could smile again on the village in the steep chalk pass.

For a time Cha'Acta and his priests held aloof, huddling in the Council Lodge talking and conspiring; till black looks from the villagers, and a plainer hint from Magan, forced the issue. The High Priest entered the hut where Mata was lodged suspiciously enough, leaving a handful of armed followers at the door; but she ran to him with cries of joy. She brought him beer, serving him with her own hands; afterwards she knelt before him, begging his forgiveness and calling him her Lord. "My eyes were blinded, till I could not see the truth," she said. "I saw Cha'Acta, but could not see the God; though he blazed from him most splendidly." She poured more beer, and more; till his eyes became less narrow, and he unbent toward her fractionally. Across his brow ran a deep diagonal scar, the mark she had given him with the mask; she touched it, tenderly, and smiled. "For this I was punished, and justly so," she said. She showed him the white half-moon on her chin, where Gohm's boot had torn the lip away, the crossing weals on legs and thighs from her wild flight through the wood. "Also," she said, lifting her kilt still further, "see how I have grown, Cha'Acta my priest. Now the God has ordered that I return, to love you better than before." Then despite himself the manhood in Cha'Acta rose, so that he took her several times that very night, finding her sweet beyond all normal experience. "The God first entered me when I worked at cutting his reeds," she said later. "Now he comes to me again, in you. Let it be so forever, Cha'Acta Lord."

The trees blazed, slowly shed their leaves. For a time the air remained warm; but when the first frosts lay on the ground, whitening the long slopes of the fields, news came that disturbed the new-found tranquillity of the tribe. Stran-

gers appeared in the valley, refugees from the unknown lands that stretched beyond the Great Heath. They brought with them wild tales of a new people, a race of warriors who lived not by the peaceful tilling of the soil but by plunder, by fire and the sword. They came, it was said, from the North, from beyond the White Island that was all that remained of England, sailing in long, fast ships that braved the roughest seas. Each warrior, it seemed, was a King in his own right, claiming kinship with certain Gods: wild Gods, rough and bloody and dark, whose very names sent thrills of fear through the storytellers as they uttered them. There were tales of whole villages destroyed, populations wiped out; for the invaders preyed on the land like insect swarms, leaving it bare and ruined behind them. The elders shook their heads over the stories. Nothing like them had ever come their way; but there seemed little to be done, and with the first real snow the trickle of refugees stopped. For a time, nothing more was heard.

Mata paid little attention to the tales. Her power with the people had increased; for her wanderings had taught her very well how to win respect. Always, now, she was at Cha'Acta's side; and always behind her stood the great Corn Lord, warming her with his presence. Children and babes in arms were brought to her; for it was believed magic dwelt in her touch, the young ones she blessed would grow up healthy and strong. Yet always she was careful to defer to Cha'Acta, so the Chief Priest had little cause for complaint. Each night he came to her in the God House; for the child who had once proved such a willing pupil was now an able mistress. So much was she to his liking that when the seed time was nearly due again and the ploughs went out to scratch the thin-soiled fields, the question of a new Bride for the God had not been raised.

It was Cha'Acta who broached the matter, late one night. The sea mist lay cold and clammy on the hill, eclipsing the torches on the village watchtowers, swirling round the fire that burned in the great hut. Mata heard him for a while; then rose impatiently, flicking a heavy shawl across her shoulders, and walked to the hut door. She stood staring into the void, feeling the cold move on belly and thighs. After a while she spoke.

"Where will the God find a Bride equal what he loses?" she asked amusedly. "Can another do the Magic Thing, that pleases Cha'Acta so much? Will another Bride be loving,

and as warm? Will the barley spring better for her than me?"

The High Priest waited, brooding; for he knew her power. Also, he was loth to lose her. He made no answer; and she turned back, walked swaying toward him, her eyes dark and huge. "Also," she said, "what would become of me? Would I be found too one day face down in a pool, with the brook fish nibbling me?"

He stirred impatiently. "Let us have no more of this," he said. "For all your beauty you are still a child, Mata. You do not understand all Mysteries."

She felt the God inside her, giving her strength. She kicked the fire barefooted, sending up a shower of sparks. "This I understand," she said. "There are Mysteries best not told, Cha'Acta Priest; or spears would be raised, and sacred blood would surely make them unclean."

Cha'Acta rose, eyes smouldering with rage. He moved toward her, lifting his hands; but she stood her ground, flung the shawl back and laughed. "Look, Cha'Acta," she said. "Look before you strike, and see the Magic Thing."

He stared for a time wild-eyed, rocking and groaning. So easy now to strangle her and cut, show what was left for the work of some wild beast. . . Sweat stood on his forehead; then, abruptly, he fell back. "Do not taunt me, Mata," he said hoarsely. "I mean no harm to you."

His chance was gone; and they both knew it. She stood a moment longer, smiling down; then dropped to her knees beside him. He gripped her, gasping; and she was very loving to him. They lay all night, in the close light of the fire, and Mata gave him no rest; till toward dawn he slept like one of the dead. She roused him in due course, feeding him broth and beer; afterwards she dressed, came and sat obediently at his feet. "My Lord," she said, "tell me now of these thoughts that I am to go, and another take my place."

He shook his head, eyes hooded. "No one will take your place, Mata," he said. "You know that well enough."

She pursued him, gently. "But Lord, the people will wish it."

He said, "The people can be swayed."

"I would not bring grief to my Lord Cha'Acta."

He said hopelessly, "You can persuade them, Mata, if no other."

She stared up a moment under her brows, eyes luminous. "Then do you give me leave?"

He banged his fists on his knees, pressed them to his forehead. "Do what you will," he said. "Take what you wish, speak as the Lord moves you; but for my sake, stay his Bride."

She sat back, clapping her hands delightedly. "Then let Cha'Acta too swear his constancy," she said. "By the great God, who stands at his shoulder as he stands at mine. For I have seen him many times, my Lord; his prick is long as a rush bundle, and as hard and green."

He groaned again at that; for she had a way of rousing him with words even when her body was quiet. "I swear," he said finally. "In the God's own House, where he must surely hear."

So a pact was made between them; and Cha'Acta found he could not break the invisible bonds with which she had tied him.

By early summer, the people had begun to murmur openly; for the planted corn was springing and still no Procession had been called, no new Bride chosen for the God. Mata herself stilled them, speaking from the step of the Council Lodge; an unheard-of thing for a girl or woman to do. "Now I tell you," she said, "the Procession will take place, as always before. Also the God, speaking through Cha'Acta, has already let his choice be known. It is this; that I, and no other, will lead his priests, his Bride of a second summer."

There were shocked mutterings at that, and some fists were shaken. She quelled the disturbance, instantly. "Listen to me again," she said, raising her voice above the rest. "In another place, a man once lifted his hand to me; the flesh dropped very quickly from his bones. My Lord, who is swift to bless, is swifter yet to punish; for his voice is the rolling thunder of heaven, his anger the lightning that splits the stoutest tree."

The villagers still growled uncertainly. Men stared at each other, gripping the handles of their daggers, pulling at their beards.

"Now hear another thing," said Mata. She spoke more quietly; by degrees, the crowd stilled again. "The grain will sprout higher and stronger than before," she said. "Your animals will thrive, and you will prosper. No evil shall come in all the season, while I rule the God's House. And if I lie,

I tell you this; you may fling me from the Mound, and break my bones." She said no more but turned away, pushing impatiently through the crowd. It parted for her, wonderingly; and no man raised his voice when she had gone.

Her words had been very bold; but when Cha'Acta taxed her with them she merely smiled. "The God spoke truth to me," she said serenely, "as you will see."

The summer was such as the valley had never known. The grain stood taller than the oldest villager could remember, waving and golden and rich. No wind or rain came to spoil the harvest, so that the storage pits were filled to their brims and more had to be dug, lined with wickerwork and clay. The cattle and sheep grew fat on the valley pastures, the harvest celebrations were the finest ever known; and after that all made way for Mata as she walked, stepping respectfully clear of her shadow.

To Cha'Acta also it seemed she was possessed. She had taken to sniffing the magic seeds again; she used them constantly, claiming they gave her clearer sight. Often, now, she had visions of the God. Also he came to her more frequently; and once took her in full sight of all the people, so that she lay arching her back and crying out, and spittle bearded her chin. At that even the Chief Priest fled from her, in more than religious awe.

Then more signs of the raiders began to appear.

Once again, bands of wanderers started filtering through the valley. All were ragged; many bore gaping wounds. The villagers fed them from their own supplies, turning troubled eyes toward the north. Some nights now the horizon glowed an angry red, as if whole towns were burning far across the Plain. Once a party under Magan ventured north, several days' journey away; they came back telling of scorched fields, blackened ruins where once had stood peaceful huts. At this Cha'Acta sat in council with the priests and elders of the tribe; a long and solemn council that went on a whole day and night. Mata attended for a time; but the smoke that filled the big Lodge annoyed her, stinging her eyes, while the babble of so many voices confused her brain. She ran away to her own great House on the Mound, lay all night dreaming and watching up at the stars. At dawn she sniffed the seed smoke again; and a vision came to her so splendid she ran crying to the village while the sun still stood red on the hills, throwing her long flapping shadow across the grass. The news she told sent men scurrying, uncertainly at first

and then more eagerly, toward the Sacred Mound. Today, she proclaimed, the God held open House; and the people trooped after her, not without superstitious shudderings. Cha'Acta, emerging with his followers, found the watch-towers empty, the street deserted save for the witless and the very young; while the crest of the Sacred Mound was black with folk. There was nothing left him but to follow, raging.

The people had gathered, in a great half-moon, on that side of the Mound that faced the village; the space before the God House was filled by them. Mata herself stood facing them, outlined sharply by the brilliant sky. Beneath her heels, a sheer stone face plunged to the yellow cliff of grass; beyond, tiny and far-off, rose the russet heads of the trees that lined the brook.

Cha'Acta, panting up the last incline at the head of his troupe, was in time to catch her final words.

"And so by this means we shall be saved; for none will dare raise a hand against us, while the God himself watches from the hill and his limbs are scoured and bright. It will be a work like no other in the world. By its aid, and my Lord's protection, you will become famous, and wealthier than before; for men of other tribes will surely journey many days to see."

Cha'Acta had heard more than enough. He marched to the centre of the circle below the wall, holding up his arms for quiet. In his robes of offices, blazoned with the Mark of the God, he made an impressive figure. The hubbub that had risen was stilled; Mata alone remained smiling, hands on her hips. She watched indifferently from her wall, the black, long hair flicking across her face.

"Come down from there," said the Chief Priest sharply. "And hear me, all you people. This is an evil thing that you have done."

The villagers buzzed angrily; and he turned, pointing, the sleeve of his robe flapping in the wind. "This is no time for toys," he said. "To the north, not five days' journey away, are many warriors; more warriors than you or I, any of us, have ever seen. Where they come from, no man can tell; but they bring with them death and fire, and that you know full well, as well as I. Now for a night and a day we have sat in the Council Lodge, debating many things, always with the safety of the people in our hearts. For a time, we were

unsure; then there came among us a certain God, who was green and tall –"

"That is surely strange," piped up an old, grizzled-bearded man. "For the God was with his Bride, with Mata here. From her own lips we heard it."

Cha'Acta had never in his life been contradicted by a commoner; his brow flushed with rage, for a moment he considered striking the other to the ground. He swallowed, and forced himself to remain calm. "I am the High Priest of the God," he said coldly. "You forget your station; thank the God that in his mercy he lets you keep your tongue." He raised his arms again. "I am your Priest," he said. "Have I not counselled you wisely, and brought you to prosperity? Is this not true?"

A roar cut him short. Voices shouted, above the din.

"Mata . . . Mata led us . . ."

Cha'Acta felt sweat running beneath his robes. The mob surged forward; he checked it, imperiously. "Hear me," he said. "Hear me, for your lives. The people from the north have told us, and some of you have seen, that a stockade is no defence against these warriors. For they press so thick against it, cutting and stabbing with their swords, that the stoutest fence is finally thrown down. Now what we must do is this. We must ring the village, on its weakest side, with a great bank and ditch. The chalk we shall pile high, so it is steep and slippery to climb; and in the ditch, planted close together, we shall set forests of pointed stakes. The stockade we shall line with our best slingers and archers, and hold the enemy away until he tires. This the God revealed to me; and this we must do at once."

"And this the God revealed to me," shouted Mata. She stooped and snatched up something that lay at her feet, held it out for all to see; a goat hide, cured to suppleness, bearing in great black charcoal strokes the figure of a man. The club he carried he brandished fiercely over his head; his eyes glared; his great member rose proudly, thrusting up before his chest. "See the God's own shape," said Mata. "For so he appeared to me, not two hours since, as I sat here on the grass. While you and your greybeards, Cha'Acta, wagged your silly heads in the Council Lodge and talked long, stupid words."

At that the blood seemed to flow from Cha'Acta's face and arms, leaving him icy cold. "Mata Godbride," he said, "you lie . . ."

Mata's eyes were sparkling at last, brilliant with hate. "And you lie, holy priest," she shouted. "Before the people, and in sight of the God." She danced on the wall, wrenching at the neck of her tunic. "In the reedbed, before he took me to wife, the Corn Lord put his Mark on me," she said. "This is a great Mystery; greater than Cha'Acta's –"

The crowd bellowed; and the Chief Priest, face blazing white to the lips, called hoarsely, "Mata, as you love me –"

"As I love you?" she squalled, mocking. "For this have I waited, Cha'Acta, many moons, and suffered your weight on me. . . ." She flung out an accusing arm. "Cha'Acta Priest," she shouted, "took me against my will, forcing me in the Sacred House there when I was promised to the God. And Cha'Acta took the Bride Choele, killing her afterwards to seal her tongue –"

Cha'Acta waited for no more. He ran with surprising speed across the grass, up the swell of ground to the wall. In his hand gleamed a short, curved knife. Mata didn't move; she stood contemptuously, feet spread on the wall, hair flogging her bare white shoulders. Ten paces he was from her, five, three; and something flickered in the high, warm light. Few saw the flight of the spear; but all heard the thud as it struck home, full between the High Priest's shoulderblades.

Cha'Acta had gained the base of the wall. He stood quite still for a moment, eyes wide, ashen face turned toward the girl. One hand was to his chest; across the fingers, where the iron tip of the weapon pierced the flesh, ran a thin, bright trickle of blood. He raised the knife, uncertainly; then his legs lost their strength. His body toppled, crashing through the bushes below the wall; then it was bounding, faster and faster, down the sheer slope of grass. The onlookers, rushing forward, saw it strike the base of the Mound, fly loose-limbed into the air. A stout tree shook to its top, a splash arose; then he was gone, and the stream was rolling him away.

For a moment longer the crowd stared, pale-faced and shocked, edging back from where Magan stood wide-eyed, glaring at the fingers that had made the cast. Then Mata raised her arms.

"*Build the God . . . !*"

The shout spread, on the instant; she was seized and swung from hand to hand, carried by the surging, rejoicing mob down the long slope of the Mound.

Through the rest of the day the villagers scurried across the face of the great hill, roping out a grid pattern two hundred paces deep, nearly a hundred and fifty broad. At nightfall, fires sprang up at a score of points around it. The work went on far into the hours of dark; women and children toiled forward and back across the slope, bringing fuel for the beacons. At first light Mata, who had not slept, began her part. Men followed her, wonderingly. She carried the tiny drawing of the thing to be; over it, they saw, she had inscribed a network of the same fine crossing lines. She worked methodically, with many pauses and checks, pressing lines of white pegs into the ground; by midday nearly half the Giant was visible, and work had started on the cutting of the head. Men tore at the turf with hatchets and antler picks; others shuffled forward and back up the hill, doubled over by the weight of baskets of chalk rubble that were tipped out of sight among the bushes of the Mound. In the village hearths burned low, babies cried unfed; while lines of women, both old and young, scurried across the hill, wearing a maze of new tracks in the grass, bringing platters of fish and meat to the workers, and jugs of milk and beer. At nightfall Mata left her marking-out to supervise the digging at the shoulders. The trenches, she proclaimed, were everywhere too narrow; she ordered them widened to the span of a tall man's arm, and deepened by a foot or more. Fresh shifts of workers scurried to the task; and by the second dawn the head and shoulders were complete.

