

NEW WORLDS 2



THE SCIENCE FICTION
QUARTERLY

Edited by **MICHAEL MOORCOCK**



NEW WORLDS 2

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 appearance as a quarterly publication in paperback book format.

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THE SHORES OF DEATH

THE WINDS OF LIMBO

THE BLOOD RED GAME

NEW WORLDS 2

NEW WORLDS QUARTERLY 2

**EDITED BY
MICHAEL MOORCOCK**

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INTRODUCTION

MICHAEL MOORCOCK

Just as one tires of reading too many space adventure stories or engineering problem stories, so it's possible to become quickly bored with the more recent kinds of sf — the wistful and inconsequential mood piece, the typographical trickery used to hide a sparsity of content or, perhaps worst of all, the baroque 'myth' story produced by too many of today's once-promising young writers. The bulk of so-called New Wave science fiction has no more claim to be worthy of serious attention than the bulk of so-called Old Wave sf. Most of the stuff is barely entertaining, much is irritatingly whimsical or portentous. But for all that we feel there is still more good sf of all kinds being published now than ever before.

What we sometimes term imaginative fiction can never, of course, satisfy everything we learn to demand from the novels of a Dickens or a Joyce. Imaginative fiction is expected to be well-written, entertaining, to contain, hopefully, some sort of humour and to make a few intelligent and stimulating observations (usually rather general) but we ask no more. We read it because temperamentally we are attracted to the exotic, the bizarre, the sensational and be-

cause we demand an element of speculation – scientific or social – rarely found in the kinds of fiction which would otherwise satisfy these tastes. We find these elements not merely in Alfred Bester but in the satires, allegories and romances of writers like H. G. Wells, Anatole France, Aldous Huxley, George Orwell or Vladimir Nabokov. When these writers use this form we do not expect as much from them as we should expect to find in their novels. We can quarrel with their opinions – for this is a form for expressing opinions – but we do not criticise them for failing to write novels when their intention has been otherwise.

All this is obvious to most of us. Reasonable sf readers accept the fact that sf, as such, can never by its nature offer the richer, more profound pleasures of the best novels. But it is equally obvious that in its concern for discovering new techniques, new subject matter and so on, sf may well have made the greatest contribution to the development of the novel in the 20th century, just as the Gothic contributed in the 19th century.

Sf is a genre form. Like all genre forms it has certain restrictions which we have spent some years exploring. At present we seem close to discovering the limits of those restrictions.

Some modern stories may seem significantly different from the stories of a Heinlein or a Vargo Statten, but they are not so different, either in intention or expression, from the work of the writers like France who were mentioned earlier. Scarcely 'new wave' in any real sense, they represent the need of the individual writer to express himself in a somewhat less restricted way and the need of a reader who has come to demand a rather more sophisticated form of imaginative fiction.

The fact remains that this kind of fiction – call it sf, fantasy, satire or allegory – is written within the constrictions of what is at best a minor artform. It would be foolish to claim that it is more than that. And the problem now facing a few writers who began as reasonably conventional sf writers then developed into writers of a more generalised kind of imaginative fiction is that now even these restrictions are beginning to feel uncomfortable. The work these writers may produce in future will not be 'new wave' sf or genre fiction of any kind. It will simply be fiction which may

employ some of the techniques and subject matter they learned to use as sf writers. Such fiction (and at present virtually none exists) will not have a place in any sf publication and therefore it will not be published as sf; the authors themselves would not expect it to be published as genre fiction. And if what they produce is not genre fiction it would be well worth looking at, since the genre fiction of our Updikes, Vidals, Belows, Barths, Drabbles, Barthelmes, Roths etc. etc. is pretty much all we are offered these days.

Ultimately sf on the whole may become as degenerate a form as the modern social novel, but at present it is probably at the height of its variety and vitality and, for that matter, its popularity. Its best writers are as skilled, as original, as talented and as intelligent as Greene, Hammett, Chandler and others who contributed to the hey-day of the thriller in the thirties and forties. When we look back in twenty years time it will be with nostalgic pleasure at the hey-day of the sf story and the only thing which will puzzle us is how people distinguished a 'new' wave from an 'old' wave.

Again, readers will find stories in this volume which, from our present narrow perspective, will seem to fall into these peculiar sub-categories. We believe that all the stories are enjoyable in their own terms: several, like the Bayley or the Pollack, are rich satirical allegories incorporating certain ideas and attitudes carried over from more conventional science fiction and owing, too, something to William Burroughs; several, like the Woodrow or the Sellings, are in fact conventional sf. It might be significant to point out here that both Richard Pollack, an American, and William Woodrow, an Englishman, are writers whose first published stories appear here. It will be our policy in future to publish the work of at least one new writer in every issue of NEW WORLDS. And we are still keen to hear your comments. Your letters and your manuscripts will reach us the fastest if they are sent to our British address: c/o SPHERE BOOKS, 30-32 Gray's Inn Road, London W.C.1

Michael Moorcock



MONKEY AND PRU AND SAL

by Keith Roberts

To Monkey, the movement of the sun across the sky always seemed essentially a sideways matter. It was this innate feeling – a thing of the blood rather than the intellect – that helped him in his first uncertain attempts at map reading. For years, the maps he owned had been meaningless to him. He would draw them from the wooden pocket in which they were kept, steadying himself against the lurching movements of Truck, and fold and unfold them, admiring the rich light blue of their edges, the patches of green and brown overlaid with delicate networks of marks and lines. And he would blink and frown, grappling with something more nebulous than memory.

The sea gave him his first real clue; the great blue presence of it, looming and dazzling between the shoulders of watching hills. How Truck, in its erratic career, came to be within sight of the water will never be known; but Monkey

crowed with delight, extending blackish, sticky fingers to the brightness. Then he fell wholly quiet.

He remained quiet for a day, a night and part of another day. All that time, Truck veered and rattled along within sight of the vastness. Then a dead tree, sprawling grotesquely across the road, caused Pru and Sal to swerve aside. They fled, backs humped, from the clutching, bleached branches; and Monkey lay frowning, thoughtfully oblivious, sucking at his fingers. In time, he began to doze. He dreamed of formless shapes that hovered aggravatingly just beyond reach. When he opened his eyes again, Truck was passing along a narrow sunken lane. Walls of reddish-brown rock jerked past on either side, hung here and there with the translucent green leaves of ferns. Above, the foliage of over-arching trees shone golden in sunlight.

Monkey, still bemused, lay seeing the green and brown and blue; and suddenly it was as if a great idea, already formed somewhere in his brain, pushed itself forward into consciousness. He stopped his thumbsucking, drew out once more the precious, grubby sheets; and the truth burst on him. He bawled his loudest, bringing Truck to a precipitate halt, sat up crowing and dribbling, a map clutched destructively in one great fist. He waved his arms, startling Pru and Sal from their immemorial indifference; and Truck turned, jerkily obedient, under control at last.

Monkey, his mind buzzing with new ideas, stopped Truck when the blueness was once more in sight. He sat a long time frowning, screwing his eyes against the miles-long dazzle; then finally, unsurely, he waved to the right. Though 'right' at that time was a concept beyond his grasp; rather, he turned his destiny five-fingerward. To his left, or three-fingerward, lay the water; in his hand, still tightly and juicily gripped, was the map. His intention was as irrevocable as it was strange. He would follow, or cause Truck to follow, the edge of the sea.

Through the day, and on into the night, Pru and Sal kept up a steady pace. For a time, Monkey lay restless; finally their steady pounding soothed him to sleep. Dawn light roused him, streaming over the high canvas flap of Truck. He sat up, mind instantly full of his great design. The spyholes of Truck, ahead and to either side, afforded too narrow a field of view. He stood precariously to his full height,

hands gripping the edge of Truck's bleached hood; and crowed once more, with wonder and delight, at what he saw.

He was parked on the crest of a great sweep of downland. Ahead the road stretched away, its surface cracked and broken, bristling with weeds. Across it lay the angular shadow of Truck, topped by the small protruberance that was Monkey's head. Beyond, and far into the distance, the land seemed to swell, ridge after ridge pausing and gathering itself to swoop saw-edged to the vagueness of the sea. Below him, a great distance away, Monkey saw the curving line of an immense offshore beach. Waves creamed and rushed against it; above it were hovering scraps of birds, each as white as the foam. The noise of the water came to him dimly, like the breathing of a giant.

He collapsed abruptly, huddled back to the darkness and protective warmth of Truck. Later, gaining courage, he traced with one finger the little green line that was an image of the mightiness. He sat proudly then, chin on fist, the master of all he surveyed.

At midday the great beach still stretched ahead. Behind the long ridge of pebbles, lagoons lay ruffled and as blue as the sky, dotted with the bobbing pinpoints of birds. The lagoons too Monkey traced on the map, and hugged himself with an incommunicable excitement.

His good mood was tempered in the days that followed. Always, relentlessly, he urged Truck on toward the sunset; always, at dawn, he stared anxiously ahead expecting to see the narrowing of the land, the blue glint of sea five-fingerward. But the land went on endlessly, leaping and rolling; and his faith was sorely tested. To Monkey, the notion of scale was as yet as hard to grasp as the notion of God. He became aware, for the first time, of the frustration of helplessness. His thought, lightning-swift, outran the stolid jogging of Pru and Sal. Sometimes he urged his companions on with high, cracked shouts; but they ignored him, keeping up their one stubborn pace.

It was a dull, drizzling morning when Monkey reached the end of the world. The sea, grey as the sky, was fretted with long white ridges; a droning wind blew from it, driving spray like hail against the impervious hood of Truck. Monkey, woken from a grumbling doze, sat up blearily,

crawled to the forward spyhole and yelped with triumph. The land on which Truck stood ran, narrowing at last, into the ocean; the water had swung round five-fingerward, barring further progress. Monkey crowed and howled, bobbing till Truck shook on its tall springs; for after all, the great idea was true. He had understood a Mystery.

North, or headwards, was a concept already relegated to the state of things known. Headwards Truck turned, then five-fingered toward the sun and three-fingerward again. During his first great journey the notion of contour had also come to Monkey; he studied his maps, fitting each painstakingly to the next, and in the depth of winter was undismayed to see, rising ahead, the outlines of hills greater and more terrible than any he had known. Pru and Sal stopped at the sight, clucking and stamping in alarm; but he made no further move to urge them forward. For a time Truck wandered as it had always wandered, aimlessly; and Monkey was content. Snow came, and the long howling of the wind. In time the snow passed. The sky grew blue again, buds showed green against the stark twigs of trees. Then the maps were once more produced; and once more, Truck went a-voyaging.

In this way Monkey came to understand the land in which he lived. The concept of 'island', though suggested by the maps, was more difficult to grasp. The many sheets, placed edge to edge, alarmed with their suggestion of headward immensity. At first, Monkey's brain tended to spin; with time, he grew more assured. He kept tallies of his journeys now, scratching the days carefully on the greasy wooden sides of Truck. Soon he found his head could tell him, nearly without thought, the time of travel between any two points on his maps. Also the maps themselves grew other marks, made by Monkey with the yellow drawing-stick that was his greatest treasure. He sketched where wild wheat grew, and where the land was good for hunting; and Pru and Sal, though they betrayed no outward gratitude, became sleek and well-filled. The larder of Truck was stocked to capacity; and Monkey, as is the way with men, looked about him for fresh worlds to conquer.

The adventure on which he decided almost proved his undoing. He turned Truck headwards, or north, resolved to travel as far as possible in this as yet unexplored direc-

tion; though he no longer harboured illusions as to the magnitude of the journey. Pru and Sal clopped steadily, day after day, indifferent as ever; and day after day Monkey squatted on his little rubbery heels, staring through the forward spyhole in breathless expectation of wonders. The tally lines grew again, wobbling across the dark wooden sides of Truck; hills appeared obediently to either hand, each in its allotted place. Monkey knew them now at a glance, reading their brown thumbprints on his maps. For a time, all went smoothly enough; then difficulties started to rise.

The first had to do with certain areas on the maps where the roads ran together in ever-thickening jumbles: Monkey steered for one of these, curious to see what such oddness could portend; but a whole day from his destination Pru and Sal stopped abruptly, stamping and shivering, giving vent to little hard anxiety-cries. Monkey, irritated, urged them forward; but his howls and bangings went unheeded. Pru and Sal danced with distress, shaking their heads and snorting; then, abruptly, they bolted. Truck, turned willy-nilly, jolted and crashed while Monkey clung on grimly, rolling from side to side in a confusion of legs and arms and maps. Dusk was falling before the wild flight eased; the tallies were ruined, and Monkey himself was lost.

He lay a day or more in a dull stupor of rage before he again took heart. As ever, the sidewaysness of the sun encouraged him; he spread the maps out once more, while Truck ambled slowly between rolling, gently-wooded hills. In time a higher hill, rearing dark against the sunset, gave him a reference. His good humour returned; for Pru and Sal jogged submissively, and the tallies were not wholly lost. The sideways or three-fingerward projection to which he had been subjected during their flight counted for little; he marked the map, using his drawing-stick, and turned Truck again onto its proper heading.

Twice more, the odd confluences were avoided by Pru and Sal; these times Monkey, prepared for their defection, found it easier to redirect their course. Whatever lay at the mysterious junctures must, it seemed, be avoided; for the present, he bowed to the inevitable.

For five more days the journey proceeded smoothly; then came the greatest shock of all. Far too soon – barely a half

of the tally was complete – Monkey found the way impassably barred. Ahead, and to either side, stretched the sea.

The shock to his overstrained nerves was considerable. For a time, stupidly, he urged Truck forward, as if refusing to acknowledge the impossibility; the water was hissing round the axles, and Pru and Sal were keening with dismay, before he came to his senses. He sat a whole half day, glaring and fretting, staring at the map and back to the great blue barrier. Then he turned Truck three-fingerward. Two days passed before the sea once more swung round to bar his path; the proper sea this time, in its designated place. Monkey turned back, every hour adding to his alarm. The green and brown, green and brown of the map went on; yet still the lying, deceitful land shelved to the water, vanished beneath the waves. The tally grew again, senseless now and wild. Monkey howled and sobbed, picking his nose with rage; but the salty goodies brought no comfort. He threshed impotently, till the springs of Truck groaned and creaked and Pru and Sal stooped clucking, voices harsh with concern. But Monkey was inconsolable. His bright new world was shattered.

He felt himself losing control. His hands and limbs, wobbly at the best, refused to obey him. His nights were haunted; he wetted himself uncontrollably, till Truck exuded a rich sharp stink and half a whole map was spoiled. Madness, had it intervened, would have been a merciful release; but he was saved, finally, by a curious sight.

For a day or more the ground had been steadily rising; now, just after dawn, Monkey saw ahead of him the crest of a mighty cliff. The land, no longer gentle, broke away in a great crashing tumble of boulders and clay round which the sea frothed and seethed, flinging streamers of foam high in the air. Monkey, huddling back, waved Truck on, anxious to be gone from the place; but at the height of the rise he began to thump and squeal. Pru and Sal stopped indifferently, their hair whipping round their heads, their curved hard fingers hooked across the handle of Truck. The wind seethed in the grass; clouds sailed the early, intense sky; but Monkey had eyes for nothing but the Road.

It had been a great road, the widest and finest he had seen. It came lancing out of distance, its twin broad ribbons dark

blue and cracked and proud. It soared to the edge of the cliff; and at the edge, on the very lip, it stopped.

Monkey raised himself, cautiously; then banged the side of Truck, ordering it forward. Pru and Sal moved slowly, unwilling now, straining back from the lip of the cliff; but Monkey's fear was forgotten. He stared, seeing how the road ended terrifyingly in a sudden, jagged edge. Below, white birds rode the updraught, tiny as scraps of paper. The sea crashed and boiled; and Monkey, screwing his eyes, saw what in his misery had eluded him. Far across the water, dim with distance but unmistakable, the brown and green, brown and green started again, marching out of sight.

He fell back; and relief was like a balm. Once more, he had understood; and the second Mystery was stranger than the first. The land had been changed after the maps were made.

The maps lived to the right of Truck, in their shallow compartment. Each part of Truck, each fragment of the tiny inner space, was apportioned with equal care. To Monkey's left was the area designated, in later times at least, Garage Accessories. The Accessories themselves didn't amount to much. There was a sleekly polished red oil can; beside it, tucked in tightly to prevent unpleasing rattles, the piece of rag with which Monkey furbished the metal, keeping it bright. Next to the oil can lived a tin of thick brown grease, with which Monkey anointed the axles of Truck whenever the elements conspired to draw from them high-pitched, irritating squeaks. Other Accessories were even less prepossessing. There was the galvanised nail with which Monkey prised up the lid of the tin (seconded lately for the important function of journey-marking) a small rusty spanner which fitted nothing about Truck but which Monkey kept anyhow, and an even more curious fetish; a little yellow wheel, made of some substance that flexed slightly in the fingers and was pleasant to hold and suck. Like the spanner, it served no discernible function; but Monkey was equally loth to throw it away. "You can never tell," he would bawl sometimes at the unresponding heads of Pru and Sal, "when it might Come In."

At Monkey's feet a locker closed by a rusty metal hasp constituted the Larder. Here he kept the flat grey wheat-cakes that sustained him, and his bottles and jars of brook

water. Other chunks of rag, stuffed carefully into the spaces between the containers, checked the clinking that would otherwise have spoiled his rest. Next to Larder, a corner compartment was crammed with spare rag, blankets and a blackened lace pillowslip. It also housed a broken piece of mirror, carefully wrapped and tucked away. Once, Monkey had gashed himself badly on its edge; now it was never used.

To either side of his head as he lay were the Tool Chest and the Library. The Tool Chest contained an auger, a small pointed saw, three empty cardboard tubes and a drum of stout green twine. The Library was full to overflowing, so full its lid could scarcely be forced down. Sometimes Monkey would take the topmost books out, lie idly turning the pages, marvelling at the endless repetition of delicate black marks. The marks meant nothing to him; but the books had always been there, and so were accepted and respected. Like Truck, they were a part of his life.