With the dawn came a little group of strangers. They stood far off below the Sacred Mound, well out of the longest bowshot, and stared up at the hill. Magan marked them worriedly, shading his eyes with his hand. They were too distant for details to be clear; but their clothes seemed not to be the clothes of chalk dwellers, and on their heads he caught the gleam of iron. Also he saw that each had come on horseback, a nearly unheard-of thing; he could make out the animals grazing, farther down the slope. A party was detached to investigate; but long before they came within hail the strangers wheeled their mounts, and trotted away.

Mata, dark lines of tiredness under her eyes, still scurried from point to point, directing every detail of the work; and slowly, sparkling-white, the Giant grew. The arms developed hands, the hands burst into fingers; then the great club came into being, vaunting across the grass. But by midday the valley floor was once more a-straggle with refugees. They

shuffled past in groups, staring in wonderment at the toiling villagers; and one of them called up. "What are you doing, fools who live on the chalk?" he said. "Do you think the Northern Men will be frightened of your little picture? Will they run with hands above their heads, crying 'Oh'?"

Magan, poised on a slight eminence with the spears of his bodyguard clustered round him, answered loftily enough. "Get to the sea, old man, and do not trouble us with chatter. This is God's work, and a magic thing." But even as he spoke the headman lifted his eyes worriedly, scanning the vacant outlines of the hills.

By the third evening, the trickle of refugees had once more thinned; but fires burned close, reflecting angrily from the clouds. Also, carried on the wind, came the dull throb of drums; and for the first time folk paused uneasily in their work, stared questioningly at each other. Then it was that Magan sought out his daughter; but she brushed him away. "Be silent, Father," she said. "You have already killed a Chief Priest; hold your peace, or perhaps the God will kill you too."

By the fourth dawn the Giant's great prick lay proud and gleaming across the hill, and the diggers were working on his feet and calves. The drums had beaten throughout the night; now they fell ominously quiet. One scout, posted by Magan a mile or more out on the heath, returned swearing he had seen the glint of armoured, marching men; the others never came back at all.

Then Magan frowned, seeing where faith had led them; but there was no time left for further reflection. From over the skyline beyond the Sacred Mound galloped a column of riders. They came with terrifying speed, fanning out across the turf, banners and standards fluttering; from them as they swept closer rose a harsh, many-throated roar.

Magan, shouting despairingly for his spears, ran down the hillside, whirling his own sword above his head. Everywhere men flung down their mattocks, grabbed for weapons. A line formed, packed and jostling. It checked the charge; though the weight and pace of the riders tore great gaps in the villagers' ranks. The warriors, fighting well, reformed; and a desperate retreat began, up across the sloping grass to the stockade gates. Behind the fight women and old folk scurried across the hill, flinging their baskets of rubble aside as they ran. Mata, hacking wildly at the turf, glared up to find herself nearly alone. The Giant was all but complete, part of

one foot only remaining to be worked; but her voice, shrill as a bird, went for the moment unheeded.

Magan, fighting his hardest, heard behind him a fresh sound of disaster. He glanced back, appalled; and a groan burst from him. Over the stockade black smoke towered into the sky, fringed at its base with leaping tongues of flame; on the ramparts tiny figures swayed, locked in deadly combat. The attack had been, after all, two-pronged; the second column of raiders, approaching unseen, had already taken the all-but-deserted village, and fired the huts.

Hope had gone; now only one thing remained. The headman raised his voice in a great shout.

"The Giant . . . Fight to the Giant, and stand . . ."

The lines reeled, locked and breathless; a battling half-moon formed, withdrawing step by step across the grass. Against it the raiders charged again and again, with reckless skill. Everywhere men had fallen, lay tumbled in ungainly heaps; between them, through the drifting smoke, the hillside glowed jewel-red. Magan opened his mouth to shout again; and a lance, wickedly barbed, took him in the throat, stood out, crimsoned, a foot beyond his head.

Behind the fighting men, almost between the legs of the horses, a frenzied little group still hacked at the turf. Sweat ran, blinding, into Mata's eyes; her hair hung across her face; and arbitrarily it seemed, two trenches met. The God was finished.

She turned, yelling defiance, sent the mattock spinning at the face of a mounted man. She ran upward, diagonally across the hill. Her hair flew round her; her breasts, uncovered, swung and jolted from her dress. The grass, close before her eyes, raced and jerked; but the frenzy in her brain blinded her to all else. Level with the Giant's head she turned, squalling with triumph, staring down at the great thing Cha'Acta hadn't lived to see; and the line below her broke, the last men of the village went over in a writhing heap.

Something sang past her, and again. She ran once more, doubling like a hare; for only her own folk used the sling. Beside her a woman, eyes bolting, staggered in mid-stride, twisting to show her shattered forehead. Mata glared up at the stockade and watchtower; and there was the dark blur of a descending missile. For a moment, while sense remained, she wondered how the sky could have made a fist, hit her so terribly in the mouth; then her legs buckled, she

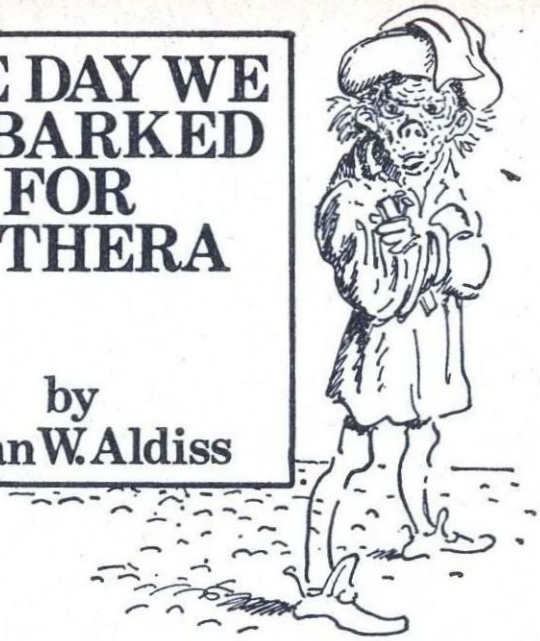
rolled back with the slope. She fetched up, finally, in the Giant's heel; behind her across the grass stretched a wavering line of red.

He came floating at last from agony and dark, brighter and more lovely than she had seen him before. He stooped above her, frowning, his great gold eyes compassionate. Shudders shook her, racking her ruined body; it seemed she raised her arms; and his entering was first the greatest pain she had known, and afterward the greatest peace. She sighed, yielding; and the Corn Lord took her up, flew with her to a far place of delight.

The invaders were well pleased. The storage pits of the village, undamaged by the flames, had yielded grain for an entire season; the valley was sheltered, opening to the south; and in all the land there were no enemies left. Their chieftains strutted, jangling the trinkets they had stolen from the dead; while those who took other pleasures from the wreckage on the hill found many of the bodies still warm.

THE DAY WE EMBARKED FOR CYTHERA

by
Brian W. Aldiss



The ruined hillside above the lake was an idyllic place for conversation and fete. We could see the town but not the palace, and the river beyond the town, and flowers grew in the warm bank on which we sat. The pines were shattered, the dells incredible, the scents of acacia all that mid-June could demand. I had forgottten my guitar, and my stout friend Portinari insisted on wearing his scarlet conversing-jacket.

So he was conversing on grandiose scarlet themes, and I was teasing him. "Mankind lives between animal and intellectual world by reason of its cerebral inheritance. I am mathematician and scholar. I am also dog and ape."

"Do you live in the rival worlds alternately or both in the same moment?"

He gestured, looking down the hillside to where young men fought with yellow poles. "They are not rival worlds. They are complementary, one to another, mathematician, scholar, dog, ape, all in one capacious brain."

"You surprise me." I took care to look unsurprised as I spoke. "The mathematician must find the antics of the dog tedious, and does not the ape revolt against the scholar?"

"They all fight it out in bed," said Clyton, cuttingly. We thought he had left our conversation to our own devices, for he squatted at our feet under one of the shattered tombstones, presenting the fantastic patterns of his satin-covered back to us as he examined the ancient graves.

"They fight it out in science," offered Portinari: less a correction than a codicil.

"They truce it out in art," I said.

"How about this fossil of art?" Clyton asked. He rose, smiling at us under his punchinello mask, and held out the fragment of tomb he had been scrutinising.

It bore a human figure crudely outlined in stone, fuzzed further by lichen, one patch of which had, with mycotic irony, provided him with a fuzz of yellowing pubic hair. In one hand the figure clutched an umbrella; the other hand, offered palm outwards, was enlarged grotesquely.

"Is he supplicating?" I asked.

"Or welcoming?" Portinari asked.

"If so, welcoming what?"

"Death?"

"He's testing for rain. Hence the umbrella," Clyton said. We laughed.

Through the low hills, screams rang.

Nothing here attracted life, for the drought of some centuries' standing had long since withered all green things. The calm was the calm of paralysis, which even the screams could not break. Through the hills, making for the edge of a distant horizon, ran the double track of a railway line. Along this line, a giant steam locomotive fled, screaming. Behind it, pursuing, came the carnivores.

There were six carnivores, their headlights blazing. They were now almost abreast of their quarry. Their klaxons echoed as they called to each other. It could be only a short time before they pulled their victim down.

The locomotive was untiring. For all its superb strength, it could not outdistance the carnivores. Nor was there any help for it here; the nearest station was still many hundreds of miles away.

Now the leading carnivore was level with its cab. In des-

peration, the locomotive suddenly flung itself sideways, off the confining rails, and charged into the dried river bed that lay on one side. The carnivores halted for a moment, then swung to the side also and again roared in pursuit. Now the advantage was more than ever with them, for the locomotive's wheels sank into the ground.

In a few minutes, it was all over. The great beasts dragged down their prey. The locomotive keeled heavily on to its side, thrashing out vainly with its pistons. Undeterred, the carnivores hurled themselves onto its black and vibrating body.

Through the hills, screams rang.

Though the king had decreed a holiday, we still had our wards strapped to our wrists. I punched for Universal Knowledge and asked about rainfall in the area four centuries previously. No figures. Climate reckoned equable.

"Machines are so confoundly imprecise," I complained.

"But we live by imprecision, Bryan! That's how Portinari's mathematician and puppy dog manage to co-exist. We made the machines, so they bear our impress of imprecision."

"They're binary. What's imprecise about either-or, on-off?" asked Portinari.

"Surely either-or is the major imprecision! Mathematician-dog. Scholar-ape. Rain-fine. Life-death. It's not the imprecision in the things but in the hiatus between them, the dash between the either and the or. In that hiatus is our heritage. Our heritage the machines have inherited."

While Clyton was saying this, Portinari was brushing away the pine needles on the other side of the tomb (or perhaps I might make that stout friend of mine sound more mortal if I said on the *opposite* side of the tomb). A metal ring was revealed. Portinari pulled it, and dragged a picnic basket from the earth.

As we were exclaiming over the basket's contents, pretty Columbine arrived. She kissed us each in turn and offered to lay the picnic for us. From the top of the basket, she produced a snowy cloth and, spreading it out, commenced to arrange the viands upon it. Portinari, Clyton, and I stood about in picturesque attitudes and watched the four-man fliers flapping their way slowly across the blue sky above our heads.

Outside the wall of the town, a silver band played for the princess's birthday. Its notes came faintly up to us, preserved in the thin air.

"It's so beautiful today – how fortunate we are that it will have an end. Permanent happiness lies only in the transitory."

"You're changing the subject, Bryan," Portinari said. "You were being taxed on imprecision."

I clutched my heart in horror. "If I am to be taxed on imprecision, then it is not the subject but the king who must be changed!"

Just a fraction late, Clyton replied, "Your tributary troubles make for streams of mirth."

The savannas ended here, were superseded abruptly by a region of stone, a semi-desert place where few of the giant herbivores ever ventured. The same heavy sky lowered over all. Sometimes the rain fell for years at a time.

Compared with the slow herbivores, the carnivores were fleet. They ranged down their terrible black road, which cut through savanna and desert alike.

One lay by the edge of the roadside slowly devouring a two-legged thing, its engine purring. Fitful sun marked its flanks.

As we sat down to our picnic, removing our masks, one of the hill-dwarfs came springing up in his velvet and sat on the sward beside us, playing his electric dulcimer for Columbine to dance to. He had a face like a human foetus, hanging over the strings, but his voice was clear and true. He sang an old ditty of Caesura's:

"I listened to every phrase she uttered
Knowing, knowing they'd be recorded only
In my memory – and knowing, knowing my memory
Would improve them all by and by. . . ."

To this strain, Columbine did a graceful dance, not without its own self-mocking quality. We watched as we ate iced melon and ginger, in which were embedded prawns. Before the dance was over, boys in satins carrying banners and a tiny black girl with a tambor came hurrying out of the

magnolia groves to listen to the music. With them on a chain they led a little green-and-orange dinosaur which waltzed about on its hind legs. We thought this party must be from the court.

A plump boy was with them. I remarked him first because he was dressed all in black; then I noticed the leathery flying creature on his shoulder. He could have been no more than twelve, yet was monstrously plump and evidently boasted abnormally large sexual appendages, for they were hung before him in a yellow bag. He gave us greeting, doffing his cap, and then stood with his back to the frolic, looking across the valley to the far woods and hills. He provided an agreeable foil to the merriment, which we watched as we ate.

The carnivores ran along the endless roads, indifferent to whether the land through which they passed was desert, savanna, or forest. They could always find food, so great was their speed.

The heavy skies overhead robbed the world of colour and time. The lumbering grass-eaters seemed almost motionless. Only the carnivores were bright and tireless, manufacturing their own time.

A group of them were converging on a certain crossroads in the area of heath. One of their number had made a kill. It was a big grey beast. Its radiator grill was bared in a snarl. It lay at its leisure on the roadside, devouring the body of a young female. Two others of her kind, freshly killed, lay nearby, to be dealt with at leisure.

This was long before internal parasites had labyrinthed their way into the mechanisms of eternity.

"Come now, Bryan," Portinari said as he opened up a second bottle of wine. "Clyton here was quizzing you on imprecision and you twice evaded the point."

Clyton leaned back on one elbow, gesturing lordly in the air with his jellied chicken-bone. "What with the smell of the acacia blossom and the tang of this new vintage, I've forgotten the point myself, Portinari, so we'll let Bryan off for once. He's free to go!"

"To be let off is not necessarily to be free," I said. "Besides, I am capable of liberating myself from any argument."

"I believe you could slip out of a cage of words," said Clyton.

"Why not? Because all sentences contain contradictions, as we all contain contradictions, in the way that Portinari is mathematician and dog, ape and scholar."

"*All* sentences, Bryan?" Portinari asked, teasingly.

We smiled at each other, the way we did when preparing verbal traps for each other. The party of children from the court had gathered round to hear our talk, all except the plump boy dressed in black, who now leaned against an aspen trunk and regarded the blue distances of the landscape.

Of course Columbine was not listening. More of the velvet-clad dwarfs had arrived, and were singing and dancing and making a great noise; only the first-comer of their tribe had laid down his dulcimer and was fondling and kissing the lovely bare shoulders of Columbine.

Still smiling, I passed my glass towards Portinari and he filled it to the brim.

"How would you describe your action, Portinari?"

They all waited for his answer. Cautiously, still smiling, he said, "I shall not be imprecise, dear Bryan. I poured you some newly-bottled wine, that was all!"