Between its several compartments Truck was fretted by a variety of holes, all seemingly inherent to the structure. The spyholes, covered when not in use by sliding flaps of leather, afforded Monkey sideways and frontal vision. Beneath him, concealed by a hinged wooden trap, was the Potty Hole; to either side smaller apertures, or Crumb Holes, enabled him occasionally to clean the littered interior of Truck. He would spend an hour or more carefully scraping together the mess of wheatcake crumbs, twigs and blanket fluff, pushing the fragments one by one through the holes. The activity had enlivened many a grey, otherwise unedifying afternoon; it cheered him, giving him a sense of purpose.

Pru and Sal formed the other major components of Monkey's mobile world. How they had come to him, or he to them, he was unsure. Certainly there had been a time – he remembered it now and then in vague, dreamlike snatches – when there had been no Pru and Sal. And also, he was nearly certain, no Truck. He remembered firelight and warmth, and lying on a bed not enclosed by tall wooden sides. He remembered hands that touched, a voice that crooned and cried. Also he remembered a bleak time of wailing and distress. The figures loomed around him, dim and massive as trees; there were other deeper voices, harder hands. One such pair of hands, surely, had placed him for

the first time inside Truck. He remembered words, though they made little sense.

"Lie there, Monkey. You're with me now. Poor bloody little Monkey. You're with me . . ."

He didn't like the dream to come too often. It woke him alone in Truck, miserable and cold, crying for the hands and voices that had gone.

Maybe Pru and Sal had stolen him, as he lay supine in his bright new Truck. No-one else would ever know; and they, perhaps, no longer remembered or cared. They too had become a part of his life. Always, as he lay brooding or contentedly dozing, their shoulders and heads were visible, outlined darkly against the sky. Their brown thin hands were clamped, eternally it seemed, round the wide handle of Truck; their feet thumped and pattered down the years.

In appearance, Pru and Sal were not unlike. Their hair, long, frayed and bleached by the sun, hung stiffly from their small rounded skulls. Their skin, tanned by the outside wind, had assumed the colour of old well-seasoned wood. Their eyes were small, slitlike and blank; their faces, untroubled by thought, ageless and smooth. Their fingers, over the years, had grown curved and stiff; good for killing, useless for the more delicate manipulations at which Monkey excelled. They dressed alike, in thick kilts of an indeterminate hue; and their voices, when they troubled to use them, were also alike, as harsh and croaking as the voices of birds.

For Monkey, secure in his endlessly-roving home, the seasons passed pleasantly enough. Pru and Sal, in their motiveless fashion, tended him well. On rainy days, and in the dark cold time of winter, they drew across the open hood of Truck a tall flap of stiff grey canvas. Then Monkey would crawl invisibly in the warm dark, sucking and chuckling, groping among the crumbs of Larder, tinkling his jars of ice-cold chill, while the feet of Pru and Sal thudded out their comfort on paths and roads unseen. These, perhaps, were the best times of all; when snow whirled dark against the leaden strip of sky, and ice beaded the high wood of Truck and wolves called lost and dim. Sometimes the snow flakes whirled right into Truck, tiny unmelting stars from outer air; and fires would leap, in clearings and unknown caves. In the mornings Pru and Sal must smash and crash

at the ice of brooks while the wind whistled thin in thin dead grass.

Though springtimes too were good. The breeze stirred gentle and mild, rich with new scents; the sky brightened, filling with the songs of birds. Pru and Sal, clucking and mumbling, would draw back the canvas cover, allowing the cheesey air to whistle cheerfully from Truck; and Monkey would sit up, chuckling, feeling the new warmth on his great blotched hairless face. Summers he would lie naked, rubbing pleasure from his mounded belly while the warm rain fell, sizzling on his heated flesh. At night the stars hung lustrous and low, and trees were silent mounds of velvet cloth.

But the map reading changed, for all time, Monkey's life. The great adventure ended, it seemed a hollowness formed within his mind. Truly, he was satisfied with his conquered Island; and not unmoved by his discovery of its truncated state. New sights and sounds presented themselves each day; a waterfall, a forest, a mountain, a bird, a lake. But novelty itself can pall. Monkey, mumbling and frowning, hankering for he knew not what, began, irritably, the formal tidying of Truck. Each object he came to – so known, once loved – seemed now merely to increase his frustration. His wheel, his drawing-stick, his spanner lay discarded. The axles of Truck set up an intermittent squeal, but Monkey merely sneered. He tidied Larder and Blanket Store, dipped desultorily into Garage Accessories. Nothing pleased him. Finally, he turned to Library.

Almost at once he discovered a curious thing. The locker was deeper than it had always appeared. The blockage was caused by books that had swelled with damp, jamming their covers firmly against the outer wooden skin of Truck. Monkey puffed and heaved, straining unaccustomed muscles. Finally the hindrances came clear. He emptied the compartment to its bottom, sat back surrounded by books he had never seen. He opened one at random and instantly frowned, feeling a flicker of excitement for the first time in weeks.

The book was unlike the others in one major respect. Monkey huddled nearer the light, crowing and drooling, turning the pages with care. Some were glued irretrievably together by damp; on others he saw, beside the squiggling

marks, certain drawings. They were detailed and complex, many of them in colour; he had no difficulty in recognising flowers and trees. Monkey, who had invented drawing, felt momentarily abashed; but the rise of a new idea soon drove self-awareness from him. He stared from the drawings to the little marks, and back. He tilted his head, first to one side then to the other. He laid the book down, picked it up, opened it again. Later he sat for an hour or more peering over the side of Truck, seeing the stony ground jog and jerk beneath. In time he made himself quite giddy. He closed his eyes, opened his mouth, laid his gums to the hard wood edge. Small shocks from the wheels and springs were transmitted to his skull.

From all this pondering, one idea emerged. He opened the new book once more, studied the flowers and trees. After a while he spread a second beside it. He discerned, now, certain similarities in the little black marks. Some of them, he saw, rose above their fellows, like tall bushes among lesser. Something in his brain said 'head' to that, or 'north.' It was the first key to a brand new Mystery. Illiterate, Monkey had divined which way up one holds the printed page.

For a season, and another, and part of a third, Truck squeaked and rumbled aimlessly while Monkey lay absorbed. The whole equipage might have become irretrievably lost had not the sinews of Pru and Sal remembered what their scorched brains were unable to retain. They followed, faithfully, their course of previous years. They harvested wheat, pounded and husked the grain, baked the flat hard cakes; they hunted rabbits and deer, ate and drank and slept. They came finally to the New Sea again, and the broken road; and there, triumphantly, Monkey added his own gull-cryings to the wheeling birds. The words floated down, vaunting and clear, to lose themselves in the roar and surge of the water.

"Even so our houses and ourselves and children have lost, or do not learn for want of time, the sciences that should become our country . . ."

How the wonder had come about will never be wholly explained. It was an achievement comparable to the first use of fire, the invention of the wheel; but of this Monkey remained unaware. Certainly the concept of a map aided

his first steps to literacy. That the books in his keeping were maps of a curious sort was never in question; though what such charts expressed he was wholly unable to define. He was conscious of an entity, or body of awareness; something that though vastly significant was yet too shadowy for the mind wholly to grasp. He grappled with it nonetheless, while his bones – the bones of genius – divined the inner mysteries of noun, adjective and verb. It was slow work, slow work indeed; ‘tree’ for instance was simple enough, but ‘oak’, ‘ash’ and ‘hawthorn’ baffled him for months. ‘Green tree’ was likewise a concept fraught with difficulty though he mastered it finally, adding to it the red, blue and violet trees of his mind. The noises he made, first fitting breath to cyphers, were less comprehensible than the utterings of Pru and Sal. It was patience that was needed; patience and dogged, endless work.

Truck rolled on, while Monkey bleated and yelped. Seasons, hours, moods, all now brought forth their observation. To Pru, sucking at a scab on her leg, he confided his opinion that ‘lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.’ Sal, seen piddling into a deep green brook, provoked an equally solemn thought. “In such a time as this,” mused Monkey, “it is not meet that every nice offence should bear his comment.” Staring into a leafy sunset reminded him of the lowing herd, while a sight of the sea brought forth memories of Coastwise Lights. “We warn the crawling cargo tanks of Bremen, Leith and Hull,” he expounded gravely. Yet for all his learning he remained centrally baffled; for despite Kipling he saw no ships, despite Shakespeare he met with no great Kings. In the beginning, God might very well have created the heavens and the earth; but God, it seemed, was no longer an active agent. No spirits sat on thistle tops, in flat defiance of Tennyson; and though Keats’ nightingales still sang, indubitably Ruth no longer walked.

Monkey found himself sinking once more into despondency. The books he owned he had read, from cover to cover; yet understanding seemed as far away as ever. Pru and Sal jogged as they had always jogged; the sun rose and set, rain came and wind, mists and snow. The sea creamed and boomed; but Monkey’s mind was as rock-girt as the coasts. Nowhere, in any book, had he come upon a description remotely resembling Truck, or himself, or Pru and

Sal; while all those things on which the books most loved to dwell – armies and Legions, painters and poets, Queens and Kings – seemed lost for ever. “Left not a rack behind,” muttered Monkey balefully. He lay sucking his wheel and brooding. Somewhere it seemed, some great clue had evaded him. The books showed a world unreachable, but sweetly to be desired. As the maps had shown a world, incomprehensible at first, that now lay all about him.

He frowned, wondering. Then for the first time in months he pulled the maps from their compartment. He unfolded them, tracing the confluences of roads, the strange knots he had never been permitted to explore. Their meaning was plain enough now. They were of course towns; their very names lay clear to read. He sat puzzling, and was struck by a wholly new thought. What if all the wonderful things of which he had read – the ships and Kings, the castles and palaces and people – still existed? What if, all this time, they had been waiting for him in the never-visited towns? He lay sleepless well into the night, turning over the brilliant, unsettling idea. Everywhere, glowing prospects opened; and when he finally dozed, he was visited by a splendid dream. He seemed to stand outside himself and outside Truck; and Truck was bowling, unaided, along a great broad highway. To either side, half lost in a golden haze, reared towers and steeples; and everywhere, as Truck moved, there seemed to rise a great and rolling shout. It was as if all the people in the world – the glittering, wondrous people of the books – had come together to greet him; and there were hands and eyes, cheering and laughter, voices and the warmth he had so seldom known.

He sat up, peering from the confines of Truck. Dawn was gray in the sky; overhead, a solitary bird piped. Monkey’s whoop of triumph sent it scuttling from its branch. “Away toward Salisbury!” he cried to the sleeping land. “While we reason here, a Royal battle might be won and lost . . .”

The intention, once formed, was irrevocable; but at first the practical difficulties seemed impossible to overcome. For all their stolid obedience, on one point Pru and Sal stood firm; neither threats nor cajolery would get them near a town. Monkey tried the experiment several times more, always with the same result. As Truck neared each objective they would move slower and slower, keening and wailing in

distress; and finally they would balk completely, or bolt like startled deer. Eventually, Monkey was forced to accept the obvious. Whatever was done must be done by his own efforts.

For several days more he lay frowning, puzzling at the problem. Finally a decision was reached, and he started work.

What he contemplated – a modification to the fabric of Truck itself – seemed at first like sacrilege. He steeled himself, remembering the ships and people and Kings. Eventually he overcame his qualms. Certain measurements, made for the most part secretly after dark, confirmed the practicability of his scheme. He worked carefully with his drawing-stick, scribing two broad circles on the sides of Truck. When the work was marked out, the auger came into play. With it he bored carefully through the planking on the circumference of one of the circles. When half a dozen holes had joined he was able to insert the tip of the little saw. The job was slow and tedious; more difficult, he imagined, than learning to read. His hands, unused to such exercise, grew blisters that cracked and spread, bloodily; he bore the pain, keeping on stubbornly with his task. Finally he was successful. A circle of wood dropped clear; beyond, an inch or so away, revolved the battered, rusty rim of one of Truck's wheels.

He stared awhile, fascinated by the unusual sight; then set to, puffing, on the other side. The second job was finished quicker than the first; the wood here was partly rotten, aiding the saw. The new holes let in a remarkable amount of draught and dampness; but Monkey was content. It was a small enough price to pay.

The next phase of the plan was more difficult still. Wheedling, coaxing, using all his skill, he persuaded Pru and Sal nearer and nearer to the town of his choice. He had selected it mainly for the flatness of the surrounding ground; that he deemed a vital factor in eventual success. The last stage of the approach was most delicate of all. Pru and Sal were stamping and trembling; the slightest mismanagement would have sent them wheeling back the way they had come, and all the valuable ground gained would have been lost. When it was obvious they would go no farther Monkey allowed them to camp, in a spinney adjoining the road. He

lay quietly but with thudding heart, waiting for night and the start of his greatest adventure.

The vigil seemed endless; but finally the light faded from the sky. Another hour and the moon rose, brightening the land again. Very cautiously, Monkey sat up. The springs and axles of Truck, well greased the day before, betrayed him by no creak. He inched forward, a fraction at a time. His height when fully erect was little more than a yard; but his arms were of unnatural length. Squatting in Truck, well forward of the hood, he could easily reach through the new holes he had made, grip the wheel rims with his great scabbed hands.

He pushed, tentatively. To his delight Truck moved a yard or more. Pru and Sal lay still, mouths stertorously open. Another shove, and Truck had glided the whole distance from the little camp site to the road. Monkey, without a backward glance, set himself to steer his clumsy vehicle toward the distant town.

An hour later he was panting and running with sweat, while every muscle in his body seemed on fire. His hands were raw and bleeding again from contact with the rusty rims; he had been obliged to stop, and bind his palms with rag. But progress had been made. Crawling to the spyhole – the rearward spyhole now, for Truck was technically moving in reverse – he saw the copse where Pru and Sal still lay as nothing more than a dim smudge on the horizon. Ahead, close now, lay the focus of his dreams.

By dawn, Truck was bowling merrily if jerkily along a smooth paved road. To either side, dusty and grey, rose the remnants of buildings, their roofs and wall tops bitten and nubbled away. Grass sprouted and bushes, here and there stunted, unhealthy-looking trees. The sight both appalled and fascinated Monkey. He thrust at the wheelrims, harder than before, staring round anxiously for signs of life; but a total hush lay over all the acres on acres of ruin. Apart from the trundling of Truck's wheels, there was no sound; even the wind seemed stilled, and no birds sang.

The sunrise proved Monkey's undoing. His eyes, weak at the best of times, were dazzled by the pouring light; he failed to observe and heed the steepening gradient ahead. Truck moved easily, without apparent effort, steadily increasing its pace. By the time understanding came it was

too late. Monkey wailed despairingly, clutching at the wheel-rims; but the flying iron tore the rags away, ploughed up the skin of his palms in thick white flakes. He shrieked, snatching his hands away; and instantly Truck was out of control. The rumbling of the wheels rose to a roar; Monkey, howling with pain and fright, felt himself banged and slewed before, with a heart-arresting jolt, Truck stopped dead. Monkey was propelled, catapult-fashion, in an arc. The blurred road rose to meet him; there was a crash, and the unexpected return of night.

He woke, blearily, a considerable time later. For a while, understanding was withheld; then realization came, and with it a blind terror. He glared round him wildly. The sun beat down on the hot white road; behind him, seeming a great distance away, Truck was upended in a heap of rubble like a little foundered ship.

The panic got Monkey to his feet. He tottered, wildly, the first three steps of his life, stumbled and fell. He crawled the rest of the way, grazing his knees on the unfriendly surface of the road; but when at last he clutched the tall spokes of a wheel with his lacerated hands, some measure of sanity returned. A wave of giddiness came and passed. Monkey lay panting, staring round him at the awesome desolation.

From his low viewpoint little was visible but the bases of ruined walls. He raised his head, squinting. It seemed taller ruins reared in the distance. He thought he caught the glint of sunlight on high, bleached stone; but his head was spinning again, and with his streaming eyes he could not be sure. He lay still, gathering strength; then, with a great effort, pulled himself to his feet.

Truck seemed to be undamaged, though the crash had mortally disarranged the lockers and their contents. Rags, books and blankets sprawled everywhere inside, mixed and confused with the remnants of Larder. Monkey, scrabbling, managed to retrieve a few scraps of rag, and an unbroken bottle of water. He plumped back, gasping, in the shade. Unscrewing the cap of the bottle hurt his hands again; but the liquid, though lukewarm, restored his senses a little. The rag he bound, as tightly as he was able, round his palms. He rested an hour or more; then, painfully but with dogged determination, he drew himself to his hands and

knees. He began to crawl slowly away from Truck, into the ruined town.

Some hours later, an observer stationed beside the broken road would have witnessed a curious sight. The night was black as pitch, neither moon nor stars visible; but despite the overcast the road was by no means dark. It was lit, in places quite brightly, by a wavering bluish glow that seemed to proceed from the ruined shells of building themselves. By its aid, a small wooden truck was jerking itself slowly along. Its method of propulsion was curious. From a hole at the rear of the vehicle protruded two long, smooth poles. Each in turn, to the accompaniment of grunts and labouring gasps, groped for the cracked surface, found a purchase and heaved. Truck, under the influence of this novel motivation, lurched and veered. Sometimes, as if its occupants were very, very tired, it rested for long periods motionless; but always the upward movement was resumed. In time, the slope eased; and there could have been heard, rising from the ungainly little vehicle, a cracked but triumphant refrain.

"Silent the river, flowing for ever,

"Sing my brothers, yo ho heave ho . . ."

Pru and Sal were waiting beneath the fringe of trees.

For a while, as Truck laboured toward them, they stood poised as if for flight. The hailing of Monkey, and his shouted exhortations, steadied them. His face, blackened and terribly peeling, loomed moon-like above a mound of tattered, browning paper; his arms terminated in dark red balls of rag; but it was Monkey, still indubitably and defiantly Monkey, who greeted them.

They ran to Truck then with hard, gabbling cries, seized their long-accustomed handle and fled. Their feet galumphed, up hill and down dale, away from the sinister, shining town; and as they ran Monkey, his brain burning with strangest visions, regaled them with news of the world.

"Subscribers' dialled trunk calls are recorded at the exchange on the same meters used for local calls," he carolled. "These meters are extremely reliable, *and are regularly tested.*" He flung down the pamphlet, grabbed another. His eyes swam; fierce shooting pains stabbed suddenly through

his head. "How to take care of Your New House," he shouted. "Taps and Ball Valves, Gulleys and Gutters. Paths and Settlement Cracks. . ." Pru and Sal shrieked back; but Monkey's voice boomed triumphantly, overriding them. "What is Shrinkage?" he cried cunningly. "Is an Imperfection a Defect?"