A toad hopped under one of the broken tombstones. I could hear its progress, so quiet had our circle become.

"'I poured you some newly-bottled wine'," I quoted. "You provide a perfect contradiction, my dear friend. At the beginning of your sentence, you pour the wine, yet by the end of the sentence it is newly-bottled. Your sequence contradicts utterly your meaning. Your time-sense is so awry that you negate what you did in one breath!"

Clyton burst out laughing – even Portinari had to laugh – the children clapped – the dinosaur plunged – and as Columbine clapped her pretty hands in mirth, the dwarf flipped out of her corsage the two generous orbs of her breasts. Clutching them, she jumped up and ran laughing through the trees towards the lake, her pet fawn following her, the dwarf chasing her.

Over the lush grass the rain fell in curtains. It seemed to hang in the air rather than descend, to soak everything between ground and sky. It was an enormous summer

shower, silent and fugitive; it had lasted for tens of thousands of years.

Occasionally the sun broke through clouds, and then the moving moistures of the air burst into violent colour, only to fade to a drab brass tint as the clouds closed again.

The metal beasts that drove through this perpetual shower hooted and snarled on their way. Outwardly, they shone as if impervious, paintwork and chromework as bright as knives; but below the armour, the effects of the moisture, dashing up for ever from their spinning wheels, were lethal. Rust crept into every moving part, groping for the heart.

The cities where the beasts lived were surrounded by huge cemeteries. In the cemeteries, multitudinous carcasses, no longer to be feared, lapsed into ginger dust, into poor gravies.

As we were finishing the wine and eating the sweetmeats, the dwarfs and boys danced on the sward. Some of the youths leapt on their goose-planes and pedalled up above our heads for aerial jousting-matches. All the while, the black-clad plump boy stood in lonely contemplation. Portinari, Clyton, and I laughed and chatted, and flirted with some country wenches who passed by. I was pleased when Portinari explained my paradox of imprecision to them.

When the girls had gone, Clyton, rising, swept his cloak about him and suggested we should move back to the ferry.

"The sun inclines towards the west, my friends, and the hills grow brazen to meet its glare." He gestured grandly at the sun. "All its trajectory is dedicated, I am certain, towards proving Bryan's earlier aphorism, that the only permanent happiness lies in the transitory. It reminds us that this golden afternoon is merely of counterfeit gold, now wearing thin."

"It reminds me that I'm wearing fat," said Portinari, struggling up, belching, and smoothing his stomach.

I picked up Clyton's figured fragment from the tombstone and offered it to him.

"Yes, perhaps I'll keep him till I solve his riddle."

"Is he supplicating you to?" I asked.

"Or welcoming you to?" Portinari.

"He's testing for rain." Clyton. We laughed again.

Almost hidden by a nauseous haze of their own manufacture, a pride of machines lay by the side of the road, feeding.

The road was like a natural feature. The great veldt, which stretched almost planet-wide, ended here at last. It appeared to terminate without reason. As inexplicably, the mountains began, rising from the dirt like icebergs from a petrified sea. They were still new and unsteady. The road ran along their base, a hem on the mighty skirt of plain.

It was a twenty-two-lane highway, with provision for both mach-negative and mach-positive traffic. The pride of machines lay in one of the infrequent rest-places, gorging themselves on the soft red-centred creatures that rode in them. There were five of them, perpetually backing and revving engines as they scrambled for better positions.

Juice spurted from their radiator grills, streamed over their cowling, misted their windscreens. The tainted blue of their breath hung over them. They were eating their young.

As we were moving off, it chanced I was just behind my friends. On impulse, I went and plucked the sleeve of the plump boy in black and asked him, "May a stranger inquire what has preoccupied your thoughts all afternoon?"

When he turned his face to me and removed his mask, I saw he was pale; the flesh of his body carried no echo on his face: it resembled a skull.

He looked at me long before he said, slowly, "Perhaps truth is an accident."

The words caught me by surprise. I could find no rejoinder.

Only as I turned to go did he add, "Perhaps you and your friends talked truth all afternoon long by accident. Perhaps our time-sense is awry. Perhaps we are contradictions, each one in himself. Perhaps . . . perhaps we are too imprecise to survive. . . ."

His voice was low, and the other party was still making its merry noise – the dwarfs would continue to dance and frolic long after sunset. Only as I hurried through the saplings after Portinari and Clyton did his words actually register on me: "Perhaps we are too imprecise to survive. . . ."

A melancholy thing to say on a gay day!

And there was the ferry, screened by tall cypresses and so rather gloomy. But already lanterns twinkled along the

shore, and I heard the sound of music and singing aboard. Back at the tavern, our sweethearts would be waiting for us, and the new play would open at midnight. I had my rôle by heart, I knew every word, I longed to walk out of the wings into the glittering lights, cynosure of all eyes....

"Come on, my friend!" cried Portinari impatiently, turning back from the throng and catching my arm. "Look, my cousins are aboard – we shall have a merry trip homewards! Will you survive?"

Survive?

Survive?

THE SHORT, HAPPY WIFE OF MANSARD ELIOT

BY JOHN SLADEK

Mansard Eliot's shadow, long with aristocracy, came out of his gallery on Fifth Avenue and moved along the sidewalk. Eliot knew exactly how he looked, with the sun gleaming in his hair. The hair would be parted slightly to one side, smoothed flat all over, and rich with dark, oily health. And the teeth: so white and even that Gladys said they reminded her of bathroom tiles.

Today he'd asked Gladys to become his wife. And if Dr Sky didn't like it, so what? Dr Sky, with his "separation of dream life from reality", his "horizontal cracks in the ego structure"! Let *him* try flopping down on the truth table like a seal pup and trying on the hard hat of memory . . . Mansard would, by Heaven, marry beneath his station.

Today she was making up her mind. While he waited, Mansard recalled the formula for locating street addresses on Fifth Avenue. From 775 to 1286, he knew, one dropped the last figure and subtracted 18. It was just something like that, he supposed, some geographical or historical fact, that had made him rich. So today he had asked Gladys to divorce her husband, Dean, who was unemployed. As soon as she answered "Yes", Mansard would rush away to tell Dr Sky.

"I can't divorce Deanie," she whined. "It would break his back."

"I see." Mansard was grave. His cereal company had founded a sports foundation, whose director was just now clearing his throat to make an announcement. Mansard Eliot owned at least one tweed sports jacket, one black or navy blue blazer, one sterling shoehorn, one pair heavy slacks, one summer suit, one drip-dry shirt, one raincoat, one pair cotton slacks, two neckties, two sportshirts, one pair dress shoes one pair canvas shoes, one light bathrobe, three pairs of socks, three sets of underwear, two handkerchiefs, one bathing suit, toilet and shaving articles (adapted for European use), and the building in which Gladys was a scrubwoman.

"Deanie needs me," she explained. "People try to harm him. Yesterday I came home and found him sleeping on the couch, and the kids had put a plastic bag over his head. They hate his guts. He could have died. He hates their guts, too."

What does Monique van Vooren do after dinner? A candle sputters. She fingers the bottle's long, graceful neck. Suddenly there is a shower of liquid emeralds. *Mansard was taller than Gladys, who, of Gladys, Mansard and Dean, was not the shortest.*

"He beats me," she explained. "He makes me have children I don't want. He doesn't want them either. He makes me go out and work, while he just lays around the house, guzzling two kinds of beer. My mother hates his guts. She'll be glad when I divorce him."

The *Stallion* is a westernized shirt, extremely tapered, of cotton chambray. Why be bald?

"Everyone just hates his guts," she explained. "He even hates himself. Only I understand and love and cherish him. Or maybe it's only hate. Well, anyway, at least he loves his kids." Minnesota has 99 Long Lakes and 91 Mud Lakes.

"Why don't we just pick up and go to Europe?" Mansard asked, glancing at himself in the lake. "Or somewhere else?"

"Oh, I couldn't leave the kids. They don't get along with Deanie very well. They just don't get along." Gladys put down her mop and pail and accepted a cigarette from the gold case he proffered. Satin sheets and pillow cases are a must for the compleat bachelor's apartment. The Doggie Dunit makes an ideal gift memento or "ice-breaker" at parties. So realistic your friends will gasp. Mansard's hand

trembled as he lit two cigarettes with a special lighter, then handed one to Gladys.

"Do you smoke?"

"Oh, no thanks. But you go ahead. I like the smell of a man's cigarette."

Exhaling a cloud of aromatic smoke, he said, "Let me think, now . . ."

She lit two cigarettes and handed him one. When he had lighted their cigarettes, Mansard closed his eyes.

He consumed her with his eyes: her cold-reddened nose, print dress, feet swelling out of water-stained wedgies. His apartment, a penthouse over the supermarket, was filled each evening with soft Muzak. Alone at night, he'd listen, smoking one of his specially-blended cigarettes in the dark. The apartment could take her for granted; why couldn't he?

"How can you love him?" he said, touching his glass to hers. "He even hates himself!"

But she would not speak. "It's no good, our meeting like this," she said, "Mansard. Secret rendezvous in elegant nite spots. Dancing till dawn in posh cafés. Moonlit rides with the top down. Our own flower code. Losing a cool ten G's at chuck-a-luck, and laughing like the crazy fools we are. 'The wrong hotel room'. *Billets-doux*. Smoking menthol by mountain rills. Appearing nightly in an exclusive engagement. Sailing. In fact, all water sports, including snow and ice as water. And finally, my love, leaping down a volcano, together." She seemed unable to speak.

Mansard thought of Dean. Just place the International audio wall probe against any wall, and pick up sounds, voices, in the next room. Dual listening device, used by law enforcement officers on a world-wide basis, attaches to any phone. The Snooper – world's only private listening device, used by law enforcement officers, amplifies sound 1,000,000 times. Looks like a briefcase. Peeping Tom snooperscope is no bigger than a fountain pen, yet gives 6X magnification.

"I want to meet this 'Dean'," Mansard said suddenly.

"So you want to degrade yourself," said Dr Sky. "Why, do you think? Has it anything to do with the time my father strapped me to my little potty chair?"

"His father did nothing of the kind," said Mansard evenly. "I never said he strapped me *down*, only strapped me."

"Why did we feel trapped?"

"He did strappado me once," said Mansard. "He had some notion it would make me grow taller, have more confidence with tall women, business associates. As usual, he was right."

"So we tell ourselves."

Mansard recalled. "He used to force-feed me. Vivisected my dog, to explain to me the mysteries of biology. Poor Spike."

"Or poor you, you mean."

"Yes, Dad never ceased preparing me for future happiness. He had a nurse read Kant to me while I slept. I had this recurring nightmare of being chased by a synthetic *a priori* proposition. I always wanted to go to Europe, but I never did."

"What do you dream of recently?"

Mansard Eliot took down the dream in shorthand, a skill he'd learned in three short weeks. "Last night I dreamed I was a member of a kid gang. We were beating a toilet with big chains. The sight of all the lavender porcelain being torn away made me sick, but I didn't dare let on.

"Then I was in the hospital, where the doctors were scraping pain or paint from me, using chisels and saws. It seemed to be the pineapple festival. I got up and ran down a hall lined with red Formica. There were thousands of people all going to the big pineapple fire. I saw a man eating a doughnut made of ice cream, and I noticed it was a rose wreath from my grave. There was money all over the floor, and lucky charms, but it was electrified. I tore along on my scooter, whose headlamp seemed to show darkness instead of light. It was all tinkertoys ahead of me, and cages full of live soap. I had to hurry, before the bureau closed, but the hands on my watch were wrong, no matter how I turned it to look at it.

"At the movie tent, the screen was blank, but everyone sat watching. 'What is it?' I asked my mother, the projectionist. 'See for yourself,' she said. The X-ray glasses had some instructions written on them, on the cardboard bows, but in code. I deciphered it letter by letter: it was a letter from Monique van Vooren to Mamie van Doren, giving the menu. I ordered coffee eggs. They were beautiful, made of transparent plastic garden hose and film – but just then mass was starting. Father Zossima, Father Coughlin, Father Divine, Father Christmas, Father Flanagan, Father Keller and Father were officiating, but then I had to climb a windy

mountain, strangely grown with hornets. At the top was a – never mind.

"Hacking my way through the swamp, I went down into a subway station. All the trains ran to a place called 'Breakfast'. I started the engine with a huge, three-pronged key. Gladys and I sped along the highway, chased by a synthetic *a priori* proposition. They proposed to lock her away in a priory, see –"

"Time's up!" cried the doctor, waking to his wrist alarm. "We'll take up there tomorrow."

"But I haven't told you half of it! Then I was spearing –"

"I'm sorry, but I have another patient. Write it all down, we'll discuss it tomorrow."

Mansard hid in a phone booth in the lobby, until he saw Dr Sky leave with his golf bag.

Dean was short, fat, and altogether friendly-looking. For example, he wore a T-shirt with the message "Thank God It's Friday", though it was only Wednesday. His arms were tattooed with Dumbo and Pinnochio.

"Navy?" asked Eliot, taking the initiative.

"No, I just wanted 'em. Who knows why kids do these crazy things, anyway." Remove unwanted hair. Learn meat cutting: people must eat! Mansard noticed Dean had a faint, not unpleasant halitosis. *Robbed* of your high school diploma?

"So you're Glad's boss?" Dean, a bald, perspiring man whom Mansard Eliot had just met, laughed.

"That's right. She's told me so much about you, Mr –"

"Call me Dean," Dean — said. "Want a beer? We got two kinds."

Mansard decided it was time to speak. "I think we can talk this over like civilized people, Dean."

Dean smiled. "Dalu 'mun karon fenna," he said. "Waa narrapart weearn manuungkurt barrim barrim tillit impando. Nxabo amacebo: amakwata nekra wai?"

"I want you to give Gladys her freedom."

"So Glad tells me. It's sure okay by me. I'll miss the old sock, but –" He made a deprecating gesture, as if to say "*Mes sentiments!*"

Mansard took from his pocket a bullet. "Glad to hear you take it like a man, Dean," he said. "So many men of your

station – no offence intended – would have made a scene, screamed bloody murder, and so on."

"I'm just curious, understand, but why do you want her?"

In the silence, Eliot's watch emitted a tiny electronic scream. Why did he want her? How to put it into words? He glanced over at her, sitting before the television with her feet up. Half her face was in shadow. From the other half, her hand removed blackheads at regular intervals, using a silvery plunger. He thought of the times she had refused to come to him, times when he'd rushed into the closet to press his burning face into a cool, damp mop, inhaling the sweet-sour fragrance of her. Her mop!

"One wearies of explanations," he said.

"That reminds me, what about the kids?"

"I was thinking we'd send them to some sort of school or camp," said Mansard easily. "You know, nothing terribly expensive, but exclusive enough. We've written to Auschwitz, for one."

Harry raised an eyebrow. "Bet it's hell trying to find anything reasonable these days."

"And how! Prices are absurd – it must be the administration."

"Just what Glad was saying, the other day. Her very words. I don't know what the country's coming to." Dean's face grew red. He slapped the table, shouting, "Damn it to hell! It makes me sick the way the government pushes around the Little Guy!" Inside this pencil is a quality stapler! Inside this exact replica of a bottle of scotch is a 9-transistor radio that's on its way to being *the* executive gift! 24-kt golden peanuts contain lighter, pillbox, or executive toolkit!

"I couldn't agree more," said Mansard. He opened a small, gold-filled penknife. Usually it was used to clip the ends from the cigars he had made up in Havana and flown in by special plane. Today, however, he put it to a new use, clipping off the bullet's nose.

"What's that you've got there, a bullet?"

"Yes, a 'slug'."

Dean opened two kinds of beer. "I see you're making a dum-dum out of it. Neat idea."

Mansard showed him the gun. Dean's eyes widened. "That's a beauty!"

"Thanks. I call it my 'gat'." Eliot worked the action back and forth.

"I understand a forty-five is powerful as hell," said Dean. "Knock a man down if you only get him in the little fingers. But – how's the recoil?"

Mansard loaded and cocked the gun. "Well, it seems big at first, but I've been practising."

Gladys stood up as he sighted along the barrel at Dean's heart. "No you don't!" she tittered, throwing herself in the line of fire.

A lady traveller to Europe should take: four pairs of nylon panties, six pairs of nylon stockings, two petticoats, two bras, a cardigan sweater, a pair of slacks or bermuda shorts, a pair of sandals, a pair of good, sturdy walking shoes, a pair of dressy heels, bathing-cap and suit, one knit daytime dress, one drip-dry daytime blouse....

"Damn," said Dean, looking down at the body. "I'm really going to miss her. You notice how loyal she was – died trying to save my life – notice that?"

"Yes. I expect the police will be wanting this." Mansard took from his pocket a personalized pencil with his name in gold, set of twelve, 60¢ ppd., inserted it into the barrel of the automatic so as to preserve his prints, and handed it over.

A PLACE AND A TIME TO DIE

J. G. BALLARD

Shotguns levelled, the two men waited on the river bank. From the shore facing them, four hundred yards away across the bright spring water, the beating of gongs and drums sounded through the empty air, echoing off the metal roofs of the abandoned town. Fire-crackers burst over the trees along the shore, the mushy pink explosions lighting up the gun-barrels of tanks and armoured cars.

All morning the ill-matched couple making this last stand together – Mannock, the retired and now slightly eccentric police chief, and his reluctant deputy, Forbis, a thyroidal used-car salesman – had watched the mounting activity on

the opposite shore. Soon after eight o'clock when Mannock drove through the deserted town, the first arrivals had already appeared on the scene. Four scout cars carrying a platoon of soldiers in padded brown uniforms were parked on the bank. The officer scanned Mannock through his binoculars for a few seconds and then began to inspect the town. An hour later an advance battalion of field engineers took up their position by the dynamited railroad bridge. By noon an entire division had arrived. A dusty caravan of self-propelled guns, tanks on trailers, and mobile field kitchens in commandeered buses rolled across the farmland and pulled to a halt by the bank. After them came an army of infantry and camp followers, pulling wooden carts and beating gongs.

Earlier that morning Mannock had climbed the water-tower at his brother's farm. The landscape below the mountains ten miles away was criss-crossed with dozens of motorised columns. Most of them were moving in an apparently random way, half the time blinded by their own dust. Like an advancing horde of ants, they spilled across the abandoned farmland, completely ignoring an intact town and then homing on an empty grain silo.

By now, though, in the early afternoon, all sections of this huge field army had reached the river. Any hopes Mannock had kept alive that they might turn and disappear towards the horizon finally faded. When exactly they would choose to make their crossing was hard to gauge. As he and Forbis watched, a series of enormous camps were being set up. Lines of collapsible huts marked out barrack squares, squads of soldiers marched up and down in the dust, rival groups of civilians – presumably political cadres – drilled and shouted slogans. The smoke from hundreds of mess fires rose into the worn air, blocking off Mannock's view of the blue-chipped mountains that had formed the backdrop to the river valley during the twenty years he had spent there. Rows of camouflaged trucks and amphibious vehicles waited along the shore, but there was still no sign of any crossing. Tank-crews wandered about like bored gangs on a boardwalk, letting off fire-crackers and flying paper kites with slogans painted on their tails. Everywhere the beating of gongs and drums went on without pause.

"There must be a million of them there – for God's sake, they'll never get over!" Almost disappointed, Forbis lowered his shotgun on to the sandbag emplacement.

"Nothing's stopped them yet," Mannock commented. He pointed to a convoy of trucks dragging a flotilla of wooden landing craft across a crowded parade ground. "Sampans – they look crazy, don't they?"

While Forbis glared across the river Mannock looked down at him, with difficulty controlling the rictus of distaste he felt whenever he realised exactly whom he had chosen as his last companion. A thin, bitter-mouthed man with over-large eyes, Forbis was one of that small group of people Mannock had instinctively disliked throughout his entire life. The past few days in the empty town had confirmed all his prejudices. The previous afternoon, after an hour spent driving around the town and shooting at the stray dogs, Forbis had taken Mannock back to his house. There he had proudly shown off his huge home arsenal. Bored by this display of weapons, Mannock wandered into the dining room, only to find the table laid out like an altar with dozens of far-right magazines, pathological hate-sheets and heaven knew what other nonsense printed on crude home presses.

What had made Forbis stay behind in the deserted town after everyone else had gone? What made him want to defend these few streets where he had never been particularly liked or successful? Some wild gene or strange streak of patriotism – perhaps not all that far removed from his own brand of cantankerousness. Mannock looked across the water as a huge catherine wheel revolved into the air above a line of tanks parked along the shore, its puffy pink smoke turning the encampment into an enormous carnival. For a moment a surge of hope went through Mannock that this vast army might be driven by wholly peaceful motives, that it might suddenly decide to withdraw, load its tanks onto their trailers and move off to the western horizon.

As the light faded he knew all too well that there was no chance of this happening. Generations of hate and resentment had driven these people in their unbroken advance across the world, and here in this town in a river valley they would take a small part of their revenge.

Why had he himself decided to stay behind, waiting here behind these few useless sandbags with a shotgun in his hands? Mannock glanced back at the water-tower that marked the north-west perimeter of his brother's farm, for years the chief landmark of the town. Until the last moment he had planned to leave with the rest of the family, helping to gas up the cars and turn loose what was left of the live-

stock. Closing his own house down for the last time, he decided to wait until the dust subsided when the great exodus began. He drove down to the river, and stood under the broken span of the bridge which the army engineers had dynamited before they retreated.

Walking southwards along the shore, he had nearly been shot by Forbis. The salesman had dug himself into a home-made roadblock above the bank, and was waiting there all alone for his first sight of the enemy. Mannock tried to persuade him to leave with the others, but as he remonstrated with Forbis he realised that he was talking to himself, and why he sounded so inconvincing.

For the next days, as the distant dust clouds moved towards them from the horizon, turning the small valley into an apocalyptic landscape, the two men formed an uneasy alliance. Forbis looked on impatiently as Mannock moved through the empty streets, closing the doors of the abandoned cars and parking them along the kerb, shutting the windows of the houses and putting lids on the garbage pails. With his crazy logic Forbis really believed that the two of them could hold up the advance of this immense army.

"Maybe for only a few hours," he assured Mannock with quiet pride. "But that'll be enough."

A few seconds, more likely, Mannock reflected. There would be a brief bloody flurry somewhere, one burst from a machine-pistol and quietus in the dust . . .

"Mannock –!" Forbis pointed to the shore fifty yards from the bridge embankment. A heavy metal skiff was being manhandled into the water by a labour-platoon. A tank backed along the shore behind it, test-rotating its turret. Exhaust belched from its diesel.

"They're coming!" Forbis crouched behind the sandbags, levelling his shotgun. He beckoned furiously at Mannock. "For God's sake, Mannock, get your head down!"

Mannock ignored him. He stood on the roof of the emplacement, his figure fully exposed. He watched the skiff slide into the water. While two of the crew tried to start the motor, a squad in the bows rowed it across to the first bridge pylon. No other craft were being launched. In fact, as Mannock had noted already, no one was looking across the river at all, though any good marksman could have hit them both without difficulty. A single 75mm. shell from one of the tanks would have disposed of them and the emplacement.

"Engineers," he told Forbis. "They're checking the bridge supports. Maybe they want to rebuild it first."

Forbis peered doubtfully through his binoculars, then relaxed his grip on the shotgun. His jaw was still sticking forward aggressively. Watching him, Mannock realised that Forbis genuinely wasn't afraid of what would happen to them. He glanced back at the town. There was a flash of light as an upstairs door turned and caught the sun.

"Where are you going?" A look of suspicion was on Forbis's face, reinforcing the doubts he already felt about Mannock. "They may come sooner than you think."

"They'll come in their own time, not ours," Mannock said. "Right now it looks as if even they don't know. I'll be here."

He walked stiffly towards his car, conscious of the target his black leather jacket made against the white station-wagon. At any moment the bright paintwork could be shattered by a bullet carrying pieces of his heart.

He started the motor and reversed carefully onto the beach. Through the rear-view mirror he watched the opposite shore. The engineers in the skiff had lost interest in the bridge. Like a party of sight-seers they drifted along the shore, gazing up at the tank-crews squatting on their turrets. The noise of gongs beat across the water.

In the deserted town the sounds murmured in the metal roofs. Mannock drove round the railroad station and the bus depot, checking if any refugees had arrived after crossing the river. Nothing moved. Abandoned cars filled the side-streets. Broken store windows formed jagged frames around piles of detergent packs and canned soup. In the filling stations the slashed pump hoses leaked their last gasoline across the unwashed concrete.

Mannock stopped the car in the centre of the town. He stepped out and looked up at the windows of the hotel and public library. By some acoustic freak the noise of the gongs had faded, and for a moment it seemed like any drowzy afternoon ten years earlier.

Mannock leaned into the back seat of the car and took out a paper parcel. Fumbling with the dry string, he finally unpicked the ancient knot, then unwrapped the paper and took out a faded uniform jacket.

Searching for a cigarette pack in his hip pockets, Man-

nock examined the worn braid. He had planned this small gesture – a pointless piece of sentimentality, he well knew – as a private goodbye to himself and the town, but the faded metal badges had about the same relevance and reality as the rusty hubcap in the gutter a few feet away. Tossing it over his left arm, he opened the door of the car.

Before he could drop the jacket onto the seat a rifle shot slammed across the square. A volley of echoes boomed off the buildings. Mannock dropped to one knee behind the car, his head lowered from the 3rd-floor windows of the hotel. The bullet had starred the passenger window and richocheted off the dashboard, chipping the steering wheel before exiting through the open driver's door.

As the sounds of the explosion faded, Mannock could hear the rubber boots of a slimly built man moving down the fire escape behind the building. Mannock looked upwards. High above the town a strange flag flew from the mast of the hotel. So the first snipers had moved in across the river. His blood quickening, Mannock drew his shotgun from the seat of the car.

Some five minutes later he was waiting in the alley behind the supermarket when a running figure darted past him. As the man crashed to the gravel Mannock straddled him with both legs, the shotgun levelled at his face. Mannock looked down, expecting to find a startled yellow-skinned youth in a quilted uniform.

"Forbis?"

The salesman clambered to his knees, painfully catching back his breath. He stared at the blood on his hands, and then at Mannock's face above the barrel of the shotgun.

"What the *hell* are you playing at?" he gasped in a weary voice, one ear cocked for any sounds from the river. "That shot – do you want to bring them over?" He gestured at the police jacket which Mannock was now wearing, and then shook his head sadly. "Mannock, this isn't a fancy dress party . . ."

Mannock was about to explain to him when a car door slammed. The engine of the station-wagon roared above the squeal of tyres. As the two men reached the sidewalk the car was swerving out of the square, bumper knocking aside a pile of cartons.

"Hathaway!" Forbis shouted. "Did you see him? There's your sniper, Mannock!"

Mannock watched the car plunge out of sight down a side-street. "Hathaway," he repeated dourly. "I should have guessed. He's decided to stay and meet his friends."

After Forbis had torn the flag down from the hotel mast he and Mannock drove back to the river. Mannock sat uncomfortably in the police jacket, thinking of Hathaway, that strange youth who with himself and Forbis completed one key triangle within their society: Hathaway the misfit, head full of half-baked Marxist slogans, saddled with a bored wife who one day tired of living in rooming houses and walked out on him, taking their small son; Hathaway the failed political activist, whose obsessed eyes were too much even for a far-left student group; Hathaway the petty criminal, arrested for pilfering a supermarket – though he soon convinced himself that he was a martyr to the capitalist conspiracy.

No doubt one sight of Mannock's old police jacket had been enough.

An hour later the advance began across the river. One minute Mannock was sitting on the old rail-tie that formed the rear wall of Forbis's emplacement, watching the endless parades and drilling that were taking place on the opposite shore, and listening to the gongs and exploding fire-crackers. The next minute dozens of landing craft were moving down the bank into the water. Thousands of soldiers swarmed after them, bales of equipment held over their heads. The whole landscape had risen up and heaved forward. Half a mile inland vast dust clouds were climbing into the air. Everywhere the collapsible huts and command posts were coming down, ungainly cranes swung pontoon sections over the trees. The beating of drums sounded for miles along the water's edge. Counting quickly, Mannock estimated that at least fifty landing craft were crossing the water, each towing two or three amphibious tanks behind it.

One large wooden landing craft was headed straight towards them, well over a hundred infantrymen squatting on the decks like coolies. Above the square teak bows a heavy machine-gun jutted through its rectangular metal shield, the gunners signalling to the helmsman.

As Forbis fumbled with his shotgun Mannock knocked the butt off his shoulder.

"Fall back! Nearer the town – they'll come right over us here!"

Crouching down, they backed away from the emplacement. As the first landing craft hit the shore they reached the cover of the trees lining the road. Forbis sprinted ahead to a pile of fifty-gallon drums lying in the ditch and began to roll them around into a crude emplacement.

Mannock watched him working away, as the air was filled with the noise of tank-engines and gongs. When Forbis had finished Mannock shook his head. He pointed with a tired hand at the fields on either side of the road, then leaned his shotgun against the wall of the ditch.

As far as they could see, hundreds of soldiers were moving up towards the town, rifles and submachine-guns slung over their shoulders. The river bank was crammed with landing craft. A dozen pontoon bridges spanned the water. Infantry and engineers poured ashore, unloading staff cars and light field pieces. Half a mile away the first soldiers were already moving along the railroad line into the town.

Mannock watched a column of infantry march up the road towards them. When they drew nearer he realised that at least half of them were civilians, carrying no weapons or webbing, the women with small red booklets in their hands. On poles over their heads they held giant blown-up photographs of party leaders and generals. A motorcycle and sidecar combination mounting a light machine-gun forced its way past the column, and then stalled in the verge. Chanting together, a group of women and soldiers pushed it free. Together they stamped on after it bellowing and cheering.

As the motorcycle approached, Mannock waited for the machine-gun to open fire at them. Forbis was crouched down behind a fuel drum, frowning over his sights. His large eyes looked like over-boiled eggs. A tic fluttered the right corner of his mouth, as if he were babbling some sub-vocal rosary to himself. Then in a sudden access of lucidity he turned the shotgun at the motorcycle, but with a roar the machine swerved around Mannock and accelerated towards the town.

Mannock turned to watch it, but a man running past collided with him. Mannock caught his slim shoulders in his hands and set the man on his feet. He looked down into a

familiar sallow face, overlit eyes he had last seen staring at him through the bars of a cell.

"Hathaway, you crazy . . ."

Before Mannock could hold him he broke away and ran towards the approaching column striding up the dirt road. He stopped a few feet from the leading pair of infantrymen and shouted some greeting to them. One of the men, an officer Mannock guessed, though none of the soldiers wore insignia, glanced at him, then reached out and pushed him to one side. Within a moment he was swallowed by the melée of gong-beating and chanting soldiers. Buffetted from one shoulder to the next, he lost his balance and fell, stood up and began to wave again at the faces passing him, trying to catch their attention.

Then Mannock too was caught up in the throng. The drab quilted uniforms, stained by the dust and sweat of half a continent, pushed past him, forcing him onto the verge. The shotgun was knocked out of his hands, kicked about in the breaking earth by a score of feet, then picked up and tossed onto the back of a cart. A troupe of young women surrounded Mannock, staring up at him without any curiosity as they chanted their slogans. Most of them were little more than children, with earnest mannequin-like faces under close-cropped hair.