Truck heeled, struck a stone and righted. Monkey leafed at the jizzing papers. "These are your Service Authorities," he intoned. "Rating Authority, Water Supply Authority, Gas Board, Electricity Board!" He snatched up another paper from his hoard. "I never wanted to be a Star," he bellowed. Then, turning two pages at once, "Separates that Add Up in your Wardrobe . . ."

Truck slowed at last, in the sun and shadow of a dappled wood where a grassy road ran between grassy banks.

Monkey wasn't feeling too good any more. He gulped and blinked, fighting the rise of a sudden swelling pain. "Goodbye," he said sadly, "To the Bikini Girl of Nineteen Seventy. Next year will be Cover Up Year . . ." The pain centred itself into an acute epiglottal knot; and Monkey burped. The burp was red and bright, and ran across his chin. He groaned, and brought up his wind again. The second belch was worse than the first. He splashed the wetness with his hands, and started to shriek.

The attention of Pru and Sal was riveted. They stooped, staring and mumbling. Their hands, iron-hard and hooked, scrabbled concernedly; and the cheeks of Monkey fell wholly from his face, lay on the pillows bright as flower petals!

A mask, whether it be of blood or another substance, is a form that depersonalizes. Now, new triggers operated within the curious brains of Pru and Sal. The red thing that writhed and mewed was no longer Monkey, but a stranger that had taken Monkey's place. They seized it at once, shrieking with rage, and hurled it to the ground. Still it cried and wailed, its fear-smell triggering in turn desire to kill. Pru and Sal stamped and leaped, keening, their unused grass-dry bosoms joggling beneath their shifts. In time the sounds stopped, and what was on the path lay still. They gripped then the handles of the empty Truck and fled, backs humping, knees jerking regular as pistons. When they had gone, the lane was quiet.

The day was warm, and still. Flies buzzed, steady and soothing, through the afternoon. Toward dusk a wild creature found, in the path, something to its liking. For a time it chewed and mumbled warily; then leaf shadows, moved by a rising wind, startled it away. It retired to its hole, under the roots of an elderly, spreading oak; there it cleaned its fur, washed its nose and paws, and died.

Clouds piled in the sky, grey-amber in the fading light. Overhead, the leaves of trees glowed pale against the thunderous masses of vapour. The first rainspots fell, heavy and solitary, banging down through the yielding leaves; and the storm broke, with a crashing peal. In time it passed, grumbling, to the east. It left behind it, in the cleansed lane, a great new smell of earth and wet green leaves.

NO DIRECTION HOME

NORMAN SPINRAD

How does it feel
To be on your own?
With no direction home . . .
Like a complete unknown.
Like a rolling stone."

—Bob Dylan, *Like A Rolling Stone*

"But I once *did* succeed in stuffing it all back in Pandora's box," Richarson said, taking another hit. "You remember Pandora Deutchman, don't you. Will? Everybody in the biochemistry department stuffed it all in Pandora's box at one time or another. I seem to vaguely remember one party when you did it yourself."

"Oh you're a real comedian, Dave," Goldberg said, stubbing out his roach and jamming a cork into the glass vial which he had been filling from the petcock at the end of the apparatus' run. "Any day now, I expect you to start slipping strychnine into the goods. That'd be pretty good for a yock, too."

"You know, I never thought of that before. Maybe you got something there. Let a few people go out with a smile, satisfaction guaranteed. Christ Will, we could tell them exactly what it was and still sell some of the stuff."

"That's not funny, man," Goldberg said, handing the vial to Richarson, who carefully snugged it away with the others in the excelsior-packed box. "It's not funny because it's true."

"Hey, you're not getting an attack of morals, are you? Don't move, I'll be right back with some methalin - that oughta get your head straight."

"My head is straight already. Canabinolic acid, our own invention."

"*Canabinolic acid*? Where did you get that, in a drug-store? We haven't bothered with it for three years."

Goldberg placed another empty vial in the rack under the petcock and opened the valve. "Brought it on the street for kicks," he said. "Kids are brewing it in their bathtubs now." He shook his head, almost a random gesture. "Remember what a bitch the original synthesis was?"

"Science marches on!"

"Too bad we couldn't have patented the stuff," Goldberg said as he contemplated the thin stream of clear green liquid entering the open mouth of the glass vial. "We could've retired off the royalties by now."

"If we had the Mafia to collect for us."

"That might be arranged."

"Yeah, well maybe I should look into it," Richardson said as Goldberg handed him another full vial. "We shouldn't be pigs about it, though. Just about ten percent off the top at the manufacturing end. I don't believe in stifling private enterprise."

"No really, Dave," Goldberg said, "maybe we made a mistake in not trying to patent the stuff. People *do* patent combo psychedelics, you know."

"You don't mean *people*, man, you mean outfits like American Marijuana and Psychedelics, Inc. They can afford the lawyers and grease. They can work the FDA's head. We can't."

Goldberg opened the petcock valve. "Yeah, well at least it'll be six months or so before the Dope Industry or anyone else figures out how to synthesize this new crap, and by that time I think I'll have just about licked the decay problem in the cocanol extraction process. We should be one step ahead of the squares for at least another year."

"You know what I think, Will?" Richardson said, patting

the side of the half-filled box of vials. "I think we got a holy mission, is what. I think we're servants of the evolutionary process. Every time we come up with a new psychedelic, we're advancing the evolution of human consciousness. We develop the stuff and make our bread off it for a while, and then the Dope Industry comes up with our synthesis and mass produces it, and then we gotta come up with the next drug out so we can still set our tables in style. If it weren't for the Dope Industry and the way the drug laws are set up, we could stand still and become bloated plutocrats just by putting out the same old dope year after year. This way, we're doing some good in the world, we're doing something to further human evolution."

Goldberg handed him another full vial. "Screw human evolution," he said. "What has human evolution ever done for us?"

"As you know, Dr. Taller, we're having some unforeseen side-effects with eucomorfamine," General Carlyle said, stuffing his favourite Dunhill with rough-cut burley. Taller took out a pack of Golds, extracted a joint, and lit it with a lighter bearing an Air Force rather than a Psychedelics, Inc. insignia. Perhaps this had been a deliberate gesture, perhaps not.

"With a psychedelic as new as eucomorfamine, General," Taller said, "no side-effects can quite be called 'unforeseen'. After all, even Project Groundhog itself is an experiment."

Carlyle lit his pipe and sucked in a mouthful of smoke which was good and carcinogenic; the General believed that a good soldier should cultivate at least one foolhardy minor vice. "No word-games, please, doctor," he said. "Eucomorfamine is supposed to help our men in the Groundhog moonbase deal with the claustrophobic conditions; it is not supposed to promote faggotry in the ranks. The reports I've been getting indicate that the drug is doing both. The Air Force does not want it to do both. Therefore, by definition, eucomorfamine has an undesirable side-effect. Therefore, your contract is up for review."

"General, General, psychedelics are not uniforms, after all. You can't expect us to tailor them to order. You asked for a drug that would combat claustrophobia without impairing alertness or the sleep cycle or attention-span or

initiative. You think this is easy? Eucomorfamine produces claustrophilia without any side-effect but a raising of the level of sexual energy. As such, I consider it one of the minor miracles of psychedelic science."

"That's all very well, Taller, but surely you can see that we simply cannot tolerate violent homosexual behaviour among our men in the moonbase."

Taller smiled, perhaps somewhat fatuously. "But you can't very well tolerate a high rate of claustrophobic breakdown, either," he said. "You have only four obvious alternatives, General Carlyle: continue to use eucomorfamine and accept a certain level of homosexual incidents, discontinue eucomorfamine and accept a very high level of claustrophobic breakdown, or cancel Project Groundhog. Or..."

It dawned upon the General that he had been the object of a rather sophisticated sales pitch. "Or go to a drug that would cancel out the side-effect of eucomorfamine," he said. "Your company just wouldn't happen to have such a drug in the works, would it?"

Dr. Taller gave him a we're-all-men-of-the-world-grin. "Psychedelics, Inc. *has* been working on a sexual suppressant," he admitted none too grudgingly. "Not an easy psychic spec to fill. The problem is that if you actually decrease sexual energy, you tend to get impaired performance in the higher cerebral centres, which is all very well in penal institutions, but hardly acceptable in Project Groundhog's case. The trick is to channel the excess energy elsewhere. We decided that the only viable alternative was to siphon it off into mystical fugue-states. Once we worked it out, the biochemistry became merely a matter of detail. We're about ready to bring the drug we've developed – trade name nadabrin – into the production stage."

The General's pipe had gone out. He did not bother to relight it. Instead, he took 5 mg. of lebemil, which seemed more to the point at the moment. "This nadabrin," he said very deliberately, "it bleeds off the excess sexuality into *what*? Fugue-states? Trances? We certainly don't need a drug that makes our men psychotic."

"Of course not. About three hundred micrograms of nadabrin will give a man a mystical experience that lasts less than four hours. He won't be much good to you during that

time, to be sure, but his sexual energy level will be severely depressed for about a week. Three hundred micrograms to each man on eucomorfamine, say every five days, to be on the safe side."

General Carlyle relit his pipe and ruminated. Things seemed to be looking up. "Sounds pretty good," he finally admitted. "But what about the content of the mystical experiences? Nothing that would impair devotion to duty?"

Taller snubbed out his roach. "I've taken nadabrin myself," he said. "No problems."

"What was it like?"

Taller once again put on his fatuous smile. "That's the best part of nadabrin," he said. "I don't remember what it was like. You don't retain any memories of what happens to you under nadabrin. Genuine fugue-state. So you can be sure the mystical experiences don't have any undesirable content, can't you? Or at any rate, you can be sure that the experience can't impair a man's military performance."

"What the men don't remember can't hurt them, eh"? Carlyle muttered into his pipestem.

"What was that, General"?

"I said I'd recommend that we give it a try."

They sat together in a corner booth back in the smoke, sizing each other up while the crowd in the joint yammered and swirled around them in some other reality, like a Bavarian merrygoround.

"What are you on?" he said, noticing that her hair seemed black and seamless like a beetle's carapace, a dark metal helmet framing her pale face in glory. Wow.

"Peyotadrene," she said, her lips moving like incredibly jeweled and articulated metal flower-petals. "Been up for about three hours. What's your trip?"

"Canabinolic acid," he said, the distortion of his mouth's movement casting his face into an ideogramic pattern which was barely decipherable to her perception as a foreshadowing of energy release. Maybe they would make it.

"I haven't tried any of that stuff for months," she said. "I hardly remember what that reality feels like." Her skin luminesced from within, a translucent white china mask over a yellow candle-flame. She was a magnificent artifact, a creation of jaded and sophisticated gods.

"It feels good," he said, his eyebrows forming a set of curves which, when considered as part of a pattern containing the movement of his lips against his teeth, indicated a clear desire to donate energy to the filling of her void. They *would* make it. "Call me old-fashioned maybe, but I still think canabinolic acid is groovy stuff."

"Do you think you could go on a sex-trip behind it?" she asked. The folds and wrinkles of her ears had been carved with microprecision out of pink ivory.

"Well, I suppose so, in a peculiar kind of way," he said, hunching his shoulders forward in a clear gesture of offering, an alignment with the pattern of her movement through space-time that she could clearly perceive as intersecting her trajectory. "I mean, if you want me to ball you, I think I can make it."

The tiny gold hairs on her face were a microscopic field of wheat shimmering in a shifting summer breeze as she said: "That's the most meaningful thing anyone has said to me in hours."

The convergence of every energy configuration in the entire universe toward complete identity with the standing wave pattern of its maximum ideal structure was brightly mirrored for the world to see in the angle between the curves of his lips as he spoke.

Cardinal McGavin took a peyotadrene-mescamil combo and 5mg. of metadrene an hour and a half before his meeting with Cardinal Rillo; he had decided to try to deal with Rome on a mystical rather than a political level, and that particular prescription made him feel most deeply Christian. And the Good Lord knew that it could become very difficult to feel deeply Christian when dealing with a representative of the Pope.

Cardinal Rillo arrived punctually at three, just as Cardinal McGavin was approaching his mystical peak; the man's punctuality was legend. Cardinal McGavin felt pathos in that: the sadness of a Prince of the Church whose major impact on the souls of his fellows lay in his slavery to the hands of a clock. Because the ascetic-looking old man, with his colourless eyes and pencil-thin lips, was so thoroughly unlovable, Cardinal McGavin found himself cherishing the man for this very existential hopelessness.

He sent forth a silent prayer that he, or if not he then at least someone, might be chosen as an instrument through which this poor cold creature might be granted a measure of Divine Grace.

Cardinal Rillo accepted the amenities with cold formality, and in the same spirit agreed to share some claret. Cardinal McGavin knew better than to offer a joint; Cardinal Rillo had been in the forefront of the opposition which had caused the Pope to delay his inevitable encyclical on marijuana for long ludicrous years. That the Pope had chosen such an emissary in this matter was not a good sign.

Cardinal Rillo sipped at his wine in sour silence for long moments while Cardinal McGavin was nearly overcome with sorrow at the thought of the loneliness of the soul of this man, who could not even break the solemnity of his persona to share some Vatican gossip over a little wine with a fellow Cardinal. Finally, the Papal emissary cleared his throat – a dry, archaic gesture – and got right to the point.

“The Pontiff has instructed me to convey his concern at the addition of psychedelics to the composition of the communion host in the Archdiocese of New York,” he said, the tone of his voice making it perfectly clear that he wished the Holy Father had given him a much less cautious warning to deliver. But if the Pope had learned anything at all from the realities of this schismatic era, it was caution. Especially when dealing with the American hierarchy, whose allegiance to Rome was based on nothing firmer than nostalgia and symbolic convenience. The Pope had been the last to be convinced of his own fallibility, but in the last few years events seemed to have finally brought the new refinement of Divine Truth home.

“I acknowledge and respect the Holy Father’s concern,” Cardinal McGavin said. “I shall pray for divine resolution of his doubt.”

“I didn’t say anything about doubt!” Cardinal Rillo snapped, his lips moving with the crispness of pincers. “How can you impute doubt to the Holy Father?”

Cardinal McGavin’s spirit soared over a momentary spark of anger at the man’s pigheadedness; he tried to give Cardinal Rillo’s soul a portion of peace. “I stand corrected,” he said. “I shall pray for the alleviation of the Holy Father’s concern.”

But Cardinal Rillo was implacable and inconsolable; his face was a membrane of control over a musculature of rage. "You can more easily relieve the Holy Father's concern by removing the peyotadrene from your hosts!" he said.

"Are those the words of the Holy Father?" Cardinal McGavin asked, knowing the answer.

"Those are my words, Cardinal McGavin," Cardinal Rillo said, "and you would do well to heed them. The fate of your immortal soul may be at stake."

A flash of insight, a sudden small satori, rippled through Cardinal McGavin: Rillo was sincere. For him, the question of a chemically-augmented host was not a matter of Church politics, as it probably was to the Pope; it touched on an area of deep religious conviction. Cardinal Rillo was indeed concerned for the state of his soul and it behoved him, both as a Cardinal and as a Catholic, to treat the matter seriously on that level. For after all, chemically-augmented communion was a matter of deep religious conviction for him as well. He and Cardinal Rillo faced each other across a gap of existentially-meaningful theological disagreement.

"Perhaps the fate of yours as well, Cardinal Rillo," he said.

"I didn't come here all the way from Rome to seek spiritual guidance from a man who is skating on the edge of heresy, Cardinal McGavin. I came here to deliver the Holy Father's warning that an encyclical may be issued against your position. Need I remind you that if you disobey such an encyclical, you may be excommunicated?"

"Would you be genuinely sorry to see that happen?" Cardinal McGavin asked, wondering how much of the threat was Rillo's wishful thinking, and how much the instructions of the Pope. "Or would you simply feel that the Church had defended itself properly?"

"Both," Cardinal Rillo said without hesitation.

"I like that answer," Cardinal McGavin said, tossing down the rest of his glass of claret. It was a good answer — sincere on both counts. Cardinal Rillo feared both for the Church and for the soul of the Archbishop of New York, and there was no doubt that he quite properly put the Church first. His sincerity was spiritually refreshing, even

though he was thoroughly wrong all round. "But you see, part of the gift of Grace that comes with a scientifically-sound chemical augmentation of communion is a certainty that no one, not even the Pope, can do anything to cut you off from communion with God. In psychedelic communion, one experiences the love of God directly. It's always just a host away; faith is no longer even necessary."

Cardinal Rillo grew somber. "It is my duty to report that to the Pope," he said. "I trust you realize that."

"Who am I talking to, Cardinal Rillo, you or the Pope?"

"You are talking to the Catholic Church, Cardinal McGavin," Rillo said. "I am an emissary of the Holy Father." Cardinal McGavin felt an instant pang of guilt: his sharpness had caused Cardinal Rillo to imply an untruth out of anger, for surely his Papal mission was far more limited than he had tried to intimate. The Pope was too much of a realist to make the empty threat of excommunication against a Prince of the Church who believed that his power of excommunication was itself meaningless.

But again, a sudden flash of insight illuminated the Cardinal's mind with truth: in the eyes of Cardinal Rillo, in the eyes of an important segment of the Church hierarchy, the threat of excommunication still held real meaning. To accept their position on chemically augmented communion was to accept the notion that the word of the Pope could withdraw a man from Divine Grace. To accept the sanctity and validity of psychedelic communion was to deny the validity of excommunication.

"You know, Cardinal Rillo," he said, "I firmly believe that if I am excommunicated by the Pope, it will threaten my soul not one iota."

"That's merely cheap blasphemy!"

"I'm sorry," Cardinal McGavin said sincerely, "I meant to be neither cheap nor blasphemous. All I was trying to do was explain that excommunication can hardly be meaningful when God through the psychedelic sciences has seen fit to grant us a means of certain direct experience of his countenance. I believe with all my heart that this is true. You believe with all your heart that it is not."

"I believe that what you experience in your psychedelic communion is nothing less than a masterstroke of Satan, Cardinal McGavin. Evil is infinitely subtle; might not it

finally masquerade as the ultimate good? The Devil is not known as the Prince of Liars without reason. I believe that you are serving Satan in what you sincerely believe is the service of God. Is there any way that you can be sure that I am wrong?"