Realising what had happened, Mannock pulled Forbis from the ditch. No one had tried to take his shotgun from Forbis, and the salesman clung to it like a child. Mannock twisted the weapon out of his hands.

"Can't you understand?" he shouted. "They're not interested in us! They're not interested at all!"

EXIT FROM CITY 5

BARRINGTON BAYLEY

Kayin often wondered why the autumnal phase of the city's weather-cycle brought with it such an atmosphere of untidiness and decay. He sat holding Polla's hand in the park, watching as the light over the city dimmed with the approach of night. Here, the gentle breeze that blew continuously through City 5 collected by fitful gusts into a modest wind, gathering up a detritus of torn paper, scraps of fabric and dust.

Rearing above the park's fringe of trees, the ranks of windows in the serried arrays of office buildings began to flick into life. The park was situated on a high level and well out towards the perimeter of the city, so that from this vantage point City 5, with its broken lines, blocks and levels, presented the appearance of a metal bowl finely machined into numerous rectilinear surfaces like an abstract sculpture.

From the broken perimeter to the central pinnacle the city rose in a wide countercurve to the curve of the crystal dome overhead, creating a deliberate, but false, impression of spaciousness. And indeed for a brief period in the late morning, when the light was brightest and the air filled with the sounds of industry, City 5 did manage to generate an atmosphere of liveliness, almost of excitement. But by mid-afternoon the illusion was gone. The crystal dome, glinting in the falling light, became oppressive, and when night arrived it grew overreachingly, invisibly black, filling Kayin's imagination with vacant images of *outside*.

"Why don't they leave the light on?" he said irritably. "I don't need any night-time."

Polla did not answer. The reason was known to them both. Of all the carefully-arranged principles by which the city lived, routine was the most vital. Instead she disengaged her hand and put her arm round his neck in a fond, artless gesture. "You *are* getting moody lately," she told him.

He grunted. "I know. Can you blame me? This trouble with the society. I'm out, you know. They don't dare let me back after this. And the City Board will come down on my neck like a ton of steel."

"Oh, they'll go easy on you. What you did wasn't really shocking by today's standards. Anyway, something like that doesn't usually bother *you*, Kayin."

Kayin sighed. "You're right, it's not the society. They won't achieve anything anyway. Poll, have you ever taken a walk through the city from end to end?"

"Sure," she laughed, "lots of times."

So had he. Its diameter was a little short of five miles. Streets, offices, factories, houses, parks, level piled on level. Some parts of the city were laid out neatly, efficiently, others were warrens of twisting turning passages. There was a fair amount of variety. But for some reason, on these walks of his, Kayin always seemed to find himself out at the Perimeter, where the city proper met the crystal dome, piling up against it in irregular steps like a wave. It was not possible actually to touch the dome: the way was barred by a solid girdle of steel. For interest's sake, Kayin would usually return through the basement of the city, where acre upon acre of apparatus managed the precise transformations of matter and energy that kept City 5 biologically viable, skirting round the vast sealed chambers that contained the old

propulsion units that had brought them here centuries ago.

"I feel I know every foot of this place," Kayin said. "I feel I know everybody in it. That's ridiculous, of course – you can't know two million people. But you understand . . . I'll admit I've had some good times here. It's all right if you like living in what is essentially an extended, highly technical village. But there's something a bit dead about City 5. Nothing ever comes in from outside. Anything that happens has to be generated right here."

Polla's expression was both worried and uncomprehending. "What are you talking about? What could come in from outside?"

He ignored her question. "I'll tell you something, Poll," he said, "the City Board ought to have tighter control. I don't like the kind of symbolisations and plays they've been putting on lately. They really shouldn't allow these independent art groups and independent scientific groups like the society. Ambition is a curse, it's frustration."

"I never expected to hear you say that! You were always going to be the teenage rebel."

Kayin shook his head. "I still can't feel happy at having to spend the rest of my life in City 5. I know that's a queer thing to say. I have my job in the Inertial Stocktaking Department, I spend my time in the same way everybody else spends theirs, and I wish I could be content with that. But instead I feel restless, dissatisfied. I just wish I could *go* somewhere."

With an impatient shake of her head Polla stood up. "All right, then. Let's go home and have a session. I feel randy."

"Okay." Automatically he rose and followed. But before leaving the park he headed for its most obstrusive feature, the now defunct observatory. The building, a tall, ribbed dome, bulked large against the background of trees and shrubbery. Beside it a squat tower loomed, housing the exploratory nucleon rocket that had once been part of the observatory's ancillary equipment. He beckoned Polla and, crossing a stretch of sward, led her through a small door in the base of the building.

Although abandoned, the observatory was still kept in good order and any citizen had the right to visit and use it. Few people ever bothered, but Kayin, along with his ex-colleagues in the Astronomical Society, had spent a fair amount of time there lately.

Not that there was anything to see. The experience was a

purely negative one, and subsequent visits could do nothing but repeat it. A soft light, faintly tinged with green, filled the vaulted chamber. Kayin switched on the observatory and saw the glow of life come into the control panels, heard the waiting hum from the machinery that moved the main telescope.

The instrument was the best of its type ever designed, fitted with the complete range of auxiliary apparatus – radio, X-ray, laser and maser detectors, image amplification and the rest. When built, its makers had boasted that it could detect emitting matter anywhere in the sidereal universe. Kayin set the big cylinder in motion and brought it to rest point directly to zenith. The wall display screens remained dark and opaque. As if performing a ritual Kayin moved the telescope again, directing it towards city-perimeter-west. On the screens, again nothing. North: nothing. East: nothing. South: nothing. Kayin and Polla stood stock-still in the capacious, echoing dome, staring at the black screens like children recalling an often-repeated lesson.

City 5 was an oasis of light in an immense darkness. A few minutes ago Kayin had said he wished he could go somewhere. He realised now that that wasn't quite right. What he meant was: *he wished there was somewhere to go.*

He thought of the nearby nucleon rocket. Recently he actually had gone somewhere – almost.

Near the centre of the city, in the upper echelons of the Administrative Ramification, Kord awoke after his customary year of suspended animation.

Strange . . . the freeze process stopped everything, body and brain. Logically he should come out of it with the feeling that only a second or two had passed since he lost conciousness. Inexplicably, it was not like that. Each time he felt as if he had been gone a long, long time, and privately he suspected that he aged a year mentally despite the biological stop.

He thrust the thought from his mind. If his task was ever completed, perhaps then he could give his attention to philosophical diversions. Until then there was only one thing to occupy his whole being.

Having lifted him out of the casket and given him a thorough check, the doctors helped him down from the inspection slab, one of them assisting Kord to fit on his prosthetic leg, the legacy of a brief period of civil strife

early in the history of the city. At length he stood up, feeling fit and alive, and paced the room experimentally, limping slightly on the artificial limb. Other men entered with clothes and attentively helped him to dress.

Not until they had finished did he speak. "Are the others awake?"

"Yes, Chairman. Will you proceed to briefing?"

He nodded, and left the room by a side door to find himself in a small, discreetly lighted chamber containing only a table and a chair. A man wearing the uniform of the Social Dynamic Movements department entered briefly to hand him a file.

Kord sat down, opened the file and began to read. It was written in the special language of sociodynamic symbology, legible only to specially trained persons. From it Kord could gain a complete picture of social tendencies over the past year, every nuance, every incipient crystallisation and fragmentation, every vibration between the poles of conservation and change. If the symbolic analysis was not enough, Kord had implanted under the skin of his neck a set of filaments connected directly to the memory area of his brain. A lead from the city archives monitor desk, taped to his neck, would induce in them currents carrying audio-visual recordings of conversations, happenings, a million cameos of life easily gathered and recorded by the watchful electronics of a closed system like City 5. By drawing on the memories he would suddenly find in his mind, Kord's knowledge of the past year would be experiential, not merely symbolic.

In adjoining cells the other four members of the permanent board were reading similar files. As he progressed through his, Kord knew that he would be calling on the monitor desk. He had been aware of dangerous tendencies present in the society of City 5, but he had not anticipated this sudden alarming acceleration of events. Grimly he realised that when the twenty-four-hour period was up he would not, as was the custom, be returning to deep freeze.

That night Kayin did not, as he would normally have done, attend the meeting of the Astronomical Society, but spent it instead alone with Polla. Ham-Ra, president of the society, had already put his decision to him and in fairness Kayin had agreed with his judgment. He was out.

The society gathered in a comfortable, otherwise unused room in one of the rambling parts of the city. A video recorder in one corner contained the edited minutes of their previous meetings and what little information or few resolutions they had been able to formulate.

The object of the society was to re-establish the sciences of astronomy and space exploration. It numbered fifteen members, without Kayin, between the ages of about seventeen and twenty-three. In most societies like this one youth was the order of the day.

"We have a lot to present this session," Ham-Ra said by way of introduction. "For the first time we're really getting somewhere. However, you'll all have noticed that Kayin isn't here. A few of you know why. For the rest, it will become plain later just why he can't attend.

"Now then, friends, when we last convened over a month ago we were getting depressed and ready to give up. But what Tamm has to show us today is really going to knock you out. Take over, Tamm."

The freckled red-head rose, grinning shyly, and stood by the table, on which stood a video unit. "As you know, public knowledge concerning the origin of City 5, the whereabouts of Earth and so on, has fluctuated considerably over the years by reason of the mandatory cut-off of information, as the administrative ramification vacillated between the theory that total ignorance is best and the theory that full knowledge is best. Over the past ten years mandatory cut-off has been relaxed considerably – otherwise our society couldn't exist – and along with the upsurge of interest in scientific matters we have been able to gain access to some information that wasn't available before.

"Nevertheless our astronomical knowledge has been slight, particularly where it affects our relations with Earth. We know that the city came from Earth some hundreds of years ago, that we can never go back, and that essentially we must remain here for all time. I think we can take it that the pendulum of policy is swinging towards freedom because, by sedulously bending the ears of a few sympathetic parties in the administrative ramification, Ham-Ra and myself gained official permission to make use of the city's last remaining nucleon rocket in order to undertake an expedition to the sidereal universe, or as close to it as we could safely get."

"That's fantastic!" said a voice into the ensuing silence.

Tamm nodded. "The condition we had to agree to is that the results of the expedition, and the information we gained from it, remain the property of the ramification and should not be divulged outside the society. Furthermore only two members were permitted to go on the trip. For various reasons Ham-Ra stood down in favour of Kayin, who together with myself made up the crew. It would have been nice if you could all have seen what we saw, but we made complete video recordings throughout so to that extent you can share the experience with us.

"You will see that the expedition was not only one of exploration; it was also a concession on the ramification's part on divulging historical knowledge in the form of an instruction tape on the rocket itself. What we learn will probably not surprise any of us much but it will still give us a great deal to think about."

He pressed a stud on the video unit. A large wall screen lit up. Tamm and Kayin were in the nucleon rocket's main cabin in bucket seats before a curved control panel. Kayin's keen, intelligent face turned towards the pick-up.

"We are going out through the egress sphincter now. In a few moments we should be the first people of our generation to see the city from outside."

With a flicker, because of rather hasty editing, the picture changed to show a view through one of the ports. Everyone in the room held his breath. At first they only saw what appeared to be a vast curving wall, just visible as a dull metallic sheen due to an unseen source of illumination. Then, as the rocket drifted away, they got a full view of the city seen side-on: a huge disk-shaped slab surmounted by a graceful glittering dome in which could be discerned a low profile of shadowy shapes.

The rocket mounted above the city and hovered over it, somewhat to one side. They were looking down on the dome now and the city was suspended in space at an odd angle, blazing with light in an otherwise unbroken, impenetrable blackness.

They could have stared at it forever; but suddenly they were back in the cabin again and this time Tamm was speaking to them while Kayin piloted the rocket. "Although we can see nothing out here even with the ship's telescope – apart from the city, that is – we have been given a guidance tape that should take us to the sidereal universe, or the material universe as it is alternatively called. The distance

is about three light-years, so we should be there very quickly."

The picture flickered wildly again; Tamm had cut out half an hour of uneventful tape. When they came back it was in the middle of a word. Tamm was shouting wildly.

"– look at that! Just look at that!"

The pick-up was once more pointing outside. The sight that met their eyes was more spectacular even than the panorama of the city. The first impression was of a blaze, of scattered light, of fire. Nearby, a few huge misty spirals hung in the void; further away, on either side, above and below, and far off into the depths, masses of similar spirals and glowing clouds and streamers receded into the distance, while a sort of diamond dust seemed to be infused among them all.

The scene was hypnotic, and the pick-up camera lingered on it for a considerable time. After the first impact, the impression was gained that the phenomenon, though big, was limited in size: the larger-looking spirals, though majestic, were some distance away and on the straggling edge of the cloud, whose limits seemed to define a slight but perceptible curve.

At that moment they became aware that the rocket's instruction tape had clicked into action, delivering a neat lecture in the quiet, calm voice of an electronic vodor. So unobstrusive was the voice at first that they failed to hear it in the general excitement:

". . . we have now passed the first threshold beyond which the material universe becomes visible, and are approaching the second threshold. You are warned severely against attempting to cross the second threshold; such a manoeuvre is generally agreed to be almost impossible or at any rate prohibitively difficult, and if by chance you should succeed and actually enter the material universe, you will not be able to leave again and will suffer the fate of all the matter it contains. Proceed with care: your visual instincts will probably tell you that the edge of the material universe, the metagalaxy as it is sometimes called, is light years away or at least many millions of miles away. It is, in fact, very close. The galaxies you are now seeing are only a few miles in diameter, many of them less than a mile in diameter, and the entire conglomeration of galactic and stellar systems is still shrinking steadily.

"The cause of the shrinkage of matter has not been ascertained with any certainty. It was first detected in 5085 A.D.,

old reckoning, when specific anomalies relating to the velocity and wave-length of light revealed that all phenomena having the properties of mass-energy were shrinking relative to the unit of space. Extrapolation of the equations led to the conclusion that a point would be reached, and that fairly soon, when the fundamental particles would be too small to maintain their identity in the space-time frame and that therefore all matter everywhere would vanish from existence.

"Since the shrinkage related to the metagalaxy as a whole, it was theorised that if an entity or system could escape beyond the by-then-known boundaries of the sidereal universe then it might also escape the field of the shrinking process and survive. Luckily the centuries-old problem of velocity had recently been solved, and already ships had been built capable of traversing the whole diameter of the metagalaxy in a fairly short period of time. The first attempts to pass into the space beyond the metagalaxy, however, met difficulty. Either the shrinkage field or the metagalaxy itself set up an interface with the rest of space that constituted a barrier to the passage of matter. Penetration of the barrier was, however, theoretically possible, and was attempted over a considerable period of time by ships equipped with specially powerful drive units. Eventually one such ship succeeded, to return with the report that the void beyond the metagalaxy, though it appeared to contain no matter itself, would accept the existence of matter placed in it and maintain it in a stable, non-shrinking state.

"As the universe shrank, the barrier grew more impenetrable. If anything was to be preserved, it was essential to act quickly. Twenty self-contained cities were constructed and equipped with the most powerful drive units. As they headed at top speed for the perimeter of the material realm they were able to observe a large number of ships, cities and similar constructs doing the same from various points in the universe. None of these alien launchings met with success and mankind's effort did only marginally better. As they encountered the barrier and strove to make their exit, all but one of the Earth cities either blew up or otherwise failed to break through. It can now be said with certainty that City 5 is the sole fragment of matter to have escaped the shrinking metagalaxy, where the current state of materiality is such that biological life is believed to be no longer possible.