"Can you be sure that *I'm* not right?" Cardinal McGavin said. "If I am, you are attempting to stifle the will of God and wilfully removing yourself from His Grace."

"We cannot both be right . . ." Cardinal Rillo said.

And the burning glare of a terrible and dark mystical insight filled Cardinal McGavin's soul with terror, a harsh illumination of his existential relationship to the Church and to God: they both couldn't be right, but there was no reason why they both couldn't be wrong. Apart from both God and Satan, existed the Void.

Dr. Braden gave Johnny a pat-on-the-head smile and handed him a mango-flavoured lollypop from the supply of goodies in his lower-left desk drawer. Johnny took the lollypop, unwrapped it quickly, popped it into his mouth, leaned back in his chair, and began to suck the sweet avidly, oblivious to the rest of the world. It was a good sign – a preschooler with a proper reaction to a proper basic prescription should focus strongly and completely on the most interesting element in its environment, should be fond of unusual flavours. In the first four years of its life, a child's sensorium should be tuned to accept the widest possible spectrum of sensual stimulation.

Braden turned his attention to the boy's mother, who sat rather nervously on the edge of her chair smoking a joint. "Now, now, Mrs. Lindstrom, there's nothing to worry about," he said. "Johnny has been responding quite normally to his prescription. His attention-span is suitably short for a child of his age, his sensual range slightly exceeds the optimum norm, his sleep pattern is regular and properly deep. And as you requested, he has been given a constant sense of universal love."

"But then why did the school doctor ask me to have his basic prescription changed, Dr. Braden? He said that Johnny's prescription was giving him the wrong personality pattern for a school-age child."

Dr. Braden was rather annoyed though of course he

would never betray it to the nervous young mother. He knew the sort of failed G.P. who usually occupied a school doctor's position; a faded old fool who knew about as much about psychedelic pediatrics as he did about brain surgery. What he did know was worse than nothing – a smattering of half-assed generalities and pure rubbish that was just enough to convince him that he was an expert. Which entitled him to go around frightening the mothers of other people's patients, no doubt.

"I'm . . . ah, certain you misunderstood what the school doctor said, Mrs. Lindstrom," Dr. Braden said. "At least I hope you did, because if you didn't, then the man is mistaken. You see, modern psychedelic pediatrics recognizes that the child needs to have his consciousness focused in different areas at different stages of his development, if he is to grow up to be a healthy, maximized individual. A child of Johnny's age is in a transitional stage. In order to prepare him for schooling, I'll simply have to alter his prescription so as to increase his attention-span, lower his sensory intensity a shade, and increase his interest in abstractions. Then he'll do fine in school, Mrs. Lindstrom."

Dr. Braden gave the young woman a moderately-stern admonishing frown. "You really should have brought Johnny in for a check-up *before* he started school, you know."

Mrs. Lindstrom puffed nervously on her joint while Johnny continued to suck happily on his lollypop. "Well . . . I was sort of afraid to, Dr. Braden," she admitted. "I know it sounds silly, but I was afraid that if you changed his prescription to what the school wanted, you'd stop the paxum. I didn't want that – I think it's more important for Johnny to continue to feel universal love than increasing his attention-span or any of that stuff. You're not going to stop the paxum, are you?"

"Quite the contrary, Mrs. Lindstrom," Dr. Braden said. "I'm going to increase his dose slightly and give him 10mg. of orodalamine daily. He'll submit to the necessary authority of his teachers with a sense of trust and love, rather than out of fear."

For the first time during the visit, Mrs. Lindstrom smiled. "Then it all really is all right, isn't it?" She radiated happiness born of relief.

Dr. Braden smiled back at her, basking in the sudden surge of good vibrations. This was his peak-experience in pediatrics: feeling the genuine gratitude of a worried mother whose fears he had thoroughly relieved. This was what being a doctor was all about. She trusted him. She put the consciousness of her child in his hands, trusting that those hands would not falter or fail. He was proud and grateful to be a psychedelic pediatrician. He was maximizing human happiness.

"Yes, Mrs Lindstrom," he said soothingly, "everything is going to be all right."

In the chair in the corner, Johnny Lindstrom sucked on his lollypop, his face transfigured with boyish bliss.

There were moments when Bill Watney got a soul-deep queasy feeling about psychedelic design, and lately he was getting those bad flashes more and more often. He was glad to have caught Spiegelman alone in the designers' lounge; if anyone could do anything for his head, Lennie was it. "I dunno," he said, washing down 15mg. of lebemil with a stiff shot of bourbon, "I'm really thinking of getting out of this business."

Leonard Spiegelman lit a Gold with his 14-Carat gold lighter – nothing but the best for the best in the business – smiled across the coffee-table at Watney, and said quite genially: "You're out of your mind, Bill."

Watney sat hunched slightly forward in his easy chair, studying Spiegelman, the best artist Psychedelics, Inc. had, and envying the older man. Envyng not only his talent, but his attitude towards his work. Lennie Spiegelman was not only certain that what he was doing was right, he enjoyed every minute of it. Watney wished he could be like Spiegelman. Spiegelman was happy; he radiated the contented aura of a man who really did have everything he wanted.

Spiegelman opened his arms in a gesture that seemed to make the whole designers' lounge his personal property. "We're the world's best pampered artists," he said. "We come up with two or three viable drug designs a year, and we can live like kings. And we're practising the world's ultimate artform: creating realities. We're the luckiest mothers alive! Why would anyone with your talent want out of psychedelic design?"

Watney found it difficult to put into words, which was ridiculous for a psychedelic designer, whose work it was to describe new possibilities in human consciousness well enough for the biochemists to develop psychedelics which would transform his specs into styles of reality. It was humiliating to be at a loss for words in front of Lennie Spiegelman, a man he both envied and admired. "I'm getting bad flashes lately," he finally said. "Deep flashes that go through every style of consciousness that I try, flashes that tell me I should be ashamed and disgusted about what I'm doing."

Oh, oh, Lennie Spiegelman thought, the kid is coming up with his first case of designer's cafard. He's floundering around with that no direction home syndrome and he thinks it's the end of the world. "I know what's bothering you, Bill," he said. "It happens to all of us at one time or another. You feel that designing psychedelic specs is a solipsistic occupation, right? You think there's something morally wrong about designing new styles of consciousness for other people, that we're playing god, that continually altering people's consciousness in ways only we fully understand is a thing that mere mortals have no right to do, like hubris, eh?"

Watney flashed admiration for Spiegelman — his certainty *wasn't* based on a thick ignorance of the existential doubt of their situation. There was hope in that, too. "How can you understand all that, Lennie," he said, "and still dig psychedelic design the way you do?"

"Because it's a load of crap, that's why," Spiegelman said. "Look kid, we're artists, commercial artists at that. We design psychedelics, styles of reality; we don't tell anyone what to think. If people like the realities we design for them, they buy the drugs, and if they don't like our art, they don't. People aren't going to buy food that tastes lousy, music that makes their ears hurt, or drugs that put them in bumper realities. *Somebody* is going to design styles of consciousness for the human race, if not artists like us, then a lot of crummy politicians and power-freaks."

"But what makes us any better than them? Why do we have any more right to play games with the consciousness of the human race than they do?"

The kid is really dense, Spiegelman thought. But then he

smiled, remembering that he had been on the same stupid trip when he was Watney's age. "Because we're artists, and they're not," he said. "We're not out to control people. We get our kicks from carving something beautiful out of the void. All we want to do is enrich people's lives. We're creating new styles of consciousness that we think are improved realities, but we're not shoving them down people's throats. We're just laying out our wares for the public – right doesn't even enter into it. We have a compulsion to practise our art. Right and wrong are arbitrary concepts that vary with the style of consciousness, so how on earth can you talk about the right and wrong of psychedelic design? The only way you can judge is by an esthetic criterion – are we producing good art or bad?"

"Yeah, but doesn't *that* vary with the style of consciousness too? Who can judge in an absolute sense whether your stuff is artistically pleasing or not?"

"Jesus Christ, Bill, *I* can judge, can't I?" Spiegelman said. "I know when a set of psychedelic specs is a successful work of art. It either pleases me or it doesn't."

If finally dawned on Watney that that was precisely what was eating at him. A psychedelic designer altered his own reality with a wide spectrum of drugs and then designed other psychedelics to alter other people's realities. Where was anyone's anchor?

"But don't you see, Lennie?" he said. "We don't know what the hell we're doing. We're taking the human race on an evolutionary trip, but we don't know where we're going. We're flying blind."

Spiegelman took a big drag on his joint. The kid was starting to get to him; he was whining too much. Watney didn't want anything out of line – just certainty! "You want me to tell you there's a way you can know when a design is right or wrong in some absolute evolutionary framework, right?" he said. "Well I'm sorry, Bill, there's nothing but us and the void and whatever we carve out of it. We're our own creations, our realities are our own works of art. We're out here all alone."

Watney was living through one of his flashes of dread, and he saw that Spiegelman's words described its content exactly. "But that's exactly what's eating at me!" he said. "Where in hell is our basic reality?"

"There is no basic reality. I thought they taught that in kindergarten these days."

"But what about the basic state? What about the way our reality was before the art of psychedelic design? What about the consciousness-style that evolved naturally over millions of years? Damn it, that was the basic reality, and we've lost it!"

"The hell it was!" Spiegelman said. "Our pre-psychedelic consciousness evolved on a mindless random basis. What makes that reality superior to any other? Just because it was first? We may be flying blind, but natural evolution was worse – it was an idiot process without an ounce of consciousness behind it."

"Goddamn it, you're right all the way down the line, Lennie!" Watney cried in anguish. "But why do you feel so good about it while I feel so rotten? I want to be able to feel the way you do, but I can't."

"Of course you can, Bill," Spiegelman said. He abstractly remembered that he had felt like Watney years ago, but there was no existential reality behind it. What more could a man want than a random universe that was anything he could make of it and nothing else? Who wouldn't rather have a style of consciousness created by an artist than one that was the result of a lot of stupid evolutionary accidents?

He says it with such certainty, Watney thought. Christ, how I want him to be right! How I'd like to face the uncertainty of it all, the void, with the courage of Lennie Spiegelman! Spiegelman had been in the business for fifteen years; maybe he *had* finally figured it all out.

"I wish I could believe that," Watney said.

Spiegelman smiled, remembering what a solemn jerk he had been ten years ago himself. "Ten years ago, I felt just like you feel now," he said. "But I got my head together and now here I am, fat and happy and digging what I'm doing."

"How, Lennie, for chrissakes, *how*?"

"50 mikes of methalin, 40 mg. of lebemil and 20 mg. of peyotadrene daily," Spiegelman said. "It made a new man out of me, and it'll make a new man out of you."

"How do you feel, man?" Kip said, taking the joint out of his mouth and peering intently into Jonesy's eyes. Jonesy

looked really weird – pale, manic, maybe a little crazed. Kip was starting to feel glad that Jonesy hadn't talked him into taking the trip with him.

"Oh wow," Jonesy croaked, "I feel strange, I feel *really* strange, and it doesn't feel so good . . ."

The sun was high in the cloudless blue sky; a golden fountain of radiant energy filling Kip's being. The wood-and-bark of the tree against which they sat was an organic reality connecting the skin of his back to the bowels of the earth in an unbroken circuit of protoplasmic electricity. He was a flower of his planet, rooted deep in the rich soil, basking in the cosmic nectar of the sunshine.

But behind Jonesy's eyes was some kind of awful grey vortex. Jonesy looked really bad. Jonesy was definitely floating on the edges of a bummer.

"I don't feel good at all," Jonesy said. "Man, you know the ground is covered with all kinds of hard dead things and the grass is filled with mindless insects and the sun is hot, man, I think I'm burning . . ."

"Take it easy, don't freak, you're on a trip, that's all," Kip said from some asshole superior viewpoint. He just didn't understand, he didn't understand how heavy this trip was, what it felt like to have your head raw and naked out here. Like cut off from every energy flow in the universe – a construction of fragile matter, protoplasmic ooze is all, isolated in an energy-vacuum, existing in relationship to nothing but empty void and horrible mindless matter.

"You don't understand, Kip," he said. "This is reality, the way it really is, and man it's horrible, just a great big ugly machine made up of lots of other machines, you're a machine, I'm a machine, it's all mechanical clockwork. We're just lumps of dead matter run by machinery, kept alive by chemical and electric processes."

Golden sunlight soaked through Kip's skin and turned the core of his being into a miniature stellar phoenix. The wind, through random blades of grass, made love to the bare soles of his feet. What was all this machinery crap? What the hell was Jonesy gibbering about? Man, who would want to put himself in a bummer reality like that?

"You're just on a bummer, Jonesy," he said. "Take it easy. You're not seeing the universe the way it really is, as

if that meant anything. Reality is all in your head. You're just freaking out behind nothing."

"That's it, that's exactly it, I'm freaking out behind nothing. Like zero. Like cipher. Like the void. Nothing is where we're *really* at."

How could he explain it? That reality was really just a lot of empty vacuum that went on to infinity in space and time. The perfect nothingness had minor contaminations of dead matter here and there. A little of this matter had fallen together through a complex series of random accidents to contaminate the universal deadness with trace elements of life, protoplasmic slime, biochemical clockwork. Some of this clockwork was complicated enough to generate thought, consciousness. And that was all there ever was or would ever be anywhere in space and time. Clockwork mechanisms rapidly running down in the cold black void. Everything that wasn't dead matter already would end up that way sooner or later.

"This is the way it really is," Jonesy said. "People used to live in this bumner all the time. It's the way it is, and nothing we can do can change it."

"I can change it," Kip said, taking his pillbox out of a pocket. "Just say the word. Let me know when you've had enough and I'll bring you out of it. Lebemil, peyotedrene, mescamil, you name it."

"You don't understand, man, it's *real*. That's the trip I'm on, I haven't taken anything at all for twelve hours, remember? It's the natural state, it's reality itself, and man, it's awful. It's a horrible bumner. Christ, why did I have to talk myself into this? I don't want to see the universe this way, who needs it?"

Kip was starting to get pissed off – Jonesy was becoming a real bring-down. Why did he have to pick a beautiful day like this to take his stupid nothing trip?

"Then *take* something already," he said, offering Jonesy the pillbox.

Shakily, Jonesy scooped out a cap of peyotedrene and a 15 mg. tab of lebemil and wolfed them down dry. "How did people *live* before psychedelics?" he said. "How could they stand it?"

"Who knows?" Kip said, closing his eyes and staring

straight at the sun, diffusing his consciousness into the universe of golden orange light encompassed by his eyelids. "Maybe they had some way of not thinking about it."

THE MEEK

WILLIAM WOODROW

It would have been my last assignment in any case, regardless of what happened. For me it was a sentimental journey (a ritual one could have said, if that word has not been expunged from the official vocabulary of the Atlantic Republic; it has overtones (the President said) of anachronistic religiosity). For everyone else it was simply Assignment 33/2058/ant., to discover exploitable and possibly habitable territory where the pollution level was below ASP5. That the prospect should cover the same ground as the First Crossing of Antarctica in its centenary year occurred to no-one — was remembered by no-one; except me. That sentimental streak of mine has always hindered my advancement in the Service. I am 35, retirement is six lunar cycles away and I have reached the rank of guild sergeant — a standard one normally advances from at 15 or so. But who wants a poetic officer? What service would (voluntarily) employ a colleague with a conscience; an ecologist who sees beauty in the sunrise, sadness in the falling of leaves; and has bad dreams.

I was there. I saw all that happened as it happened. I added my observations to those of my colleagues. Yet the official report differs from my own. That is to be expected. Official reports deal with facts, eschew sense impressions that are not backed by CCDP techniques — that is Consolidated Computer Data Processing — and, generally speaking, tidy up the rather ragged and sometimes incoherent utterances of unpromoted guild sergeants with consciences. I talk a lot; nobody listens. I read too, old books, real books, books that I ache to share. But nobody wants to know. Somebody might sometimes, somewhere, be just curious to know not the facts but the impressions, the impact, the “poetry that is the pity” so to speak. So here it

is: my commentary, my observations, my on-the-spot diary notes directly transcribed.

With the co-operation of the Pacific Alliance States we established an HQ on the site of the old Polar Research Centre at the Pole itself. From there several missions set out, each one having four personnel; engineer, land technologist, geomorphologist and ecologist. Other specialists remained at base but were on call by each party at need. Our prospect ran towards the Beardmore glacier.

Who can imagine the desolation of that landscape? The furrowed and fretted ice, the wind that burns, the vast monotony that is Antarctica. I'm at it again; rhapsodizing – denigrating rather – the inanimate. I have been told too often that landscape is raw material; the potential energy of the Universe which only Man can realize and harness and bring to fulfillment. Only Man; mere Man who, so one of the species said centuries ago, “struts and frets his weary hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more.”

Sometimes the ice appears to smoke and fume. We are hemmed in by blizzard and swirling snow. Nothing can be done. Just for the record, Pearson checks bearings, takes radar scans and amends the route plan; Naylor strips down the solar-cell motors and tunes the pressure drive units; McLaren takes ice and snow samples, checks the pollution level and measures the radiation emissions. I appear to be supernumerary. What can an ecologist do in a landscape devoid of life? Data is radioed back to HQ and collated there. Otherwise Pearson, Naylor and McLaren chew tranquillizer gum and sit. I sit. Sometimes I have bad dreams.

One wonders. Pearson, Naylor and McLaren (duties done) tranquillized, remote, withdrawn; are they happy? One cannot ask since happiness (the word, not the concept) is no longer viable. We are all happy (the President said) so how can one ask? It's like asking “Are you alive?”

We made a move today, after the stores ship came. The blizzard held off long enough for us to move right up to the glacier's foot. This is base for all of us, Pearson, Naylor, McLaren and me, until the assignment is complete – or HQ calls us in.

Some kind of meteorological tension is building up. Storms, electric storms that set the instruments whirling, range over the glacier. High above us tower great masses of

cloud, like steam rising, and always the wind that tears at the cloud mass and disperses it as fast as it forms. Radio communication with HQ is tenuous and spasmodic. Pearson got through today and checked in with control. All other mission teams satisfactory. Storms seem limited to the glacier region.

And the storm goes on. We, buried now in drift, are caught up, held, isolated from HQ, self-sufficient for the time being, in a rhythm that has imposed some kind of extrasensory order on our lives. Naylor has been performing some complicated business with the generators. We are now drawing our energy from the storm itself. We are harnessing, in a way I cannot follow, the actual kinetic energy of the lightning. All instruments have been switched onto automatic-record. We have all lapsed into semi-sentience. Pearson, Naylor and McLaren chew tranquillizer gum and sit. I sit. I have bad dreams.

Once I woke (but had I even slept? – day and night no longer mean anything) and heard: really heard, not imagined; heard the leitmotiv of the Flying Dutchman. Apt. I remembered switching on my portable recorder with one of the tapes I'd brought along as personal luggage. I listened. It was the overture, then silence.

Naylor is shaking me awake, pointing, talking, incoherent. Pearson and McLaren, bleared and unshaven mutter together. There is a persistent rattle like teeth chattering; but not teeth. The instruments, still on automatic, are all live. Something of Naylor's urgency comes through. The geiger counter is registering a high degree of radiation. Naylor says: "I'm telling you, idiot, I'm telling you. It's radio-active snow." Pearson is saying over and over: "They've done it! They've done it at last! The bastards, they've dropped it at last!" Saying, not talking, not communicating: uttering and making articulate the pent-in fears of generations of forebears.

McLaren, steadier now, the sediment of tranquillizer gum still in his system, is trying to radio to HQ. No good, the interference level is still too high.

Me; still hearing faintly the "Dutchman" theme, inwardly hearing (the recorder is turned off), what of me? I look at my watch, a mechanical and meaningless act, and read 0815 hrs; the date square shows Aug. 6. Coincidence?

Coincidence is immeasurable and therefore invalid (the President said – inadmissible evidence). The shadow of Cain that fell then as the rain falls, indiscriminately; has it fallen once again? Words all about me: Naylor's reiterations and exhortations to action, Pearson's mouthings, McLaren, more lucid than the other two but just as futile; all words that act as descant to those other words (detritus of a thousand words) that whirl me to wakefulness.

"Blessed are the peacemakers – I'm telling you, you idiot – what a piece of work is man – the bastards, the bastards! – where is the way the light dwelleth? – . . . calling HQ – . . . active snow – hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow? Or hast thou seen the treasures of the hail, . . . are you receiving me, do you read me, over – which I have reserved against the time of trouble, – the bastards. They've dropped it – the waters are hid as with a stone, and the face of the deep is frozen."

"I'm telling you! Radioactive snow."

"They've done it!"

"Are you receiving me? Do you read? Over."

And faintly, we all heard but faintly, "HQ to Alpha 10. HQ to Alpha 10. Yes we read you. Over."

Gently, almost soothingly, HQ's stilted and formal voice brought us back to normal. Information was passed and instructions were issued. Yes, HQ was stormbound. No, "they" had not dropped it. The intense radioactivity seemed to be a localized phenomenon centred at the foot of the Beardmore glacier. We were almost at the focus. Finally; yes we were O.K. The safety level of our screening device was nowhere near the "red." Yes, we could safely proceed even to focus "itself" without endangering the electronic contents of our capsule. Incidentally, we (Pearson, Naylor, McLaren and me) would be safe too.

We had difficulty in surfacing. Not on account of the radiation, the screening took care of that. The capsule works on a hovercraft principle by compressed air. It was the desiccation plant that delayed us. Unless the air is wholly dry it will freeze in these latitudes and choke the vents. Naylor, with McLaren to help, spent an hour stripping down the drying chamber and replacing the pump. We surfaced through twenty feet of drift into the ubiquitous whiteness of the snowscape. Surface and sky, it was all the

same now without even sunlight to cast shadow and throw the unevenness into relief.

Perhaps a kilometre away (perhaps more, distances are difficult to calculate without some scale of visible values) where the snout of the glacier should be, something had happened. Great clouds of steam were rising, billowing upwards, condensing constantly and falling again, not as snow but as fine hail. The geiger-counter chattered. It was this hail, not the snow that blew cross-wise from the pole, that was active. We radioed HQ. No, the seismograph was not registering excessive tremors. A slight increase in "ground noise" with a few subsidiary ripples but nothing more. We reported the steam cloud and the radio-active hail. We described the billowing cloud but neither we nor they voiced the relief we felt as we referred to the amorphous mass of steam; being careful not to say that it had no recognizable shape, let alone say that it was not mushroom-shaped. Instructions now; orders to get across there and see. HQ to stand-by. Out.

We set off cautiously, not in direct line but upwind, leaving the geyser (it was Pearson who first used the name and it gave us all a psychological relief to repeat so normal a term) to port. Two kilometres to windward we pivoted and began the run in. The geyser (no more, surely, than that) was line-ahead. We ran up an incline, slight at first but steepening, and halted on the lip of a crater just where the melt-water outflow would have been in temperate climates. The crater brimmed with water, dark, turbulent and steaming; the steam column starting about a metre from the surface. That was all. The radiation level was high but no danger, still, to us inside the capsule.

Teamwork began. We measured and photographed. By remote control we took the surface temperature of the water and found it a uniform 44° C. We took samples and retreated a kilometre to report and rest.

Instructions from HQ. Stand by for supporting capsule with Team A. Do nothing. Rest. I liked the "supporting capsule" touch; subtle. Team A are the big boys, the scientists, beside whom we mortals of the technician class are about as significant as laboratory animals, and just as expendable. We rested. We all chewed tranquillizer gum and slept. I had no dreams.

Team A came and conferred. Four of us, two Team A men (they do not appear to have names – just call me Sir), McLaren and me, will put on radiation suits and go out on power-skis to inspect the lip zone of the crater. Already after 24 hours, the turbulence had subsided. There was a mere whisp of vapour and the hail was reduced to a slight but persistent smattering. We made our ways across the surface towards the crater.

I cannot say what I expected to see, (I cannot speak for McLaren and the Sirs), and it doesn't much matter. If I had seen bug-eyed monsters crawling from a space-ship submerged there in the crater I might not have been more surprised. On the lip of the crater, on the ice itself, growing there, was a narrow ring of green fronds, like massive bryophytes or (more accurately as it turned out) aerial mycelia of giant fungi. And that was all, except for blobs of jelly, dark-centred; nucleated like huge frog spawn. Into this jelly – and this is important – into this jelly, not out of it, delicate and transparent hyphae grew from the tangled mass of vegetation already established. I was an ecologist. This was my business, but one of the Sirs was an ecologist too, and he took command. I was despatched to the capsule for some radiation screened specimen tubes and he took samples which returned with him directly to HQ. Again we held a watching brief.

As we suspected, (as I had determined provisionally from observations in situ) the vegetation was some form of fungus hitherto unknown. The jelly (protein, but structurally new according to HQ biochemists) was the substrate on which the fungus fed. One other important discovery was that the green pigment was not chlorophyll; the growth was parasitic and could not photosynthensize. This fact more than taxonomic data convinced HQ that the growth was a fungus and not a moss. So that we should have some basis for communication we provisionally named the new species *Penicillium superbus antarcticus*; PSA for short.

Back at HQ our whole lives centred about PSA. Every kind of biologist we could muster did all that he could with it. What was beyond the scope of our apparatus was left for Central Laboratories to accomplish from samples dispatched in screened and refrigerated containers.

Since we, the crew of Alpha 10, (that is Pearson, Naylor,

McLaren and me) were in a sense the discoverers of PSA we were the crew chosen to return to the crater – after a lapse of three days—for further supplies. Confident to a man, blase even, we set off. We never reached the crater. We didn't need to. In those three days the growth had spread out radially, so far as we could see, and the edge of the "field" was now almost a kilometre from the crater. Furthermore, the radiation level had dropped so low that we could almost have survived without screening.

These two fragments of data turned the scale for a mission that had been debated by Team A almost since our return to HQ. It was, to mount over the crater the standing tackle for a Munchausen Descent Sphere (a sophisticated variety of deep water diving chamber) and make a descent into the crater itself. Pearson and Naylor, who had once done a tour of duty over the Blake Deep off Puerto Rico, would crew the sphere.

Crossing the fungus field was like crossing heather moorland. The fungus had the same crispness, the same resilience underfoot. Most of the apparatus, including the heavy winching gear and cable, was conveyed by transport helicopters. The working party – wary still of radiation and possible side effects from the fungus itself – went by capsule hovercraft. That night we slept again in Alpha 10. No tranquillizer gum. O dreams; O destinations!

On Aug. 13 at 0815 hrs Pearson and Naylor began the descent. It must have taken several days to complete but time became confused and my diary shows one continuous entry. For hours on end the great winch slowly turned and turning slowly let down the capsule, on its 3000 metres of cable, first into the great cylinder in the ice-gap then into the earth itself. 500 metres, 800; 900 metres then Naylor's voice tugged at us from the tele-screen: "Hey! Did you see that? That jellyfish?"

The screen showed dark rock, mineral speckled and igneous. Then suddenly nothing. The light shone outward but the walls had gone. Naylor's voice: "There again. Now!"

Faintly, refracting light and not reflecting it, we saw; a mass of the frogspawnlike jelly that had littered the snowscape around the crater. The substrate of the fungi.

1000 metres, 1500. More jelly now, progressively more until the capsule was coated with it, enfolded in it. 1750 metres. Then sound transmission failed and we were left with an intermittent and smoky-looking picture on the vision monitor.

Pearson and Naylor, moving sluggishly, seemed to be arguing then, as the picture clouded even more, began to fight. The picture failed totally, permanently.

"HQ Control to Base Alpha 10. Prepare the ascent. Over."

A change of gear, of pace, of rhythm. The winch began winding in. No contact now although the tele-link was still live. All that showed was smoky-green darkness shot over with a blizzard of light flashes. As the capsule came within 20 metres of surface we heard again, tentatively at first then with growing insistence and regularity, the chatter of the geiger. The capsule was coming up active.

I was there when it surfaced. McLaren and I went in with the rescue team, screened and shrouded; into the communicating valve of the conditioning chamber. The capsule was embedded deep in jelly so that it looked like the nucleus of some vast amoeba or (as McLaren put it) like giant frogspawn.

From the opening of the pressure-door it took six hours to get them out. The capsule was entirely filled with the aerial mycelia of the fungi whose sustenance-seeking hyphae were bedded deep in all that remained of Pearson and Naylor. Just then, for the first time in days, the sun came out; wan and distant; right on the horizon. In that unaccustomed gleam their bodies looked like nothing more than great blobs of jelly, like giant frogspawn.

McLaren went today. As I write (back alone inside Alpha 10) I can see a faint green fuzz on my forearm and hand. The light fades, my eyeballs prickle and weep. I have one pack of tranquillizer gum and I chew. I sit. Maybe I'll have bad dreams.

the CAUSEWAY

M. JOHN HARRISON

"Nobody has been here for a hundred years. Why should you take an interest?"

Crome didn't know. He had been bored with travel and almost frightened by the immense distance of his home.

"You can get sick of stars," he said.

"We can't be helped, you know. You should go back where you came." She swept an arm vaguely across an arc of sky, attributing to him several unlikely points of origin. The Heavy Stars: surely she didn't think he came from there. Firelit, her face was beautiful, strange.

"People have tried. We don't want you here. Don't you see we are ashamed?"

He got up, planning to turn his back on her abruptly, evince some powerful emotion, shock her.

"The migration begins tomorrow," she said.

He sighed, walked away a few paces.

"You should leave before then," she called after him calmly.

He thought it might be some kind of adolescent pose, evidence of uncertainty. He looked back at her thin, appealing form behind the fire: her robe was tinted orange by the dying flames, and a heat shimmer distorted her. He shrugged.

"I'm going to take you away from here whether you want to go or not," he said. "This entire planet is a madhouse."

There were things he didn't quite understand, but even after a week of her evasions, he was sure she had no husband.

A little after dawn the next morning, lured by the continuing enigma of the causeway, Crome flew his queer machine over to the coast.

It was a hundred-kilometer trip, and the landscape was as quietly resigned as its inhabitants. Low hills, worn drumlins, coarse grass and bracken, the odd thorn or bullace bent by the prevailing wind: it was tired and passive, sparsely populated, and prone to slow, drizzling rains. He found it vastly irritating.

The causeway, he had discovered as he made his final braking run some weeks before. Its apparent length had impressed him immediately, but he had been too occupied with his instruments to give it attention. Since then he had come to believe it crossed some thousands of kilometers of ocean, linking two large continents. But he preferred to leave that simply as a possibility, and he had never flown its length.

The villagers could not be persuaded to talk about it. He knew they hadn't built it.

Settling the machine above the tideline, he gazed blankly through a porthole; tapped his fingers for a moment, three against four. These visits were an indulgence: not that he had any reason to feel guilty.

It was a shingle beach, a vista of grey ovoid pebbles stretching to the uneasy sea. The wind blew his hair into his face, the pebbles scraped and shifted beneath his feet. Black gulls were squabbling over the terminal massif of the causeway; circling, mewling, dipping down to the access-ramp hidden among the dunes; furious quanta of energy in a static panorama.

He began as always by trying to make some sense out of the immense age of the structure, poking desultorily about where the great uneven granite blocks grew out of the bed-rock of the shore. Far back in the gaps between the stones were traces of old, crude mortar. The thing reared a hundred feet above him, its shadow cold. He was overpowered by Time, and soon grew tired.

He prised some small crustaceans away from the green, slimy surface beneath the high-water line, but later threw them into the water.

He wandered through the dunes to the access-ramp and found that the gulls had been mobbing a larger bird. Its white feathers were bloody and disordered, its meter-and-a-half span of wing limp and ineffectual. He wondered why it had not escaped by flying. He thought once that it moved – saw himself washing it in the sea, taking it back to the village as a present for the girl – but it was quite dead.

Up on top, the wind seemed to pluck harder at his clothes, and if he looked down suddenly, he tended to lose his balance.

The road itself had a much smoother surface than the rest of the structure, a completed look. He stood at the exact spot where the ramp became horizontal, and stared down the long grey perspective.

I am standing at the very beginning, he thought. Right here.

The road had a slightly convex surface and no walls. There were cracks, but he could ignore them, particularly in the middle-distance, where they vanished in the haze. The causeway was enormous beneath his feet, but as it moved out across the sea it dwindled to a thread, a tenuous link with the barely perceptible horizon.

The sea was choppy.

He saw something that made him hurry back down the ramp.

Seaward of the shingle where he had grounded the machine, the retreating tide had exposed a strip of sand. Along it, from the south, meandered a line of footprints, dark and haphazard against the glistening surface. They were already losing definition as the waterlogged sand sank back into a plane.

An old, hunched figure was making its way hesitantly over the pebbles. There was nothing male or female about its long dirty coat, or the way the wind plucked at it. It stopped every so often to stoop awkwardly, grub about, and put something in a wicker basket beneath its arm. Reaching Crome's machine, it halted abruptly; took a pace back, peering.

After a moment, it set the basket down, spat, and shook its fist irritably at the obstruction.

Crome's boots thudded on the access-ramp – each foot-

fall exploding along his bones – and sprayed grey sand as he entered the dunes, his arms cartwheeling.

“Oy!” he shouted.

He looked down and saw that he was going to tread on the dead bird. He tried to change direction in mid-stride: fell heavily and rolled down the side of the dune, marram whipping his face. When he had picked himself up, he found that the figure with the basket had gone, and left no foot-prints in the shingle. He crushed several small, active dune-bugs that had got into his clothing.

He lifted the machine on its chemical engines, trawled north and south along the beach, and made four or five passes over the causeway environs. Nothing was moving there but the marram and the mad, speedy gulls, so he flew back to the village to clarify what the girl had told him the night before. Below him, the land was lost, diffused by drizzle, a watercolour applied too wet.

He closed the portholes.

The village was empty. A few sheep huddled in an irregular field and panicked when he landed. A discarded length of unbleached cloth looped down one street in the wind; in another, a cat stalked something he couldn't quite see. Hunched into his clothes against the rain, he quartered the place, carrying a small, powered megaphone.

“Halloo!” he shouted. There was no answers, and the buildings hardly echoed.

The villagers were defined here, in the absence of tension between village and landscape. The single storey barns and cottages were comfortably weathered, their edges blurred by accumulations of moss and lichen. Crome shivered, wishing for a less vernacular architecture, a severity of line that might provide a reply to the organic dreariness of the landscape, if not a defence against it.

The cat had vanished.

All the dwellings were carefully shut up, neat and deserted, dim and chilly inside. He entered every other one – knocking loudly on each door before he opened it – and found nothing more to do than fiddle with domestic implements or poke through chests of clean, abandoned linen. In the girl's home, there was no message for him.

Soot stirred and rustled in the chimney as he examined

some of her personal garments. He put his megaphone down by a wooden cruet that stood on the scrubbed table and compared them as expressions of purpose.

Along the ledge above the fireplace marched a curious little procession of clay figures, crudely painted in bright colours.

Where have they all gone? he thought. He felt offended to discover she had been telling the truth about that.

The cat reappeared as he left, rubbing itself briefly against his leg. It purred as he walked away, and slipped into her house without looking after him. "You're too late." Rain dripped steadily into stone sinks outside each cottage, soft water for washing the healthy, peasant hair of women.

During the latter part of the morning, he discovered that the migration was general: drifting in and out of low cloud cover, he watched the moorland villages emptying themselves smoothly on to the major road of the province via a loose network of unsurfaced lanes. After two or three hours a caravan several kilometers long had formed beneath him, a long blind animal moving very slowly toward the sea.

In the afternoon, seeking a familiar analogue for the abandoned villages, he set up a microfilm projector and ran archive footage of DRB111B, the Refugee Cluster.

While the girl and her fellow-villagers remained a separate unit, he hovered above them; but by twilight the caravan had absorbed them, and he was forced down. A fine rain hissed across the heath on an easterly wind, beading the dull shell of his machine like condensation on a black grape. Migrants streamed past him as he stood shivering by the road.