"In recent years an acceleration in the rate of shrinking has been observed, leading to the belief that the moment is now very close for the extinction of this island of materiality unique in the spatial frame. For a long time it has been effectively invisible from City 5, or indeed from anywhere outside the interface region, for the reason that the enveloping barrier has an outer and an inner surface known as the first and second thresholds. The inner threshold is permeable to radiant energy but offers a strong resistance to the passage of solid masses. The outer threshold may be crossed quite easily by slow-moving masses, but is opaque to light and other radiation passing to it from the inner threshold. In order to view the sidereal universe it is therefore necessary to position oneself between the two.

"City 5 was designed to be self-subsisting in perpetuity. Physicists on Earth nevertheless entertained the expectation, or rather the hope, that other areas of materiality where humanity could again proliferate would be located in the void, even though they might be immensely remote from the home universe. For a long time long-range spaceships were built and despatched from City 5 in efforts to discover even one atom or electron of matter. Any one of these missions covered a distance equal to many billion times the diameter of the old metagalaxy at its original full size, a feat that has added poignancy when we reflect that by pre-shrinkage standards of measurement City 5 itself is slightly over half an inch in diameter. All such projects have long since been abandoned as useless and the exploratory rockets dismantled. It is now accepted that materiality is not a normal feature of the space frame and that it does not exist anywhere apart from the sidereal universe already known to us. All future endeavours on the part of humanity must perforce make do with such material as was transported in City 5 at the time of the migration, and the city has therefore had to face the problems of perpetuating the life of mankind in complete isolation. The technical aspects, though prodigious, do not present any insoluble difficulties; the chief problems lie in the social and psychological field."

The screen went suddenly blank. "I think we might as well end the tape there," Tamm said matter-of-factly. "That's the valid part of the mission."

His audience was silent, thoughtful, perhaps a little stunned. Finally Ham-Ra said: "Well, that fills in some gaps in our knowledge. Any comments?"

"It shouldn't come as any great shock," someone said after a moment, "but somehow it does. We have always known we were isolated and alone, that we can't return to Earth. But I always presumed that Earth and the rest of the universe still existed somewhere and would always continue to exist. It makes a difference."

"That's a fact," said another. "It means we have to rethink our aims and objectives. Which brings me to the point that it still hasn't been explained why Kayin is absent."

Tamm cleared his throat and glanced at Ham-Ra, who nodded for him to go ahead. "When Kayin and myself returned to City 5 we still had very little technical data of a useful kind. While beyond the first threshold we did of course take a whole library of image and spectral recordings which we can all study at our leisure. But a great deal of the other instrumentation we took along proved useless. More specifically, the nucleon rocket's instruction tape had whetted our appetite to know more about the early efforts to explore the empty void, as this seemed to be the direction in which the society's interest would lie. Unfortunately the requisite documents lie well behind the mandatory cut-off, and no one we could reach in the administrative ramification had authorisation to give us access. So we devised a scheme to tap the archives illegally."

The audience was torn between fright at this manoeuvre and admiration for its audacity. The brighter of them had already anticipated the outcome of the story. A skinny, scowling youngster with a sharp face snorted. "The tap was detected, of course?"

"Yes, but only Kayin's part in the matter is known to the ramification. It was his training that made the attempt possible. Now, although both Ham-Ra and myself, and to that extent the whole society, were involved, the only chance to save the society from dissolution is to disavow responsibility. We all agreed that Kayin should be expelled and his actions condemned."

"Isn't that a little unfair?"

"Kayin doesn't seem to think so."

"What will happen to him?"

"Nothing much, not the way the wind's blowing at present. You could say our loss is just as great as his – we've lost one of our only two members to have seen the sidereal universe with their own eyes."

The news seemed to have agitated, energised the society.

They began speaking all at once, shouting each other down.

"What do we do now?"

"We ought to force the ramification to act!"

"We ought to steal the nucleon rocket –"

Ham-Ra held up his hands for silence. The hatchet-faced, damp-haired young man who had spoken before rose to his feet. Ham-Ra nodded.

"Obviously the ramification expected us to accept what we've learned and to give up quietly, maybe even to dissolve ourselves voluntarily," said the youth, whose name was Barsh. "Their message to us is: *there is no science of astronomy, there is no exploration of space.* I don't think we should take it lying down. Instead, I think we should revive the whole question of whether there is matter in the empty void and of launching new missions going even further than they did before."

"That's right! Last time they gave up too easily."

Curtly Ham-Ra once again stopped the rising hubbub. Tamm was smiling wrily. "I don't imagine they gave up easily. I think they tried as hard as it's possible to try. These days the ramification has trouble of a different kind."

He flicked a switch, reeling back a few inches of tape. The screen glowed with its incredible picture, accompanied by the instruction tape's closing remark:

". . . the chief problems lie in the social and psychological fields."

The others heard the words, but the blank look in their eyes betrayed their lack of interest. "What are we going to do about outfitting an expedition into deep space?" Barsh said.

To Kiang, chairman of the temporary board, the meeting with Kord was slightly frightening, slightly thrilling. The man was large – tall, broad, and bulky; his face, which gave one the impression that it had never smiled, was also large, and lined with the impress of years of wilfully directed thought. Its colour was grey, not the grey of illness but the grey of granite, of obdurate strength. When Kord spoke, everybody listened. He was that rare man, the great leader who in times past would have directed the affairs of continents, of planets. There was something heartbreaking in seeing that powerful personality applied with full force to

the promotion of stasis and conservation on this pathetic scrap of a vanished universe.

The boardroom was divided down the centre by a long, polished table. On one side sat the temporary board, headed by Kiang and backed by Haren, Kuro, Chippilare and Freen. Facing them sat the permanent board: Kord flanked by Bnec, specialist in physics, the science of materiality; Engrach, specialist in technology; Ferad and Elbern, specialists in sociodynamics. Elbern was one of Kord's strokes of strategy, for he was a converted member of the old opposition of centuries ago. Kord knew that the errors promulgated by the vanquished party would occur again and again in the history of City 5, though he hoped with steadily diminishing force, and he realised the advantage of having a man who understood the kind of mentality that fostered them.

Kord permitted himself a direct glance into Kiang's mobile face. They're afraid of us, he thought. They feel young in our presence; they're aware that we were old and wise, sitting on this board, before they were babies. But they'll fight us if they have to.

The members of the permanent board lived for only one day a year. Thus one year of aging for them spanned three hundred and sixty-five years of City 5 history. Without this device of a permanent guiding hand, Kord believed, the city would never have maintained its historical stability thus far – and in this small, unique, precious island of life stability was all-important. If social tendencies slowed down enough to require less readjustment, the dormant period could be extended to ten years, perhaps even to a hundred years.

At the moment those long, restful sleeps seemed a long way off. Inwardly Kord sighed. He was the last of a line of leaders, including men like Chairman Mao and Gebr Hermesis, who had tried to reform the mind of humanity and fix it with an eternal pattern. Always the problem was one of training the new generation to think in every way like the old. Humanity had survived their failures, but Kord was convinced that it would not survive his.

Angrily he flung the file he had studied at Kiang. "A hundred years ago you would have been executed for the contents of that file. I spare you now only on the assumption that rectification of the situation will immediately be taken in hand."

". . . We do not necessarily agree, Chairman, that rectification is necessary."

"How many times do I have to spell it out to you, gentlemen?" Kord said, his voice becoming gravelly with displeasure. "We are concerned with preserving the city, not for a thousand years, not for a million, but *forever*, for *eternity*. Due to the nature of the human psyche this is only possible if life is regularised in every detail. There must be no new directions, no individuality, no innovations or originality of thought. The city is small. It must be protected from itself." Kord felt himself sweating. Only a few years ago the consciousness of what was required for survival was infused in the ramification, in the mind of the city itself. Yet over and over again, through the centuries, he had gone through exactly such arguments as this. It seemed that the tendency to deviate, to forget, was ever-present and in time entered even the temporary board itself. Even so, Kord was shocked to find that the position had deteriorated so quickly in the past year; his perpetual nightmare was that one day he would awake to find that his authority was no longer valid.

"You have made the severest mistake," he continued, "committed the greatest crime, in giving youth its head. The absolute pre-condition for a permanent social pattern is the complete subordination and conditioning of the younger generation. But what do I find? Led on by your own foolish ambitions, you have permitted youth to set in train what threatens to be a virtual renaissance in the arts and sciences."

"We have been giving the matter considerable thought for some time, Chairman," Chippilare put in. "As we see it, you fear initiative because it will upset the balance; but we fear stasis because it produces a movement in the other direction, towards decay. The city can die through a progressive depletion of psychic energy, as well as through an explosion of it."

"There has been a noticeable air of apathy and drabness about the city of recent years," Kuro said. "Perhaps you, in suspended animation, have missed it. It was to counteract this decline in tone that we decided to liven things up a bit."

"In fact," added Freen, "we now question whether a society can be kept in good health without innovation and change."

"It can," answered Kord firmly, aware by now that he

had a full-scale rebellion on his hands. "There were many such societies on Earth, usually of a primitive nature, which were eventually destroyed *only* by change and innovation introduced from outside. In particular, the aborigines of the prehistoric period on the continent of Australia maintained a fully developed culture for thousands of years, believing their origins to be in an immensely distant 'dream time'. We have to create a 'dream time' for our people."

"That's right," said Elbern, looking at Freen with a certain amount of hostility. "The reason for the long-term stability of the aborigines was that, living in a sparse, poorly-endowed land, all their energies were taken up in the considerable skills needed to survive. We are perhaps unfortunate in that with our level of technology we can take care of our basic needs fairly easily – that is why we have tried to replace preoccupation with short-term needs with pre-occupation with long-term needs, in the maintenance of the basic machinery, in the continual drawing up of new plans for the re-design of the city, and above all in the inertial stocktaking, which takes up an enormous amount of the population's labour-time and is concerned with accounting for every atom of the City's mass. I do not need to remind you how important that activity is if we are to conserve all our mass and energy over billions and billions of years."

The temporary board looked embarrassed and cast covert glances at one another. At length Kiang told them: "Our recent philosophical ventures have cast doubt on the very basis of the city's plan for existence. We have been studying the very fact of matter itself. It has been known ever since the early formulation of dialectical materialism that motion and tendency, opposing forces and so on, are the very basis of matter whether it takes physical, mental or social forms. If the principle of opposition, as for instance in a class struggle of some sort, is fundamental then how can you be sure that a static or self-perpetuating state *is even possible*? You cannot name any Earth society that remained stable for all time."

Kiang was voicing Kord's private fears, but he said nothing, only stared stonily.

"Furthermore," Kiang continued, "we have to take note of the fact that materiality is an extraordinary and temporary occurrence in the space-time frame. More and more we have become convinced that the materiality of the sidereal universe consisted of an accidental polar opposition with

no inherent tendency towards stability. It had to move some way, and in so doing the transient balance was lost; hence the shrinkage of matter and its final disappearance. But where does that leave us? The materiality of City 5 is even more isolated and vulnerable. At any moment in time it may suddenly collapse and disappear. So there is not much point in our planning for eternity."

Throughout this argument the permanent board had listened in silence. When Kiang had finished, Bnec, Kord's specialist in physics, let out an expression of disgust. "A very pretty speech! You palpitating fool, is your brain so addled that you have forgotten your special access beyond the mandatory cut-off? Or do you believe yourself to be too progressive to learn anything from the superhuman efforts of your ancestors? Can you seriously imagine that these questions were not thrashed out, researched and resolved millennia ago?"

Kord held up his hand to quell the brewing quarrel. "Have no fear, the material of the city is sound as far as science can tell. Also, we shall not run out of energy provided we lose no appreciable mass: it has been found that we are in a privileged position here, in that there is a conservation of mass-energy. The material polarity, as you correctly call it, is self-conserving. When atomic energy, say, is released from matter to perform useful work, it is not dissipated but we absorb it elsewhere in the city. Thus as long as the total mass remains constant the same energy can be released again and again in a cyclic action. Apart from that we have proved that we can keep the genetic material of the population stable. So our problem concerns only the conscious, active life of the city, without which none of these principles can be maintained."

He clenched his fist. "Get this! Everything that happens, happens beneath the crystal dome. *There is no external world*. There is no longer any universe, any creation . . . so any uncontrolled process beneath the dome is a danger to the city. The element in the human psyche that reaches out, explores and discovers must be eradicated. It means destruction to us. The outward, aspirational life must be replaced by an inward life of symbolism and extremely close personal relationships.

"None of this can happen at once, of course. In a sense we are still in our first stages of arrival in the empty void. We have still to make the adjustment, which we are doing

by degrees, progressing two steps forward and one step back. Thus at the moment the dome is transparent and lets out a blaze of light. This means a loss of energy but for us it is a symbol, an announcement of our presence. At some date in the future the dome will be made totally impervious and no quantum of mass-energy will ever be allowed to leave the city. Then again, we still call the city by its original name, City 5, bringing with it the awareness that there were other cities and other places. Eventually it will be known simply as the City."

"And is ignorance also part of the prescription for survival?" Haren's tone was mildly contemptuous.

"A careful balance is needed." The long arguing was making Kord tired, but he refused to let his energy flag. "Full consciousness of our situation would be too much for the collective mind, it would cause mental disorders and ultimately destroy us. Likewise, complete ignorance would destroy us for different reasons. We must steer a middle course until the day when the non-deviating republic has been established and we can safely permit the whole city to live with the full knowledge and consciousness of where we are."

Kord stood up, his bulk looming over them. "I trust I have made things clear. We will recess for a short while and meet in the executive complex in three hours' time. It will be necessary to make some arrangements."

With opaque faces the temporary board rose and left the room. The others remained behind, looking pensively at the table top.

"A fairly bad business," Elbern said.

"We can handle it. But I think the board we leave behind when we freeze again will have some different names in it." Kord picked up the file he had thrown at Kiang and leafed through it moodily. The section on the archetypal dramas had been the first give-away. Kord had always known that the symbols and archetypes that would emerge from the collective unconscious would decide the fate of City 5 in the long run. That was why he had encouraged the development of art forms for which practically the whole city was an audience; films, plays and archetypal dramas delivered in a semi-hypnagogic state, in which these entities could find expression, symbols, characters and stories merging into a dream-like, hypnotic blend. The section on the dramas was always the first thing he turned to when given the briefing.

If the symbols were rounded, square, on the Jungian mandala or quaternity patterns, then he was pleased. The image he looked for was the cave, the female, the square table, the square room, the circle. Today there was an altogether unacceptable number of thrusting, probing images, the tower on the plain, the pointed lance, the long journey, the magician, the supreme effort. These images were all culled from the generalised social unconscious of the time. Aware of the part played by the sexual polarity in the structure of the social psyche, Kord had long since realised that it was necessary to create a womb-centred, vulva-centred civilisation, instead of a phallus-centred one.

Brooding, he closed the file. He had faced many difficulties in the past. It was disappointing to find that they might not, after all, be diminishing.

When they again met the temporary board three hours later, they found that the spirit of disagreement was still present. Further, the rebels had used the time to reconsolidate their position among some complexes of the ramification. Kord was obliged to resort to strong measures. Within twenty-four hours he had set in motion an efficient and informed state police. Two days later, the general purge began. Within a week public executions were being held daily in the main park.

Kayin was in hiding, having taken Polla with him, in a part of the city that had not been rebuilt for a few hundred years and where he had friends. To his surprise he remained hidden, whereas others failed to evade the combination of delation and electronic scanning by which the ramification discovered everyone's whereabouts. The reason, as he at last surmised, was simple: his expulsion from the society had saved him. He was no longer associated with a subversive movement, and his other crime was not, in the context of present events, viewed with the same gravity.

Accordingly he began to venture out. In the main park he watched as the unrepentant Ham-Ra, Tamm and Barsh received the customary lethal injections in the neck. As he wandered away, feeling bitter and sick, he heard someone call his name.

It was Herren, an acquaintance he had not seen for a couple of years. About the same age as himself, Herren appraised him speculatively.

"How are you, old chap? Everything all right?"