Their faces were empty and similar, their gait uniform; they were dressed in coarse wool; some of them carried small bundles. They rarely spoke among themselves, and affected not to notice him at all. (Originally he had parked the machine in the centre of the road ahead of them, hoping to focus attention on his arrival: but they had simply split into two columns and flowed past on either side, scattering silently when he throttled up and lifted off again.) It was a dull pilgrimage. The children that gazed incuriously at him or the machine would look away as soon as he smiled. A dull pilgrimage, he thought.

Three quarters of the caravan passed.

"Here I am!" he shouted.

Her expression was calm and contained, in repose despite a frame of damp, stringy hair: it recalled vividly the tired, bucolic fatalism of the older villagers. She raised her arm briefly to wipe rain from the hollows of her cheeks; ignored him. She was entirely involved with walking. Her robe clung wetly to the small of her back, like the paint on a cheap madonna.

A village boy was walking at her left side, a big, graceless adolescent wearing bulky agricultural sabots. The nape of his neck was red and soft. He kept reaching back there with blunt fingers, to scratch at an incipient boil.

Crome hurried along and fell into step on her right. He caught her arm.

"It's me."

"Please go away. I told you we can't be—"

"All right," he admitted, "I'm not interested in the rest of them. Why on earth are you going off with them like this?"

"It's just something we do."

"Here," said the boy suddenly, craning his neck to peer at Crome. "Why don't you pee off? You can see she doesn't want to listen to that stuff." His lips were thick and strong. Curly yellow hairs sprouted in clumps from his chin and cheekbones.

"Look—" Crome tugged at the girl's sleeve "—leave this stupid procession. It's all right for these people." He indicated the boy.

She shook his hand away. "No."

"You heard her," said the boy, "bugger off." He touched her shoulder possessively. He pointed a belligerent finger at Crome, showed his teeth. "We don't want you here. She doesn't want you, either. Sorry."

"Christ!" shouted Crome. "Who is this? What is he to you?" he waved his arms.

Tonelessly, she said, "This is Gabriel."

The boy blushed and grinned stupidly. "Yes." He licked his lips. "And don't hurry back," he told Crome.

"You said nothing about this to me. Why haven't I seen him before? Oh, for God's sake stop fooling about. Come on." He had lost patience with her. "He's a village idiot!"

Gabriel worked his lips around and spat. He stepped agilely round to Crome's side of the girl, dusting his hands. "Do you want it willing, or not?" he hissed. He clutched at Crome's clothing and dragged him bodily out of the column. "It makes no bloody difference to me, then."

The migrants behind milled about. One of them stumbled over Crome's feet. They closed the gap and walked, hardly looking at him.

Out on the peat-moss he tore himself loose. The wind cut at him. The boy came very close. "How do you want it? Well then?" He grinned. Ropes of spittle linked his upper and lower incisors. His face was pink and healthy. He rolled up his sleeves, flexed his knees, and tested his footing on the moss.

"I'm not sure what you mean," said Crome.

"You wet little sod."

Gabriel drew one foot back and lashed out. It was so quick: the heavy wooden sabot hit Crome just below the knee. His leg gave way abruptly as the blow shuddered along his bones. He yelled involuntarily and fell forward into the moss. He squirmed and looked up. The boy was grinning at him. "Want any more? I've hurt strong men with these clogs." He laughed.

Crome let his head settle back. Brackish water squeezed out of the moss ran into his mouth. His shin wasn't broken, but the whole leg was trembling violently. He had wet himself. He knew the girl was standing over him, too.

"I watched you for a week," he said. "You had nobody in the village."

"He's been away."

Gabriel came between them. "You quite sure you don't want any more of that?" And, when Crome had looked away ritually, shaking his head (full of fear but thinking, You arrogant bastard): "Fair enough then."

He nodded equably and took the girl's arm.

Crome rubbed his bad leg, stood up. He let them move off a little way in the direction of the procession, then followed, limping. His light boots made very little noise on the moss. He locked both his hands together and swung them into the nape of the boy's red neck. Then he stumbled the half-kilometer to his queer vehicle, looking back through the

rain and the gathering dark to watch humiliated as the girl knelt over her collapsed youth.

The migrants were still walking, unpoliced and orderly; impassive. All through the night, they registered on his detectors: the populations of outlying villages, coming on late but steady behind the main body.

He kept track of the caravan, although by now he was quite certain of its destination. The obsessive plodding of the villagers moved him to a mixture of fury and elation; an emotion which, paradoxically, affected him most when they stopped.

At noon, he would fly low over their heads as they lit their cooking fires, putting the machine through hesitation rolls and daring outside loops; when he went transonic they fell down like curious little wooden dolls, hands clamped over their ears. After nightfall, he hovered beneath the cloudbase injecting powdered cerium into his exhaust venturi and firing off red parachute flares.

But he grew bored as they came within striking distance of the coast. On the third day since his discovery of the abandoned village, he returned to the causeway.

Down where the tide slapped the granite, spindrift rose in fast spectral arcs; up over the access ramp the gulls spun and sideslipped furiously, shedding feathers: but the causeway buttresses and the immense roadway absorbed all that – they glistened, they hummed faintly with accumulated Time.

Recalling his last experience on the shore, Crome resumed his search for the old beachcomber, scouring the sand for footprints. He found nothing.

He decided on stealth, he hid behind a buttress.

He caught the sod throwing stones at his machine.

“Stop that!” he shouted, as the vehicle’s hull rang sullenly.

Coat flapping and cracking wildly in the wind, the beachcomber ignored him. Gnarled, liver-spotted hands scrabbled energetically in the shingle. Crome left his cover, came closer, and the previous sexual ambivalence of the figure resolved: it was a man, with chin-whiskers and a rheumy eye.

“Come off it!” Crome yelled. “I want you!”

The old man twitched. He looked challengingly at Crome, and threw another stone, the billowing coat lending his motions a mad energy. He cackled and turned to escape. His basket lay on the shingle: he tried to pick it up on the move, stumbled, and fell down in a vile storm of rags and flailing limbs. He looked up at Crome, panting.

"You wouldn't hurt an old man?"

Crome helped him up.

"I just wanted to ask you some things."

"Oh, ah." His teeth were brown and sticky. His hands ran over him like tired piebald crabs, picking at his thighs and crotch. He bent down, clutched his basket firmly to his chest. He eyed Crome slyly. "You wouldn't *steal* from an old man?"

"No. Look, you must have lived here for years. What do you know about the causeway?"

He squinted. "Eh? Oh, that. I know all about that, all right."

He plucked at Crome's sleeve, drew him close and whispered: "You come a long way, then?" he chuckled. "Oh, I could tell you some tales about *that*. Pee your pants." He wiped his nose on the back of his hand. "Ah."

"Yes?" said Crome.

"What? Now you look here at this, for instance—" He offered Crome his basket. "You're an honest lad. Take a look at this."

It was full of white pebbles. They were uniformly ovoid and smooth. They averaged six or seven centimetres long. Wet sand adhered to some of them.

"These here," he said, "is eggs."

He seemed to notice Crome's machine again.

He grimaced and spat at it. He shook both fists. When Crome stepped forward to prevent him from picking up another stone, a vacant, silly look of fear crossed his face. He dropped the basket and ran off, reaching the nearest dune without looking back. He scrambled up it with amazing agility.

"Bloody eggs!" he shouted, and vanished.

Crome stirred some of the spilt pebbles with his foot. He looked bitterly round at the inert landscape. He went back to the machine and modified some equipment.

Up on the causeway.

During the evening, the wind had risen and cleared the cloud cover, revealing odd configurations of stars. One moon came up, hazed faintly by wisps of fast-travelling cirro-stratus. The tide rose and bit the shingle. The wind gave the darkness a sense of motion, but the causeway was heavy, inorganic. Moonlit, the cracks in the causeway made a strange communicative web. Crome, standing on the access ramp, felt that given time he might have understood.

Behind him, a mechanical voice was counting out seconds.

At *sixty* the causeway groaned and shuddered.

Two kilometers ahead, the road lifted itself into a one-in-one gradient, bent like a neck, and flew apart. Bits of masonry floated upward, silhouetted against an inverted cone of white light. Crome threw his tools into the sea. The wave-front of the explosion rocked him. Smoke and dust streamed past like weed in a shallow river.

He shook his head.

In the moment before the demolition charge fired he had imagined he could see along the whole, immense length of the causeway to the opposing shore; as if he had the power to overcome horizons.

He lifted off into the turbulence above the area of collapse. The machine yawed, spun slowly: dirty steam shrouded it as the sea boiled through a thirty-metre gap in the ancient masonry.

He turned his back and ran inland at Mach 2, trailing more concussions.

That night he further limited the options of the column, visiting the moorland with plastic explosives and improvised detonators. He mined key roads and bridges until just before dawn, working in the fitful red glare of the erupting villages.

In the dark hinterland there was nothing wholly human. Crome found a six-kilometer animal nosing hesitantly at the dunes, directed by some uncomfortable instinct to find a way through. Its head broke suddenly into a hundred component parts as it felt about for the route buried in the shifting sands. It changed shape uneasily; impatient; hurt by internal goads.

By the time he had settled the machine on the shingle the road had been rediscovered: with a curious gritty rustling of feet, the main body of the column was spilling on to the access-ramp of the causeway. Faces disturbed him, passing in the pre-dawn chill. The children were alien, tired. He suspected that the column had been moving all night.

The wind hissed in the marram. A faint band of viridian light appeared above the eastern horizon. It struck wickedly off the line of a jaw, the side of a neck, limned the causeway buttresses like dawn in an underworld.

It was still too dark to see well. Crome waited for the girl. He mistook other women for her; stopped them; found himself staring horrified into unknown peasant eyes. They were strong, they pulled away from him without a word. Growing frightened of them, he clambered up the side of a tall dune to wait out the inevitable confusion and retreat. He decided to approach the girl with his final offer somewhere on the return journey.

The sky paled. High chains of cloud broke free of the horizon and came on purposefully, reflecting magenta and burnt orange. Seabirds began dogfighting above the causeway, wailing as they shot the blackened gap left by Crome's bomb.

The column hesitated. It compacted itself into a third of its original length. Crome sniggered. Along the submerged dune road came a few infirm stragglers, murmuring dully. They wedged themselves on to the access-ramp, pushing against the motionless backs of the main body. Their legs attempted walking motions. Some of them collapsed.

Two kilometers out, the leaders of the caravan faced a heavy sea. They moved their heads bemusedly from side to side, squinting at the mad black gulls.

"Why aren't you migrating?" called Crome derisively.

He raced down to the machine and found his little electric megaphone.

"Why aren't you?" he boomed. He laughed.

He was floundering back up the face of the dune for a better look when the first of the villagers stepped calmly off the lip of the cavity and fell into the water; and by the time he had reached the top the column was moving again, faster and faster.

VISIONS OF HELL

AN ASSESSMENT OF WYNDHAM
LEWIS'S "HUMAN AGE" TRILOGY

J.G.BALLARD

Hell is out of fashion – institutional hells at any rate. The populated infernos of the twentieth century are more private affairs, the gaps between the bars are the sutures of one's own skull. Sartre's is other people – a lesbian, a coward and a neurotic trapped together in a hotel room and bored beyond death by their own identity. Cocteau's is the nether-world of narcissism, Orpheus snared by the images of his own mirror. Burroughs's hells are more public, their entrances are subway stations and amusement arcades, but made nonetheless from private phobias, like the Night-town of Leopold Bloom and Faust's witches' night. A valid hell is one from which there is a possibility of redemption, even if this is never achieved, the dungeons of an architecture of grace whose spires point to some kind of heaven. The institutional hells of the present century are reached with one-way tickets, marked Nagasaki and Buchenwald, worlds of terminal horror even more final than the grave.

By comparison Wyndham Lewis's hell in *The Human Age* is a more conventional affair, perhaps not so deterministic as the Inferno of Dante but schematised all the same. Layered like a department store, the presiding bureaucracy of demons and supernal gauleiters would satisfy the most narrow-minded fundamentalist. A magisterial Bailiff, like a sinister Punchinello, presides over the emigré rabble of

the dead waiting for admission to purgatory. This, called Third City, looks like Barcelona, with tree-lined avenues crammed with cafés. Now and then supernatural booms knock everyone to the ground as archangels the size of skyscrapers move across the sky. An amiable Padishah rules this chaotic outpost of heaven like a sultanate ("social life centres on the palace"). Hell itself is a cross between Birmingham and Dieppe, governed by the Lord Sammael, a droll Lucifer who sounds like a saturnine account executive cutting a swathe through a typing pool.

Summarised like this, Lewis's Hell is hell. But even on the page his annealed prose and painter's eye are unable to save this vision of the judgment and resurrection of mankind from becoming little more than a bizarre pantomime. Put on by the Third Programme ten years ago with tremendous style and panache, and with a virtuoso performance by Donald Wolfit as the Bailiff, the trilogy came over superbly as black theological cabaret. The narrative, however, asks to be taken more seriously, and here the failure is one not only of imagination but of sympathy. The black centre at Lewis's heart casts a pall over his panorama of the after-life.

'Is this Heaven?' Pullman at last blankly inquired of the air. . . . Thousands of people overflowed the café terraces. As they began to pass the lines of tables nearest the road, faces came into view. They were the faces of nonentities; this humanity was alarmingly sub-normal, all pig-eye or owlish vacuity. Was this a population of idiots – astonishingly well-dressed?

Needless to say, this was not Heaven. Unfortunately for the author, it is not hell or purgatory either. This malevolent and inaccurate vision of mankind is merely the fantasy of a solitary misanthrope out of touch with his times. A leader of the *avant-garde* before the first World War and founder of the review *Blast*, Lewis's aggressiveness and talent for polemics served him well enough in the last round of the attack on the already routed bourgeoisie. Painter, writer and propagandist, after the war he launched Vorticism, a more cerebral version of cubism, and then turned his

withering eye on the prominent writers of the twenties, Hemingway ('the dumb ox'), and Joyce, who comes up for special attention in *The Childermass*. Although his criticism is written with tremendous élan, a boiling irritability and impatience with fools, Lewis's reputation began to slide, particularly as his right-wing views seemed to reveal a more than sneaking sympathy for Hitler and the Nazis. *The Childermass* had been published in 1928, and a quarter of a century later he brought out the next two volumes of *The Human Age*—*Monstre Gai* and *Malign Fiesta*. When he died in 1961, blind and ignored, he was working on the notes for its projected successor, *The Divine Age*, in which the principal characters would ascend to paradise and there conclude their journey through the after-life.

The Childermass

The inner eye of the blind painter, warped by his own bile and malign humour, illuminates a landscape beyond time, space and death. Already cut off by temperament from the mood of his age, he inhabits a private purgatory or, rather, sits with the other journeymen to the grave on the nominal ground outside the walls of limbo, waiting to begin his descent into hell.

The city lies in a plain, ornamented with mountains. These appear as a fringe of crystals to the heavenly north. One minute bronze cone has a black plume of smoke. Beyond the oasis plain is the desert. Two miles across . . . the emigrant mass is collected within sight of the walls of the magnetic city. To the accompaniment of innumerable lowing horns along the banks of the river, a chorus of mournful messages, the day breaks.

Sand-devils perform on the borders of the plain, the air murmurs and thunders by the outposts of Beelzebub, in this supernatural light flares burst from the sand. There is a whiff of plague. At the ferry-station by the river a seedy-looking man in a shabby suit looks out with a speculative eye at the magnetic city, wondering how he can gain admission. The powers of this world after death seem in no hurry to set him on his way.

This sense of the constant need for choice and decision dominates Lewis's vision of hell. Unlike its obvious parallel, Dante's *Inferno*, Lewis's netherworld is a place of shifting identities and loyalties, where the characters' progress towards their ultimate trying-ground is achieved by their capacities for self-assertion, intrigue and manoeuvre. Like a party of tourists stranded outside the gates of a chaotic and perhaps hostile desert city, they have to bluff and barter their way through its guards towards whatever dubious comforts lie beyond.

The Childermass opens with the arrival of Pullman and Sattersthaite at the refugee camp. Both have died in middle age during the first World War, but are incarnated here in their most typical guise. Pullman, a former schoolmaster, a man of sharp but pedantic intelligence, is now a young man of about thirty. Satters, his onetime fag, appears as a babyish adolescent in rugby cap and fair isle jumper. The indulgent relationship between this pink-lipped juvenile and the aloof intellectual, whose mind is as barbed and impatient as his author's, is carried forward through the entire trilogy, sustained by bonds that are by no means evident to the reader. How far much of the high camp that mars *The Childermass* was originally satiric in intention is difficult to decide.

Taking stock of themselves, Pullman and his companion begin to explore the margins of this supernatural plain. At the refugee camp everything is uncertain. There is no formal administration, no system of processing by which the waiting emigré throng can gain entrance to the city. It is not even known whether the magnetic city, from which they are excluded by the high walls and river, is heaven or hell. Rival sects have formed themselves around the leaders of different philosophic schools, and spend their time vilifying each other and haranguing the mob. All that Pullman and Satters are sure of is that they themselves are dead, and that part of their fate, if no more, lies in the hands of the unpredictable minor demons who form the casual bureaucracy of the camp.

Principal among these is the Bailiff, to whom Pullman, with his sharp eye for self-preservation, is soon drawn. Loathed and abused by the disputing philosophical sects, the Bailiff is the presiding eminence of *The Childermass* and

Monstre Gai, and, to give Lewis his due, one of the most bizarre characters of fiction, who holds his own with Falstaff, Bloom and Quasimodo. Grotesque in appearance, but with a mind of great learning and cultivation, he arrives at the camp at the head of a procession of demons and janissaries, and there holds court for the ostensible purpose of selecting entrants to the city. In fact, his authority here seems doubtful, and despite the powers of restraint and mutilation which he now and then exercises, is continually challenged by his opponents among the emigrés.

As Pullman soon realises, behind his façade as a capricious buffoon, and the endless metaphysical and theological discourses to which he treats his audience, the Bailiff's real rôle is to remind his listeners exactly who they are and how pathetic and vulnerable their condition, both in this life and their previous one, how meaningless and precarious their tenancy of time and space. Wheedling, raucous, vicious and cajoling by turn, a fund of low vaudeville humour and academic witticisms, the Bailiff rouses his audience to a pitch of fury. Pullman alone, realising that this sinister but powerful figure is his one hope of escaping from the internecine feuding and sterile self-immersion of the camp, decides to accept the Bailiff on his own terms. At the first opportunity, outside the gates of the city, he attracts the Bailiff's attention and by his ingratiating manner gains admission to the city for Satters and himself.