The bright, breezy manner simply left Kayin scowling. He turned away, but Herren followed him, speaking sympathetically, "Yes, I know, it's an awful shame. But the game's not lost, you know. Things really are moving. I thought you might be interested."

Kayin shrugged.

"Well, all right, it is a bit open here. Listen, I happen to know where you're staying. Surprised?" He laughed. "News travels these days. Friends, you know. I'll call on you tonight. Pity if you were left out of everything."

Kayin looked at him thoughtfully. "It's up to you." He felt oddly detached. Herren might be a ramification agent, for all he knew, but he didn't much care.

In the event, Herren was playing it straight. He called just as Kayin and Polla were finishing their evening meal. The wall screen was showing an old drama from several years ago – the new-style dramas had been taken out of circulation – but they were paying it too little heed to be drawn into the semi-hypnagogic state in which it could have been fully appreciated.

Herren entered the room and rudely switched the screen off. "Not interested in that old rubbish, are you?" He looked around, then produced a small metal cylinder from his pocket and carefully placed it on the table. "This will fool any hidden scanners," he explained. "They'll pick up nothing but an empty room."

Kayin stared at the gadget blankly. "Where did you get it?"

The other winked. "There's a certain amount of underground stuff being manufactured these days."

Despite his own misdemeanour, Kayin found the idea hard to grasp. "Do you mean insurrection? The city is fragmenting?"

"They are talking of civil war."

"But that's . . . crazy . . ." Kayin wondered if Herren knew what he knew of City 5's situation, of the facts concerning the sidereal universe.

"I haven't been getting much news lately," he ended weakly.

"Let me fill you in. Kord has already killed three members of the temporary board. Chippilare and Kuro escaped, thanks to the loyalty of sympathetic elements both in the ramification and outside. They have organised an opposition

and are holding out in the western segment, down near the basement. It's more or less an enclave. The State Police aren't strong enough to go in and get them out."

"Has Kord given them arms?"

"They're getting arms now. But the opposition is manufacturing arms, too. It's a revolution! Because the opposition isn't just in the enclave, it's all over, gradually being organised. Youth is waking up!"

Polla stared from one to the other of the young men in disbelief. "Kayin, can this be true? What's happening?"

"Kord is finding out that he can't enslave the mind of humanity forever," Herren said. "We are discovering freedom."

"It's all over a difference of opinion," Kayin told her wearily. "Kord and his people think that the city can best be preserved by rigid control and a low level of aspiration. Our technology is sufficient, so there's no need for further development in the arts or sciences. The others, like Herren here, believe that that approach leads to a slow but sure disaster, and that the city must be kept bubbling to stay healthy, that life isn't worth living any other way anyhow. They both feel strongly enough about it to go to war. They're all in the minority, of course. The great majority of the population have the good sense to interest themselves in nothing much except the inertial stock-taking."

"But which side is right?"

"Right?" Kayin said with a grimace. "Neither! Both roads will lead to disaster . . . There isn't any solution . . . The city exists in a place where it isn't supposed to be . . ."

Herren leaned forward and gripped his slumped shoulder comfortingly. "Steady, old chap. I know how it must have been for you this afternoon, seeing your friends executed. Believe me, we've all been through it. But you'll pull through. I know we'll be able to depend on you when the time comes."

Kayin remembered the wry smile on red-headed Tamm's face, just before they injected the poison.

When Kuro finally answered Kord's invitation, he found the centuries-old master of City 5 looking drawn and strained. For his part, it had been a mortal blow to Kord's confidence when he had failed to contain the situation. He suspected that for some years the briefings he had been

given had been tampered with to play down the actual motion of events. Now, though he held the central premises of the ramification, he effectively controlled only two thirds of the city.

"Very well," he said curtly, "you are strong enough to fight us."

"And we will."

Kord spoke in an exasperated tone. "Already there have been gun battles in the city! Yesterday fire broke out in the northern segment." Angrily he rapped his artificial leg. "Do you know how I got this? In a civil war pretty much like this one is becoming. Sheer lunacy! It's suicide to fight inside the city; we can't allow it again."

"So?"

"If we have to fight, it will have to be done *outside the dome*."

"My conclusion exactly," Kuro said sombrely, "as far as heavier weapons go, anyway. We can both construct space vessels of some sort. For the arrangement to be effective each side must be allowed to transfer sufficient forces outside, without interference."

"Agreed, then. We shall set up an independent commission to control the egress port."

He paused reflectively. "By the way, I got some news today. You know that there is an instrument in the ramification set to record the moment when the material universe finally vanishes altogether. Just after eight last night, the event registered."

Kuro made no comment. After they had completed the formal arrangements he left, feeling only slight discomfort about what was going on.

"It's like a nightmare," Polla said.

The city appeared to be huddling, expectant. In the north could be seen the fire-blackened region, and a faint smell of smoke still hung in the air, not quite eradicated by the circulatory system. The crystal dome sparkled; but beyond it vague shadowy forms were moving as the contending forces arrayed themselves.

"Well, at least the city will be safe," Kayin replied. Herren had come to him and expected him to take part in the street fighting. When he had declined, he had again come to him and invited him to help man the weapons

carried by the new spacecraft. Kayin could imagine what kind of a battle that would be: hastily built ships manoeuvring in an utterly empty void, carefully avoiding proximity with the city and offering perfect sitting ducks to one another. With luck, none of them would return and the city could live in peace.

Kayin was fingering a key in his pocket. It was a special key, working by electronic impulses, and it gave its owner possession of the observatory's nucleon rocket. Kayin had never handed it back after his mission with Tamm.

"Poll," he said, "let's go somewhere."

"Where?"

"Out," he answered sardonically, "outward bound. The early expeditions failed because they always turned back when they reached the point of no return, when their engines wouldn't have got them back if they'd gone further. *We'll keep on going*. What does it matter?"

She didn't understand what he was talking about, but she followed him to the park where they used to meet. He headed for the observatory, but this time bypassed the dome and pressed the key into a small slot in the base of the tower.

A door slid open. He stepped inside, taking Polla by the hand and tugging her through. There was a gap of about twelve feet between the hull of the rocket and the shell of the tower. The spacecraft loomed above them like a huge shaft.

He pressed the same key into a slot in a large box inside the door. It clicked and hummed; automatically the rocket was being readied for use.

"*Kayin*," Polla protested in sudden alarm. "What's going on? I'm not going anywhere –"

Without waiting for her fright to become hysteria, he closed in on her. For a few moments she was gasping as they grappled, then he had her held securely over his shoulder. Still she struggled, bewildered, but there wasn't far to go. He carried her to the embarkation platform; swiftly it took them up the side of the rocket to the port. Once inside the rocket he stepped down a short passage and threw her down in the luxurious living apartment.

"What are you *doing*?" She sat up on the floor, her legs asplay.

He switched on the wall screen, tuning it to the external

scanners. "Enjoy the show," he said, then left for the control cabin, locking the door behind him.

The controllers of the egress port were used to a constant stream of craft applying for exit; they asked no questions in his case. For the second time in his life he floated up above the dome, seeing the city spread out below him. But this time there were big, clumsy cylindrical objects floating in the vicinity of the city, some of them sporting wicked-looking equipment welded on in various places. The war was due to begin soon.

Kayin chose a direction at random and started up the nucleon engines at full power. In a second City 5 was gone. He and Polla were alone in the void, the eternal, infinite, vacant void.

On and on and on and on and on. The engines never stopped. Although they ran silently, Kayin checked their action constantly on the instruments in the control cabin.

Polla had wept and screamed, then sulked for weeks, and then gradually become friendly again. By now Kayin himself felt defensively sullen about what he had done. It was boorish and uncharacteristic of him. But he stubbornly refused to apologise, even to his own conscience.

At this distance it was impossible even with the most powerful magnification available on the rocket to gain as much as a photon's worth of image from the city. Shortly after departure he had picked up brief flashes that came not from the city itself but from the spaceships that were fighting one another with nuclear weapons. Even if they had not been travelling at billions of times the speed of light, such minute flickers would not have been detectable by any means now.

So there was only the emptiness on all sides. Looking out into it, one could not even discern distance, there was only absolute lightlessness.

After they had been travelling for nearly two months Kayin took to spending long periods in the direct observation blister that, projecting from the hull of the rocket in a perfectly transparent bulge, formed a cavity or extrusion into space. Here was the only place in the rocket where the artificial gravity (derived from the same principle as the nucleon engine) did not operate. With the cavity light switched off, one might as well have been floating in free

fall in the void itself. Kayin spent what seemed like hours staring out of the blister, into what to his eyes was simply blackness but which his mind knew to be infinity. His mind began working in new directions. Matter, he reasoned, had structure, but space was simply emptiness. Yet space, too, had structure of a kind. It had extension and direction. Was there, he wondered, a substratum to the void, a richer reality lying beneath it? After a while, for some dim sense of pleasure only vaguely known to himself, he took to coming into the cavity naked.

SENSORY DEPRIVATION

The human mind is not made to be without incoming sensory data for any but the briefest periods. The first consequence of sensory deprivation is that the subject loses, first, the sense of his bodily outline, and then his sense of identity. Then, since the consciousness will not tolerate lack of perceptions, and being denied them from the external direction, it draws upon them from the inner direction, projecting on to the senses first hallucinations of a random, dream-like character, and then, if the process is continued, unlocking the archetypal symbols from the unconscious.

Kayin went through all these stages fairly quickly. Out in the void he saw vast wheeling mandalas, glimmering forms whose size was beyond the mind to compute. He saw the mystic triad, the mystic quaternity, exemplified in a thousand dazzling forms. He did not think or remark on what he saw, *for he was not there.* His personal identity was gone; his being consisted merely of an impersonalised consciousness of the symbols he saw.

Once he must have moved accidentally and bumped into the wall of the cavity. The bodily sensation brought him momentarily to himself. Flashing waves of excitement, of joy, swept through him. *I'm seeing it*, he thought. *This is the reality underlying space, the structure of the world transcending it. Stay here long enough and it shows itself.*

Then he was merged once again with the contents of the unconscious, a kind of paradisical, compelling, luring world. His next bodily sensation was a feeling of hotness. Vaguely

he returned to himself, realising that genuine light was in his eyes. He turned slowly. The door of the cavity was open and Polla was drifting in, having turned on the illumination to a dim, soft glow.

She smiled at him distantly. They both rotated and twisted slowly round one another, hanging in the air. The hem of the short frock she wore was riding up, warping and twirling. To Kayin it was the most vivid thing he had ever seen, a vision thousands of miles across. Her face flashed with angelic light. The texture and colour of her skin radiated a soft, irresistible power.

He undid the clasp at her neck and pulled off the loose frock. They continued to turn and bend soundlessly in the cavity, the frock drifting away from them. Her body was angled slightly away from him, slightly above him. Reaching up, he first fondled then drew off her soft undergarment. Hot waves of unconsciousness swept through him.

The symbols and signs were still all around them, the very substance of their world. Kayin heard choking gasps, squeals and screams. He was submerged, spinning in endless glyphs of power and enjoying a withering, burning fire that ran in wide searing rivers and consumed the world.

Briefly he came again to consciousness of himself. They were suspended in the centre of the cavity. He was gripping Polla by her upper arms, and she his. Their bodies, joined at the genitals, were arched violently and bucking like wild animals, savagely butting, fucking. Dizzily vision again faded from his consciousness. He and the world were one identity, consisting of a huge, powerful and stiff phallus moving forward with steady purpose. Then he was at the same time a large opened vulva against which the phallus mashed and poked, making them both throb.

A murmur caught his ear. He was pressed up against Polla, his lips against hers and their bodies straining and heaving. Would they merge, blend, generating between them an androgyne with supernatural sexual powers?

Then, with a groan, they fell slightly apart and began grappling with the whole length of their bodies, limbs twisting and tangling, biting, gripping and kicking. Finally, after a last lunge at her, Kayin, fully restored to himself now, pushed her away and they hung staring at one another avidly.

Kayin and Polla lay weakly in the living apartment. For weeks they had been exhausting themselves in the outside cavity, pushing to the utmost every kind of sex that a male and female can engineer between them.

It was a discovery that Kayin would have liked to take back to City 5. There was nothing like it. Twenty minutes alone in the cavity, and sex became as it had never been before. It seemed that all unconscious power was released and flooded into action.

"Would you like to go home, Poll?"

"I don't care," she sighed quietly.

In between their frequent bouts Kayin had also given himself time to think. At first he had thought the visions he saw in the void, even in the blister cavity itself, were real, a hopeful revelation of a positive reality beneath the nothingness through which they moved. More soberly, he had now recognised them for what they were: projections from his own mind, the exteriorisation of basic psychic patterns, which spilled into the open when the constraining effect of sensory impressions was removed. One interesting thing about them was that both he and Polla frequently experienced the same images at the same time during their love-making, further evidence that the unconscious was a collective one.

"Then we're going home," he said firmly.

"You don't want to find the other universe?" she spoke timidly, like a child. Such powerful and abundant sex as they had been getting seemed to have made her regress to something like a childish state.

"There *isn't* any other universe. What's more, I'm pretty certain by now that *there isn't any space. No empty void.*"

She didn't understand what he meant, so he didn't try to explain. The idea had formed itself slowly in his mind, and he felt sure that it was right. Space was a consequence of matter, not matter of space. Outside the sidereal universe, where there was no matter, there was no space either. *When City 5 had escaped the metagalaxy, it had simply escaped into non-being.*

It would not appear that way to observers, of course. Since space was always associated with matter, City 5 ex-

tended its own island of space. Projectiles sent out from it always did the same, generating as they went a fictitious measuring system of distances and velocities by which they oriented themselves.

The nucleon rocket was not going anywhere. It merely created its own "appearance" of space as it "moved" through an incomprehensible nullity. It was, in fact, hard to argue that it moved at all; such a statement was quite meaningless, as was its obverse that the rocket didn't move.

None of which made any difference as regards piloting it. The rocket acted according to the laws of its materiality, for in nullity there were no laws. Kayin turned the ship round and gave the computer the problem of finding City 5. The moment of their return being mathematically certain, he and Polla then waited patiently for the rocket to deliver them there, indulging often in the pastime of which they never grew tired.

When the rocket signalled completion of the journey, they went to the now familiar outside cavity, eager for their first glimpse of their life-long home to be by line of sight.

Polla fainted dead away. Kayin grabbed a stanchion to steady himself, and avoided the same only by a determined effort of will. The crude cylindrical ships, the litter from the war between the followers of Kord and the followers of Kuro, were scattered all over the space surrounding the city, gutted, gashed and broken, trailing bodies and equipment.

Evidently the fight had been pressed too hard, and the contendants had grown desperate over relinquishing control of the city. City 5 blazed into the darkness, as it would automatically continue to do for millennia. But the crystal dome was shattered. As the rocket came closer he saw the masses of dead bodies in the airless plazas and streets. About one third of the buildings seemed to have been wrecked by an explosion, and Kayin noticed, as his glazed eyes roamed over the dead city spinning slowly like a great mandala in the void, that the big housing tower for the nucleon rocket had been broken off at the base, and lay like a fallen giant across the sward.

A LITERATURE OF COMFORT

M. John Harrison

If you're very good, you can trot along and knock on the study door. When he has let you in and finished filling his pipe and woven a cozy aromatic haze about you both, he'll pick you up. It's a long way to the floor, but with one strong, brown, gentle hand under each little armpit, you can't come to any harm at all.

What a pleasant thing to be whirled round and round this way, feeling a delirious safe thrill; to have an adventure sitting on his shoulders level with the highest shelf of books. Doesn't that typewriter look small? Or perhaps he'll pretend to drop you.

Oops, ha ha.

Don't worry about a thing, it's safe and warm in here, and when you've had enough you can sit quietly and listen to a story.