Monstre Gai and Malign Fiesta

It is here, at the opening of *Monstre Gai*, that *The Human Age* loses its way. Pullman's willingness to accept the logic of whatever situation in which he finds himself leads him to join the Bailiff's faction. Whether or not this enigmatic pasha is the Devil he can only guess, but the question is of less interest to Pullman than the need for his own advancement. In due course, an unsuccessful putsch against the palace régime is scotched when the powers of heaven send in their forces to bolster the puppet régime of the Padishah. Pullman and the Bailiff flee from Third City. In *Malign Fiesta* they arrive in hell, where Pullman deserts the Bailiff, in disfavour and exiled to the suburbs like an unsuccessful foreign revolutionary forced to return to his homeland. He

now attaches himself to the entourage of the Lord Samael. This time a more ambitious plot against heaven is abruptly forestalled, and the agents of God carry Pullman away to whatever judgment awaits in Paradise—exile, one would guess, to the supernal equivalent of Elba or Mauritius.

The strange amalgam of Ruritanian intrigue, political thriller and Old Testament demonology is often entertaining, but fails to consider the most elementary questions of morality or even of character. Pullman's failure is not a moral one but that of a minor political opportunist who has backed the wrong horse. Pullman feels no remorse, but merely a passing regret, with which he has already come to terms, for his errors of judgment.

However, apart from his deficiencies of character, Pullman is a wholly passive creature of circumstance. Unlike a torture chamber, a hell is made by its inmates, not its jailers. Sartre's Roquentin, in *La Nausée*, surrounded by festering furniture and cobblestones; Scobie in *The Heart of the Matter*, obsessed by his failure of compassion for his wife, God and fellow men; the legion of unknown sub-normal mothers struggling with their overtoppling children—these people inhabit hells of their own devising, whose racks are despair, self-disgust and self-hate. The case-histories of Freud and modern psychiatry give us a different insight into the origins of our infernos, nightmares as ghastly as the polymorphic horrors of Dali and Ernst, and very different methods for expiating our sense of sin. The hells that face us now are more abstract, the very dimensions of time and space, the phenomenology of the universe, the fact of our own consciousness.

Fifth Person Singular

PETER TATE

Spirsh'ak hovered in the octopath and tried to read a meaning into the day.

From his station in the outermost catwalk of the eight that spanned the canal, he could see purple grasslands spread liberally with butterflowers. Stately orange birds tacked and veered like Raleg's stunt squadrons across the water. The populace that would not stand still for him grumbled like overstuffed bees and the ready-mix air held a tension that confused a beginning man of 17.

The youth let the canal carry his gaze to its bend above the weir and then lifted his eyes to the storm-clouds coming in over the outriders hamlets.

A day that irritates the nostrils like mustard, he thought. I like it and I don't like it. I fear it.

Pregnant.

The word came a second ahead of the reasoning. For that second, he pondered. Then . . .

Clouds made mysterious by a sun's concealment hung with fat underbellies, ready to give birth to a strangeling something. But what?

Spirsh'ak swore at his own complexity and tried to ignore the question. Its very inessence, its reliance on one disembodied word annoyed him. He reasoned diffusely that if there were to be any genesis, it could be within himself.

He turned his attention to the birds and looked on them as birds, swimming because it was natural to them. Flowers growing in fields because where else could they grow? Customs painstakingly reproduced.

There were occasions of late when he wondered, in the midst of a Progress, whether he really belonged to any century or place, or whether he was destined to be one of the timeless people, striding across the aeons, filling his folding-file with stars.

What do I care, he liked to tell himself, for the hour of the day or the position of the feet. I am here. I am alive. I am my own creation.

It was the maturely simple philosophy, the return to basic considerations, that gave him a glimpse of his imminent full stature. An original conclusion that had no Galactic primer for a pillow. The thoughts were coming more and more often these days and he revelled quietly in the power they gave him.

But now with prospect of tempest, the precocity train broke. He had nothing to chase away the childhood fear that was part celestial folklore, part product of an education that was too much involved with the thinkers and the mystics and not enough with the technological and the weightily informative.

The clouds had moved no closer and thunder beat no distant tympan. There was perspiration along the developing hairs of his upper lip; and his brow, between tumbling auburn hair and hazel eyes; felt moist.

He ran a sleeve across his face and felt no better for it.

To Ahn, the movement was an ending to his deep-brown study. She had watched the auburn head – a rare, beautiful mutation – up all the canalside.

She was a woman of 25 summers, with hair the careful colour of harvest wheat and a skin kept wisely free of cosmetal. Her dress, too, was simple – a modest, functional coverage of the body.

Her family was Virtuist by classification. But her own trait was rebellious. Her father, Rik'ha had twice been matched and had procreated two generations – Ahn and her brother, B'ar, with his first mate, and then, with the second, another brood to which, on the woman's death, Ahn was expected to become mother.

At Agraria Settlement Q, she was mother, daughter, housekeeper, timekeeper, bookkeeper, pacekeeper. Twenty-five years and as many men had been ordered to pass her by because of her value to the unit.

She was weary of the situation, she reflected as the cool blades of purple caressed her feet, and there was an action about today's air that suggested a conclusion not Virtuist. The vacuum in her womb could have been apprehension, frustration, loneliness. It was all three.

On the causeway to the octopath, even as the moistness of him registered with Spirsh'ak and he ran a hand across his face to test its measure on his palm, Ahn selected the track that would lead her inevitably to him, noted the swollen clouds and thought, they look to be with child.

"A cauldron of mischief brewing," she said, confident that they shared a similar thought.

Spirsh'ak caught her gaze and held it because she looked upon him with such intensity. When shall we three meet again, he heard himself think.

In thunder, lightning or in rain,
When the hurly-burly's done,
When the battle's o'er and won . . .

Madness. He checked himself. I am wandering wildly. There are only two . . .

"Rain," he said. "Thunder, lightning. All coming. You're a long way from home."

He felt ill at ease. Confronted suddenly with a need, he knew his power to satisfy came only in bursts, geared to the sunshine. Today, there was no sunshine, and words were sneaking up on him.

"If the sky should weep on me," Ahn fed him, hoping for poetry, "What should I do? Rust away?"

An assault on the insides of his teeth, the words, fighting . . .

But I am weaker than a woman's tear,
Tamer than sleep, fonder than ignorance,
Less valiant than . . .
Hold your tongue, fool Spirsh'ak!

The words come to me in an echo, he thought. A part of me somewhere has conducted this very conversation before. In dreams? I can recall no such dreams and my dreams stay with me like comrades. In another world? Shouldn't I know the centrifugal blow of my coming and

going? Is my mind running ahead of my tongue? Let me see what she says next without my prompting.

And is rusting away so improbable, wondered the woman. Why does he regard me with such wide eyes? Am I so awesome to behold? And why doesn't he speak?

She began to regret that she had stopped. But it would be difficult to squeeze past him now on the catwalk, to think floorward and then select another track. Where, in any event, would she go?

Something about my scribblings, conjectured Spirsh'ak with an eerie certainty. I know it. I know too well what is coming. But how long before the vision mists?

Ahn grew impatient.

"They say you are very good with words," she said. "Have you no answer for me? Shall I stand here and bleed brown?"

Spirsh'ak looked away at the false calm on the waters of the canal. It had some kind of significance. But the metaphor was too forced, too trite.

Ahn grew more impatient.

Perhaps she would leave him. Yes, that would be an answer. No, it would be an admission that she had stopped with a hope. She must be satisfied to wait out the silence.

"You spoke to me," he said. "You must have wanted more than a polite rejoinder. Why did you stop if it comes to that?"

No time for duelling, thought Ahn. Time to cut. Time to thrust.

"Questions and answers," she said in scorn. "Are they the power of your rhetoric? Questions and answers are so much dandelion puff. A man asks, a man answers. Perhaps there is something to be learned outside their words. The problem is too complex. I said I had heard you were good with words. Well, are you?"

"I talk prettily enough," said Spirsh'ak. He shifted his weight to face her fully.

"I seem to say what men have yet to think, or what they forgot to think when they rode roughshod over the galaxies. I can set a thought to the ancient music of the mouth. It is as simple as that."

"Simple indeed," said Ahn.

"As simple as this, if it rains, we get wet. If we get wet,

we can always get dry. But being wet feels different from being dry. It is therefore interesting if uncomfortable."

"How you Aesthetes thrive on sensation," said Ahn, conscious of a warning.

"You seem to know us well," said Spirsh'ak, happy with the generalisation.

It was no surprise to either that they were moving together from the causeway and descending to the canal walk. To Spirsh'ak, it was all there, even to the number of paces he took in a moment of time. But when he tried to look ahead, to seek out a climax, a mist veil hung.

Perhaps last time, some other time, that other he had left her (her?) at the polished metal track curving over the agrarian sectors to her home. Perhaps they had argued. Perhaps he had impressed her only with his immaturity. Perhaps...

Ahn did not cast her thoughts ahead. She felt only that whatever happened to end this overlong, prickly afternoon, it was decreed. It was all arranged.

What did she know of Aesthetes, he had asked.

"I know they can call a thing beautiful without ever knowing that thing," she said. "That they echo like empty vessels when tapped. At eighteen, a youth may bind some words together for effect, and at 25, he will know that there is no effect; that making the words look pretty was just one way of avoiding the fact that he does not know what they mean. A child's charcoal drawing portrays toadstools as big as people. What happens as the child ages? Does he grow larger, or the toadstools smaller?"

"So you spoke to me as one whose toadstools are changing shape," he said. "How do you find them? Shorter or taller than I?"

"I suspect you are a virgin," said Ahn. Spirsh'ak turned his face away to hide the blush.

"You should not feel ashamed," said Ahn. "I am a virgin and I know that it can be a burden."

Her face had been almost coquettish. Now it was suddenly sad, shameful. He wanted to comfort her over the revelation.

"No merry wife of Windsor, thee," he said, nonsensically.

She regarded him strangely.

He coughed, as though clearing his throat would obliterate the words. He stopped to pluck a wild pansy from the regulated rows along the edge of the path, and caught her by the arm to still her as he wound it into her hair.

"Love-in-idleness," he smiled. "I like these wild flowers. I have studied their origin . . . Perhaps I should pick one for myself."

She scanned his face as he made the flower secure, noting his intentness in the task, the gentleness about his eyes. For no good reason, her eyes brimmed and he kissed her lightly on the forehead, a little-boy kiss.

He stood back, finally.

"There," he said, watching how the flowers sat in her harvest hair. "Experience is as old as man's mistakes. You were no man's mistake unless it was in not taking you for a wife."

Humour crinkled his nut-brown eyes.

The gulf between their ages still bothered him. No longer because he felt unable to account for himself – he knew what he would be expected to do but was apprehensive. But because they knew too much about each other just to be able to part and forget.

Ahn read this in his silence and threaded her fingers through his. She must do something . . . perhaps . . . a little . . . younger than herself. Somewhere a natural link might show itself, so that the relationship would seem less freakish, less contrived.

Towards the fibrous fly-over, cantilevered across sweet countryside, a feeder was tickled to mirth on its bed of pebbles.

"It is so close now," she said. "There seems no true coolness in all this cluster."

She sat on the bank of the feeder and began to remove her sandals. Spirsh'ak, uncomfortable with the unconscious display of limb, moved a short distance away and searched for smooth stones to skim against the current.

The movement in the void above them was violent. The clouds spun and twisted and the shadows of the trees lay heavy about them like the fallen columns of some decaying temple. Spirsh'ak lowered himself to the bank and pushed his mind into oblivion.

The feeling was still there. Somewhere, he thought, per-

haps not even on this plane, perhaps not even in this constellation, someone has done everything that I will ever do. Somewhere, someone is doing it now, an hour, a minute, a second behind me, somebody so like me that we are joined twins across time and distance, I feeling when he is hurt, he laughing when I am happy.

And the words, the wandering words, were there again, shuffling themselves neatly before his mind's eye so that he did no more than recite . . .

Eternity was in our lips and eyes,
Bliss on our brow's bent. None our
Parts so poor, but was a race of Heaven . . .

Ahn called him.

"Walk with me in the water," she invited. "It is cool right up to the head."

He turned to watch her and marvelled that, with golden hair tumbling about her shoulders and her dress up above her knees, she had the presence of a mist maiden, some radiance from a dog-eared world.

At the same time, a fever started low down in his stomach, a fire that licked its way up through his hips, his chest, his throat.

"Walk with me," called Ahn.

Again, he hesitated and instead forced himself to seek more pebbles to cast away the mysteries rising within him.

His body was tense now; he wondered whether he would stumble if he walked.

Ahn's dress was about her thighs, the current creaming around her legs, one shoulder of her garment somehow slipped away and the globe of a breast plainly visible.

The sky, the trees, his thoughts fell about him in fables. Time was a darkness and a light and a standing still. When he spoke he talked with an intelligence that was not his own.

"Venus," he cried out. "Leave the stream. Know you not that the gods sow seeds of creation that way. Come this way, away from the wind, for that, too, carries their seed. Shelter here with me."

And as she came, wondering. Adonis caught her by the shoulders and laid her gently down on the bank.

And suddenly a wind sprang up among the plasticated trees and beat about the purple grasses, flattening them to the earth. It whispered, talked, shouted, magnified by a thousand hollows in a thousand synthetic trunks until it fell upon the bank of a certain irrigation feeder in a spacecraft roar.

The wind has the voice of a woman and of an instant, it clings with fingers and has a face and a sawing movement, and when the wind is passed, the planet is in a state of autumn. The wind has gone and its voice has gone with it, and only then, lying quietly, sucked dry, does the body recall that the wind said, "Spirsh'ak . . . Spirsh'ak . . . Spirsh'ak."

Memory is a smarting face and the agony of a blow in the groin and fly-over feet pounding down pansies between X and Q, young Spirsh'ak and Agraria Settlement. Futile and alien is the voice that cries after her, "It was the wind not I, my Anna, I gave you but shelter . . ."

Will Shakespeare complete with star-filled folding file moves slowly, not aware of touching the ground, past the gaunt soul of Holy Trinity, fearing the steel sky may descend and crush him.

He seeks desperately for Clopton Bridge, Stratford, for a white panic of swans, for a butter smear on green grass, for a cobbler's shop in Henley Street, just to remember, just to remember. But he finds only darkness and no familiar place in his vortex.

A rain he can neither see nor hear burns him with its drops and his screams echo echo echo echo.

In all this black limbo, he feels for a place of contact and knows only gaping space.

But suspended as he is, he knows contact with some Siamese soul, a smile in space, a thought in the 31st century, a wandering, wandering word.

He goes plummeting and panting, groping through the celestial downpour, flailing for a handhold on a new universe or the old universe or some kind of bloody universe.

I go alone, like to a lonely dragon . . .



THE FOUR- COLOR PROBLEM

BARRINGTON
BAYLEY

The Satellite Mapping Survey undertaken in 1990 revealed that the Earth contains vast areas of undiscovered land surface overlooked by previous explorers and cartographers. Despite disquiet in scientific quarters the U.S. Congress voted a thousand billion dollars towards exploiting the new

regions and opening operations were conducted from Strategic Air Command, Omaha.

Every morning at dawn eight-jet *Vulture* bombers took off and by dint of great mathematical expertise were guided by Mission Control over the new countries. Each bomber had an onboard computer drawing random maps on a display screen purporting to relate to the landscape below. The crew meanwhile made pencilled notes of mountains, rivers and plains. It was hard to get two maps to agree—

Unease at MIT and Caltech over the Satellite Survey's findings delayed plans for surface missions by land or sea. The papers appearing in professional journals carried such titles as: 'IS TOPOLOGY WRONG?' 'IS GEOMETRY WRONG?' 'IS THE EARTH A SIMPLY-CONNECTED SURFACE?'

The Congressional Inquiry five years later found it hard to decide at what point the character of the project changed. It was evident however that by the third month the mathematical faculties of the major research centres had already established control of SAC, putting out their control lines first through Washington by means of an insidious advisory claim, then drawing up schematics until finally they were right there in SAC Mission Control having captured the chain of command.

(The maths men were already adept at taking over the nation like the SS used to take over — The reasons and methods were the same — *Weltanschauung* — Belief in correctness of technique — Professor M. M. was putting infants in sealed metal chambers and irradiating them with alien equations — They started by running the economy — Look they said economics should be left to us not to untrained psychotics — You have to align the growth vectors — Formulas and differential equations a mile long put them through logic units look we got pulse trains a light year long — Dynamic topology — Structural morphology — Soon there was nothing in the White House but a big computer with direct lines to MIT and Caltech — The President sits hypnotised by a stroboscope — MIT and Caltech start fighting it out they got different ideas see they send the electronic word war streaming through respective landlines — Hostile pulse trains contend in White House computer while Soviet satellite is beaming subversive equations of surplus value to confuse the parameters — The technician

spoke out of the corner of his mouth – “Don’t let the computer cotton on to those Marxist surplus value pulse trains from outside the ecliptic” – He picked up a bucket of water and threw it over the consoles to cool them down – Steam drifted through the white rooms – Outside the city continuous explosion of lifting Moon rocket washes over the suburbs fluttering flags – “Those outer space vectors sure pack a punch” —)

Look they said exploit new lands according to precise formula otherwise returns are not maximised. We know formula have trained forebrain will travel. But once installed in SAC Mission Control they pursue their own interests and convert the whole fucking issue into a world-spanning trillion-dollar exercise in abstract mathematics.

“We have an unprecedented opportunity,” said Professor Gottram, “to solve the four-colour problem.”