It is commonly supposed that the science-fiction genre has its roots well down into the work of two cultured and capable men, Wells the thinker and Verne the entertainer. And it is true, as the proponents of this theory have often pointed out, that there are certain similarities between the novels of these men and the science fiction that has followed. But consider this:

If the genre *had* begun life in such a carefully-written, considered and imaginative form, how on earth did it degenerate so quickly into a literature of shoddy, programmed pap?

The fashionable answer to this question is, of course, that there hasn't been a writer with one hundredth of one per cent of Wells' ability since nineteen-twenty. But even the briefest study of the output of such novelists as L. Ron Hubbard, Vargo Statten and "Doc" Smith shows this attitude to be nonsensical, if not merely snobbish.

No, the real problem is one of sources, and its solution lies in the fact that the type of fiction generally produced by sf writers doesn't originate with H. G. Wells and Jules Verne at all. It was developed from the work of A. A. Milne.

Influenced heavily by *The Wizard of Oz* and tempered by the outlook of the *Wind in the Willows* this new fiction rapidly adapted itself to do a more sophisticated but very similar job to that done so successfully by Frank L. Baum and Kenneth Grahame. At its attainment of autonomy it had – and still has – very little to do with the qualities the Wells–Verne school claim to have observed in it, those of imagination, speculation, satire, or that condition of fantasy which produces a fresh viewpoint.

It has to do with comfort: the repetition of form and content; careful rationalisation of any change in the status quo; a body of warm, familiar assumptions, reiterated from book to book and serving precisely the same purpose as "once upon a time"; the constant reminder that the short step into fantasy is also the short step away from it, that reality is just round the corner.

There is no danger of falling from daddy's broad shoulders unless you happen to read George Orwell by accident.

Genesis Two (Doubleday, $4.95), by L. P. Davies, in which scientists of a far future transpose an isolated twentieth-century village and its contents into an even farther future

to repopulate the world they have demolished, meets all the above specifications. Added to the comfy subject matter, we have the traditional hook – two improbably naive young men lost in a mysterious mist in England's Lake District; and a familiar theme – a heterogenous collection of people out of their customary frame of reference who must learn to cooperate if they are to survive.

For the means by which they are projected into this future, Davies dips his arm to the elbow in the great greasy luke-warm stockpot and comes up with a disbelief genre readers are so accustomed to suspending that they can do it without thinking, " '. . . something called kinestasis . . . Telekinesis, he mentioned. And poltergeists.' " And to keep the reading similarly easy, the book is couched in some of the least evocative prose I've ever come across. Early images of the Lake District are of the misty-fell-and-towering-crag strain ("Lightning flared behind the cardboard cut-outs of distant peaks . . ."); and when faced by the volcanic proto-landscape of AD 40,000 we are offered little more than sulphurous smells and ". . . a scarlet tongue of flame pierced the darkness, leaping high into the sky".

At least a style like that doesn't get between the reader and the content. Such as it is.

What makes this novel so interesting (no, honestly) is that it's a perfect, if accidental, parody of the "could it all have been a bad dream" story: by a fortunate side effect of the kinestatic process our heroes are presently returned to their own time, a little the worse for wear but so much *wiser*, and able to write of their experiences in the first person. Since the plot hits a precritical point just prior to their personal miracle, one wonders if there *was* any plot.

I'd tell you about it, but that might mean giving it all away.

As one might expect, there is a good deal of science with the fiction in Poul Anderson's *Tau Zero* (Doubleday, $4.95).

The starship *Leonora Christine* works on a ramscoop principle, sucking in interstellar hydrogen for fuel. The more she sucks in the faster she goes; the nearer she gets to the speed of light, the lower her *tau* factor gets; the lower her *tau* factor gets, the harder it gets to explain in less than three pages. Poul Anderson does it in two and an equation, which is probably some kind of record.

On the non-scientific side, he is duplicating L. P. Davies' theme: isolating a group of people in peculiar circumstances

and drawing a reassuring moral from it. When the *Leonora Christine* scoops up some of a particularly dense patch of interstellar material, her *tau* factor gets very low indeed. Time outside the ship moves relatively faster and faster until centuries are passing for each second lived by the crew. There is no way of slowing down, and they face a lifetime of wandering through a dying universe.

Understandably, they become depressed. Infuriated by their passive intellectual acceptance, Reymont, the ship's policeman (" 'Having seen what education and culture make people into, I'm less and less interested in acquiring them' "), goads them into taking constructive action. After a trip through eternity and a first-night seat at the Heat Death, they save themselves. He has to injure one or two of them to keep them interested.

Mr. Anderson seems to be more concerned with the science than the people, and for that reason it's a pity he couldn't have written separate books. His careful, rational explanations – an involvement with mechanics rather than implications – make the universe a smaller, more comfortable place: and, inevitably, they make people easier to handle, too. If you shout at them a lot, their effeteness factor drops appreciably.

Reading the above novels will not disturb you in any way. If you still believe that H. G. Wells was the primogenitor of science fiction, you will have to go elsewhere for the evidence. That might even mean taking the risk of reading a book which doesn't have an sf label; that is to say, a book the contents of which you cannot extrapolate from its jacket notes and a working knowledge of the sf image/concept vocabulary.

Some six years ago, when the so-called "English Movement" began to gather momentum within the genre, it was greeted with surprise and trepidation as something alien and unlooked-for. Hindsight, however, suggests that, rather than the sapling of an entirely new tree, it was a belated attempt at growth by the stunted, abandoned trunk of Wellsian science fiction (it might be interesting to try and discover what quaint climatic shift stimulated this sudden energy: we might relate, say, sudden increases in boredom to sunspot activity). Although its content was novel and varied, its concerns were once more with the old virtues of

imagination, exercises in speculation and social comment, and that condition of fantasy which engenders a fresh viewpoint.

Possibly it might be truer to say here that *because* its subject matter was new and varied, its concerns once more entered these areas of fiction, automatically dictated a formal and stylistic revolution, and just as automatically ensured that the antagonism felt toward it would rise in direct proportion to the freshness of its viewpoints –

> "There isn't a *nice thing* I can say about this depraved, cynical, utterly repulsive and thoroughly degenerate parody of *what was once a real SF theme* . . ."
>
> (Donald Wollheim on Spinrad's *Bug Jack Barron*, my italics throughout.)

With all the dams down or cracking, Frank Baum's favourite genre had to hang on to its stability, hard. There isn't all that much comfort in Jack Barron's universe.

One of the first science fiction authors to stop saying *nice things* was J. G. Ballard, and in *The Atrocity Exhibition* (Jonathan Cape, £1.05), we find the culmination of his early formal experiments, in which fragmentation and condensation minimise the waste products of the story and leave the image – the essence of the fiction – to stand by itself.

The central character of these mobile tableaux – who is sometimes Travis, often Trabert or Talbot or Tallis – travels an obsessive personal landscape of derelict airfields, mental asylums and motorways, using the twin devices of sexuality and violence to examine and measure his relationship with the exterior universe (that relationship which, in fact, constitutes our inner universe).

His fascination with the surrealist analogy, the expression of an event or series of events through an equation of emotionally-charged objects, leads him to reconstruct again and again the deaths of myth-figures like Kennedy and Grissom. He is seen as the optimum denizen of the psychiatric hospital: neither doctor nor patient, but both.

Now this is fairly complex stuff: to involve the reader, it needs a writer of great ability and an unshakeable basis in observed reality – there can be no characters, for instance, whose only characteristics are those necessary to the plot (as in Anderson's Reymont); they must all be seen to operate over the entire spectrum of human behaviour, and their

actions must be *true*; they must copulate and evacuate and do other ordinary things, be involved with life. *The fiction must be an aspect of the life of its characters, not the sole reason for it.*

Ballard constructs his fantasy from elements to be found all around us, the architectures and cultures and life-styles of the twentieth century: his end product may be thoroughly alien, but it sends disturbing pseudopods and nerve-fibres back into the world we inhabit. Fantasy is *not* just round the corner. Neither is reality. The one stems from the other, and they are as inextricably woven as the lives of patient and doctor in the psychiatric ward.

The sudden death of Arthur Sellings robbed English sf of a continually developing talent. His last novel, *Junk Day* (Dobson, £1.25), is by no means as ambitious as *The Atrocity Exhibition*, but it shares the implied premise that fiction is an extension of life, not an alternative.

" 'I saw this great jagged gap in the ground where the convent had stood, but it was somehow unreal – a mistake that was going to be put right . . .' "

But it isn't put right. With remarkable savagery of prose and image, Sellings sets out to destroy his characters, coldly stripping them to the bone in an attempt to get at the real significance of the word "disaster".

Wandering a levelled London after some immense but unspecified catastrophe, Douglas Bryan, a painter, and Veronica, a lapsed nun, discover a post-collapse society evolving around the city's old antique market, the Portobello Road, where even rubbish has its price. Joining the community, they find its values as unpleasant as those of the pre-disaster world: simple individual scavenging has been replaced by centralised collecting and a crude monetary system, and the city is a huge "totter" yard, run by Barney, ex-spiv and junk-king.

When Veronica is killed (and there is a splendid irony involved in her death) Bryan loses faith in his own ability to affect the environment. After a terrifyingly funny political meeting in which he attempts to supply an alternative to Barney's regime, he turns to wine for solace: then, drunk out of his mind, discovers that although Barney's society is *not* all that remains, the system that has survived the disaster in underground redoubts is even more soul-destroying.

This is a true disaster. There are no last-minute Edens, personal or communal. Nothing is built from the ruins that

is any better or more palatable than what has gone before. *Junk Day* hits its own characters in precisely the same way as an earthquake hits the inhabitants of Peru or Turkey, and shatters them.

Since their raison d'être is not simply to take you out of yourself for a couple of hours and then put you back together in exactly the same mental shape, reading these books *will* disturb you.

They accept the implications of their own subject matter – unlike *Genesis Two*, which lollops awkwardly up to its own crux, sniffs it worriedly, and retreats hurriedly – or *Tau Zero*, which brings you the twin secrets of the universe, how to gain mastery over matter and men, in one easy lesson, no academic qualifications necessary.

And between them, they indicate that if science fiction is to regain the direction given to it by its earliest practitioners and take on the maturity hinted at by Orwell and Huxley, it must lose Frank L. Baum and Winne-the-Pooh in the nearest enchanted wood. It must suffer more internal disasters and instabilities like that produced by the "English Movement", offer views of people and things which are not aimed at comforting the reader through repetition and inertia, and cease to address itself only to the lowest common denominator of its present audience.

Otherwise, we might as well be up there on daddy's shoulders, listening enthralled to the tale he will write down tomorrow in a cold study, with the electricity bill in front of him for his whole inspiration.

THE AUTHORS

Michael Moorcock is 31, a Londoner, the author of *Behold the Man, The Final Programme, The Chinese Agent* and *A Cure for Cancer*. His work has appeared in a variety of magazines, newspapers and anthologies. He won the British Fantasy Award in 1967 (for his work on New Worlds) and a Nebula Award in 1968. New Worlds, which he has edited since 1964, received an Arts Council Award in 1967. He has also edited the *Best SF Stories from New Worlds* series, *The Traps of Time* and *The Nature of the Catastrophe* anthologies.

Langdon Jones is 29, a Londoner, the author of many short stories and novellas which have appeared in New Worlds, Impulse, Nugget, Orbit and various anthologies. A collection of them is to be published soon by Macmillan in the United States. Associate Editor of New Worlds since 1964, he edited the magazine during 1969 and is also the editor of *The New SF* (Hutchinson) which received great critical acclaim and was judged in The Observer by Angus Wilson one of the three best books of 1969. Last year he edited and restored Mervyn Peake's *Titus Alone* in its revised edition.

R. Glyn Jones is 24 and is currently doing his doctorate thesis in psychology at London University. He drew part of the *Jerry Cornelius* comic strip in International Times and was also a contributor to Cyclops. His illustrations have appeared in most issues of New Worlds since 1969 when he became Art Editor.

M. John Harrison is 25, author of *The Committed Men* (Doubleday, U.S. and Hutchinson U.K. this autumn) and stories in *Quark, Again, Dangerous Visions,* Transatlantic Review, Fantasy and Science Fiction, New Worlds. He has been Books Editor of New Worlds since 1968.

Thomas M. Disch is 31, a New Yorker, author of several highly praised novels including *The Genocides, Camp Concentration* and *Black Alice* (with John Sladek). His poetry and prose has appeared in New Worlds, Playboy, Quark, Orbit, Transatlantic Review and Paris Review.

J. G. Ballard was born in Shanghai and now lives near London. Reviewing his first novel, *The Drowned World*, Kingsley Amis called him 'the Conrad of science fiction'. A controversial figure on the London literary scene, he has contributed to New Worlds, Encounter, Transatlantic Review, Ambit, Playboy and International Times. As a "sculptor" he mounted an exhibition of crashed cars – "Crash" – at the New Arts Laboratory, London, in 1970.

Brian W. Aldiss lives near Oxford and for many years was Literary Editor of The Oxford Mail. Last year his novel *The Hand-Reared Boy* was a best-seller in England and its sequel *A Soldier Erect* was top of the bestseller lists earlier this year. His sf novels include *Non-Stop* and *Greybeard* and in 1965 he won a Nebula Award for his novella *The Saliva Tree*.

John Sladek is 34, was raised in Minnesota and now lives in London. His work has appeared in Ambit, Playboy, New Worlds and *Dangerous Visions* and he has published two novels, *The Reproductive System* and *The Müller-Fokker Effect*.

Keith Roberts lives in Oxfordshire and was editor of Impulse during 1966, having been Associate Editor of its predecessor Science Fantasy since 1964. His paintings have appeared on many covers of Science Fantasy, Impulse and New Worlds and his stories have appeared in those magazines as well as Galaxy, *New Writings in SF* and *Orbit*. His novels include *The Furies*, *Pavane*, *The Inner Wheel* and the soon to be published *The Boat of Fate*.

David Redd is 25, lives in Wales and is the author of several short stories which have appeared in New Worlds, If and The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction.

Barrington Bayley is 33 and his work has been appearing under various pseudonyms since he was 15. He has only recently begun to write novels, of which the first is *Star Virus*, published last year. He is currently working on a book proposing a revolutionary theory of economics.

NEW WORLDS

Back Issues

In 1967 the Literature Panel of the Arts Council of Great Britain awarded a grant to New Worlds which was the second largest ever granted to a magazine. From July 1967 until March 1971 the magazine appeared in a large format (principally A4) with many graphics by leading modern artists including Eduardo Paolozzi, Richard Hamilton, M. C. Escher, Mervyn Peake, Mal Dean and the photographer Gabi Nasemann. Most of the issues published during this period were, because of bans and attempted censorship by various institutions, not well distributed. They contained the best new work by Brian W. Aldiss, J. G. Ballard, Thomas M. Disch, Michael Moorcock, Norman Spinrad, Thomas Pynchon, Harlan Ellison, Roger Zelazny, Giles Gordon, Langdon Jones, Harvey Jacobs, Charles Platt, M. John Harrison, Fritz Leiber, Mervyn Peake and many others. There was poetry by George MacBeth, D. M. Thomas, Christopher Logue and critical articles on all aspects of imaginative and avant-garde fiction. Most of these issues are still available, together with special binders to take 12 copies. A limited number of complete runs of 12 issues (189–200) are available at £3.25p (this includes binder) or £2.20p (without binder). Most single copies from No. 173 are available at 20p each and the last issue (No. 201) is available in extremely limited numbers at 35p (post free). No. 201 includes a comprehensive index of all large format issues. Please send your orders (enclosing cheque or P.O. made out to New Worlds) to Back Issues Dept., New Worlds, 271 Portobello Road, London W.11.

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Among the contributors to this issue are:

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THOMAS M. DISCH
JOHN SLADEK
KEITH ROBERTS
LANGDON JONES

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