Briefly the four-colour problem concerns the colouring of maps on a plane or spherical surface (the two being the same topologically, known in the jargon as simply-connected surfaces). Map-makers have known for centuries that no more than four colours are ever needed to colour a map so that no two adjoining countries bear the same one. The four colour problem is something of a curiosity in mathematics. Attempts to prove the proposition yielded only a proof of five colours and all efforts to reduce it to one of four colours have not satisfied the rigours of logic. However unlikely it seems to common sense, the possibility therefore remains open that a planar map requiring five colours might be feasible – The bearing it might have on the structure of space is of some interest – Current advances in the field consist mainly of upping the number of countries (140 at last count) below which a map cannot be five-colour – Editors of mathematical journals frequently receive lengthy manuscripts from amateurs purporting to prove the four-colour theorem and involving a tedious task in finding the flaw —

Some regard the four-colour theorem as true but unproven, others regard it as untrue. Professor Gottram, speaking to his students on the eve of his departure to SAC Omaha said: “The additional extensibility of the Earth has removed the question from the realm of the abstract to the realm of the concrete. Territories – Borders – Hegemonies

– Armies march and counter-march – The defender thinks himself surrounded by enemies – Suddenly a new avenue appears and the beleaguered inhabitants vanish into the promised land – The bearing on the structure of space is of immediate interest – No effort can be too great – Gentlemen, in view of the fact that the planet Earth has unanalysed topological properties it is a not unreasonable assumption that the five-colour relation *exists upon it*. We must find it before —” Align vectors – Compass needles waver – Directions uncertain – *Hold your course! Don't look back!*

So they went streaking off in search of El Dorado, Shangri La, the Elixir, the Philosopher's Stone, perpetual motion, the six hundred year orgasm.

At first the crews saw an Eden of lakes, islands and rivers. But all was not well. The scenes gave way to alien landscapes with no oxygen – All burned up by the heat – The chromanauts' perils irradiate the news media with flickering images of despair – For the crews on the end of the line vital links with SAC sometimes fade out, leaving bombers groping desperately for navigation beams precessing to pick up guiding pulse trains – The lid of an underground silo peels back and a monstrous scorpion with wings whirrs up to devour the bombers in mid-air, dashing to and fro like a fox in a chicken run – One squadron suicides with a nuclear blast – In Pentagon crew-cut general with cancer of the larynx adjusts his cardiac pace-maker and barks in a harsh electronic voice “Want more proof they're Reds?” – The crew of *Happy-Go-Lucky* forgot they were airborne and thought they were in a flight simulator – At Mission Control they are running all kinds of programmes on the hardware – Computer display screens flicker with sometimes a hundred experimental maps per second – Burning bombers sinking into bottomless black pit – Last contact is frantic reel of equations meaning nothing to Mission Control —

“Hello Mission Control – We appear to be riding on worldlines of deformed sex energy – Pressure varying – Can you give us fix for phallic heat and return to normal temperature?”

"Mission Control to Cosmo Blair – Sorry, you are on your own – *Don't look back!* – Keep us informed of degree of curvature of sex space – sex tensors vary with stress and longing—"

"We keep trying – Pilot wants to jettison nuclear armament – Says we are riding loaded roller-coaster –" Vectors sear the air. – Burning bomber sinking down black bottomless pit – Controllers stare at equations stupefied – Blazing flags flutter – Surplus value pulse train sets out for Andromeda Galaxy 'to relieve the confusion of the masses exploited there' –

"Wanta buy an army surplus pulse train? It works the settings on an export reject hydrogen bomb I got off a sergeant in the Saigon P-X." The man from Chicago held up a reel of tape. "It works on the human nervous system too to get explosions of orgasms but wear a cardiac pace-maker or your heart can hardly stand it. Try it on your girl friend or you can use it long range maybe on some cutie you're watching on television or on a girls' school the teacher too."

– Red glow of pleasure – Hot iron runs in biologic furnace – Ovens sigh giving off red heat – "Shall we try again Mission Control?"

"Withdraw if you can – Appropriations are falling – Pulse train vectors meshing in biologic social computer are radiating moiré patterns of pain –" The bombers seared by heat and pressure streaked over grumbling landscapes turned liquid and exploding in blasts of poison gas –

TECHNICAL SECTION (I)

Note on social computer: Basically any human society is a machine operating on the computer principle of binary (off/on) logic units. The binary notation is provided by the Pleasure/Pain principle expressed in a social Fortran in all its correlatives such as Praise/Blame, Like/Dislike, Admiration / Contempt, Esteem / Disgust, Enthusiasm / Apathy, Why-hello-there! / Get-out-of-my-sight-you-disgusting-little-man. All social gatherings can more or less be translated into social Fortran. The social logic unit (known as a person in the trade) forms input and output leads during an encounter and passes on an emotional charge taking its place in the transmission of a long pulse train. En-

counters are not formed by the will of the units concerned as they often think but locations and times are all programmed by the previous state of the computer. Pulse trains are immortal, outliving the units that process and transmit them – So we have the basic structure of social life – Social pulse trains are constantly intersecting the vectors that are flitting through social space-time –

Note on vectors: We owe to William Burroughs the discovery that life is addiction. To be alive is to be addicted, if not to one thing then to another. The reason is that in terms of the world-frame consciousness is addiction, being a vector quantity not a scalar quantity, not a passive screen but a direction and power at any given moment. Just as matter cannot exist without an associated vector, awareness cannot exist without vector. 'The algebra of absolute need' consequent on physical entrapment is endemic and varies only in intensity. Hence consciousness is known as 'the body of desire' in Eastern philosophies. As all instances and correlatives of Pleasure/Pain can be subsumed under Experience we are all Experience Addicts.

The social pulse train works by the simple off/on principle of permitting or stopping the passage of desire vectors. Pleasure is felt when a vector is enabled to go forward. Pain is felt when a vector is stopped or deflected. Stopping or deflecting vector damages basic being and pain, disappointment and loss of consciousness are experienced. Physical pain is stopped vector of biological body integrity – Other pain is stopped desire vector – In Scientology all losses and no gains sends a man down the tone scale towards Grief – Apathy – Death –

Most vectors are aligned *in planar social space* – i.e. they are aimed into the computer, human society. – Planar space is in general the condition of operation of the social computer, being spread one unit thick on the surface of a sphere – Hence they mesh and oppose one another for available experience-materials – Addiction of all parties to biological energy and mutual emotional need ends in 'extreme untenable positions' (quote). In conditions of stress due to heat and pressure the parties resort to distorted vectors, reflected vectors and other tactics. Binary pulse trains moiré through social space-time – Meshing vectors –

Laser light beams diffract untenable circumstances – When the heat is on and communications dry up the units feel their sources failing – Situation of extreme peril – Vital life-support technique in such times is the use of *virtual images*.

Note on virtual images: A virtual image is one that appears to show an object where no object is – As for instance a reflection in a mirror makes the image appear to emanate from a position behind the mirror – Laser holograms also produce virtual images at various angles – It is absolutely vitally necessary that an addicted unit be able to intercept a pulse train – To do this he must have effective output leads which means vector – When the oven is stepped up and the pressure is high pulse trains mesh in pain moiré – At this stage the transmission lines begin to seize up and there is nothing in the whole fucking issue but twisted vectors, deflected vectors and reversed vectors – The atmosphere is something horrible and the units choke for lack of air – So what they do is fight to acquire virtual images to set up a ghost network that allows some sort of power to pass – Virtual images are prized for their reality index that is they mostly arise from genuine entities who died long ago – The units are all scrambling for effective virtual images to validate claims to what remains of the available materials in the by this time festering dungheap or as Burroughs puts it ‘rush the lifeboat in drag’.

Note on ovens: An oven is an enclosed space bringing about chemical changes by means of stress heat and pressure – Any human society is an oven situation varying only in the level of the settings – The social computer is designed to be contained within an oven that cooks the logic units so as to specify their responses – Four or five programmed responses to any stimuli whatsoever is regarded by most as a safe level of activity – Hence the inner state of the computer can be controlled by means of a few simple external oven controls – Beings from space sometimes use these controls to cook something tasty as they pass through – A whole range of chemical changes can be induced by combinations of pressure stress heat to synthesise special-

ised addictions – The atmosphere in many ovens is indescribable – The ovens of Belsen and Buchenwald were simply ritual symbols of the Oven of Germany – Not so different really from the ritual ovens of English drawing rooms – However the chief oven function is the multiplication of virtual images which goes on with viral efficiency even at little more than room temperature.

No one has ever escaped an oven once thrown in by the brutal heavy-helmeted Guards posted at the uterine opening made of brick creaking with white heat. The only possible palliative for the occupants is in the opinion of some authorities random switching, which they are of course unable to achieve even if given this information. Galactic judges sometimes order a criminal to be absorbed into a virtual image thereby effectively banishing him from existence –

“Wanta buy a government ex-issue pulse train? It works the settings on a hydrogen fusion oven. Try it on the orgasm centres while your girl friend is squatting astride you –”
Ow-ow-ow-ow-OW-OW Oooooohhhh fu-u-u-u-ck...

DON'T BLAME ME

“Do we stand a chance, Ed?”

Ed was doodling on four-dimensional graph paper. “Chance? Chance? Nobody stands a chance in this universe of blame.” He coughed, blew ash from the sheaved papers, wiped hand over rheumy face.

“But you said –”

“I said, I said! Don’t believe all you’re told, boy. Give me some more of that Red Biddy.” He lurched, nearly scattering his notes to Professor Gottram.

The boy passed him the bottle, kicking aside a rusty tin can and pulling closer his thin jacket. The wind was beginning to cut across the waste ground. This was sure no way to live in winter.

Of late the boy was getting disappointed in Ed. The old feller not as inspiring as he used to be – Getting peevish and selfish – The boy sighed – Maybe he should split and leave the old soak to die in his dirty raincoat – Not many valuable epigrams left in that old corpse.

"Whoever solves the four-colour problem will become world-famous overnight". Ed smiled dreamily. He had been trying to solve it now for ten years, right after he left off trying to square the circle.

"Give me the Biddy and I'll instruct you in the secret doctrine of the world," said Ed. "What you need is *religion*. Things are easier if you *believe*. Believe that there's a God and his Number One Motto is: Never Give a Sucker an Even Break. Know that and you'll never be disappointed."

"You said that before," the boy told him irritably. "Years ago, in fact."

"Well, don't blame me." Ed looked into the boy's deep brown eyes, drinking his sulky frown. His heart began to hurt again. Scarcely a year since his last suicide attempt. And what did that damn fool kid do? Rushes off and comes back with an ambulance. The surgeon transplanted a new heart. Ah well, nobody dies in dignity these days . . . Ed always had a headache now. If he masturbated the new heart couldn't take the strain and he wasn't able to afford a pace-maker. For weeks after that he had refused to speak to his protege . . . disappointed to find that the boy lacked *insouciance*.

"You'll never lick that thing, will you?" the boy said in a flat tone. "You old fake!"

"Don't be so sure. Did I ever tell you about my old buddy Grafton Street Gus, one-time President of Paraguay? Used to call himself El Supremo-For-Life XIV, Chief Ass-Tearer and Commander of the Grand Inner Space Fleet. That's right, he used to say, my country's got a space fleet anchored in inner space. Come the showdown with the Yanks they'll never find us but our special radar sets can always know where they are, scanning the news media continuously -"

"For Christ's sake can't you spare me your corn."

"Your trouble is you lack imagination, the nerve to seek outlandish solutions. Let me tell you of a fellow I knew once who had the most brilliant idea I ever heard in my life." Ed squeezed his heart painfully. "I won't bother with the preamble . . . the upshot is one day he tells his psychiatrist that he's decided the answer to his problems is to buy a helicopter." Ed laughed. "Imagine the poor mug

seated at the controls for the first time – The powerful downdraft – The skids lift – The machine soars clear of the ground – Everything is laid out below like a map and you can go where you like –

“He was right, of course,” Ed finished. “A sheer fucking genius. The answer *is* to buy a helicopter.”

“My God what a clapped out old creep you are.” The boy sighed.

– The ovens are always producing phantom images – Dreamily Ed remembered long ago in his youth going to a party – He felt ineffectual there – “This is Ed, an awfully brainy fellow, he writes for the Mathematical Journal” – Sex vectors zipped about the room like bees in a hive – Ed was passed from hand to hand, referred to always in the third person – Suddenly he had to go beserk or bust – He couldn’t stand their attention any longer – “*Stop projecting virtual images on me! CUNTS!*” – He dashed about the room, trying to kick everybody, male and female, in the crutch – The party collapsed in hoots of laughter –

Vertigo. He closed his eyes briefly, fascinated by the images that folded and unfolded in his mind. Glimpses of the rooms and apartments lining Grafton Street. A girl painted carefully on a canvas in a white room streaked with raw colour. A few yards away, through walls, an electric fire glowed on a red carpet. On a nearby couch two naked bodies rocked gently, clinging together so as to resemble a big crab.

“Is that a copy of ‘Battling Laboratory Stories’ you have there?” said Ed, squinting. “That reminds me of my promise to teach you Cabbalistic science. A zig-zag flash, a continuous vibration of energy, puts the Absolute in the same circuit as the densest palpable matter. It’s Kether, the Absolute, you have to stay away from. As the magus says, too much straining after Kether, results in suicides, schizophrenia and like tragedies. Not surprising: Kether touches the veils of negative existence. No vectors in negativity. Keep your vectors in good order, lad, if you want to make it.”

“Fuck your vectors!” The boy went back to reading his magazine, where the incredible Man With the X-Ray Eyes fought with slimy green monsters that clawed and oozed, alien robots that dropped from space, and countless other

horrors that he had brought down on his own head as a result of his ill-considered experiments.

"Nobody wants to know any more." Ed spilled Biddy on the pages of the exercise books where he made his notes – Many are the stopped vectors littering the waste grounds – An old man sat in a cellar dreaming of what never happens – In a tiny village up in the hills in Europe was a girl, no longer young, who had never met anybody and who had never left her village – For some reason it was always five o'clock on a winter's afternoon, the pine trees cast long final shadows, the water of the pond was still and cold – She always went home at the same time – A hint of spice was in the air – A blazing bomber plunged headlong down the bottomless pit –

Ed muttered to himself and pored over his sheaves of pencilled notes.

Theorem 3.1.1: – Warm sighing night in July – Bedroom in Omaha – Moon shining through window and on to face of young man sleeping alone – A bird flapped against the pane and flurried in panic before disappearing – The young man woke suddenly –

– You've all had this happen – He lay on his back hearing the sound of the trees – He couldn't fight down the feeling of terror – Weird howling rising and falling outside the window – He was paralysed, couldn't move, couldn't speak – Frantic effort – Big Bird rushed at the window – This time it came on and on, flapped into the inside of his consciousness where it fluttered and winged around his mind –

– "*I found a way in, I found a way in!*" –

– At last he forced a tiny croak from his throat, frightening the bird away. Unable to sleep, he rose at dawn and went on a long walk through the countryside, discovering after some miles a place he had never seen before, a dusty complex of concrete runways and low, camouflaged buildings. Eight-jet bombers were lined up for take-off, deafening him with the shriek of their engines – Everything wavered in the heat-haze from their exhausts – As they taxied past he saw mystic mathematical symbols painted on their fuselages –

Theorem 4.88.20: Space-rocket 4-Simplex lifted off from

Cape Oswald* today on one of the longest missions yet. 4-*Simplex* is not going to any planet or asteroid but deep into space where nothing exists in the hope of locating the rebel astronauts who refused to return home ten years ago.

Cdr. Grüber was interviewed before blast-off. Had the astronauts vanished into a geodesic enclave? Said Cdr. Grüber: "We have word of a Marxist pulse train taking out instrumentation access."

Later at Cape Oswald NASA Chief Dr. Everard was asked what had gone wrong with the erring astronauts. Why did they evince non-typical psychisms? "I can only say we relaxed our screening too much to get larger numbers for back-up crews – What can ya do with such crummy hardware like ours? – In the beginning our standards were strict – The astronaut has to have nerves of steel, no imagination so that nothing frightens him – What for instance if a guy stands on the Moon and looks around him and starts *really* looking? – What if he looks up at the Earth? – He has to have strong Momism so as to maintain a subconscious umbilical cord when separated from Mother Earth – "I'm not really anywhere I wasn't before" – We aim to control the solar system – We need that u-cord – Future astronauts will be cyborgs censored for imaginative intelligence –"

London's Astronomer Royal commented later: "Quite right. I would certainly not go into space if I thought anyone of intelligence was on board." Also in London, the Chairman of the British Interplanetary Society said that despite setbacks he still believed in the possibility of space-flight and it would become a reality "probably within the next hundred years."

People with a stake in the addiction business – governments, newspapers and public-minded citizens of every degree – fear rival operations like narcotics and new ideologies because they see in them a threat to their own sources –

The President tapped his fingers on his desk. "How does this social pulse train work, Joe?"

* Misnamed by many news media – What I want to know is who shot who? – Who perpetrated the deed? – If Kennedy shot Oswald they could call it Cape Kennedy –

"Well Mr. President, when a personal logical unit receives a pulse it's an emotional charge either Pleasure/Pain and he stores it until he meets an analogous situation and he discharges it in an encounter either stopping or enabling the other party's vector. That way every social act is repeated indefinitely – a man gets hurt so he hurts somebody next time. Of course a considerable period can elapse between charge and discharge so the timebase is pretty complicated."

"Just like that?"

"Well . . ." The adviser shifted uneasily. "Of course that's a simplification. Often the pulse is processed in storage – not always easy to quantify emotion. Occasionally a pulse train fades through processing and dies out. Mostly though the stop trains are on high gain."

"Sound like quite a build-up of information, Joe."

"Yes *sir*! That's what we need, Mr. President – high stress information. Remember the opposition over the water is building up his own pressure and we got to keep pace."

The President went through the stock motions that link together dialogue in novels – lit a cigarette, bit an apple, stroked his chin and drummed his fingers on the table. "Hmmm. Now about those Terminals . . ."

"That's our main problem, sir. A few units appear to have begun acting as terminals to pain charge and refuse to pass on pain load to others. Like that girl took off her clothes *right there in the street*! By constituting pain stop these units are essentially anti-social and can reduce pressure below working level – Loss of control – The ship fills with water –"

"What are we doing about it, Joe?"

"Well, we can pinpoint some terminals. CIA agents posing as National Guardsmen shot down twelve known campus terminals last week. Otherwise chief stratagem is provocation forcing terminals to pass on or reciprocate emotional charge through sheer frustration and so re-enter pulse train pain *moiré*. Of course we have our sonic vibrators out on the streets – Certain sonic frequencies cause unendurable stress make everybody lash out around him—"

"Chicken-shit! Results! Results!"

"We are getting results, sir – Definitely promising symp-

toms: the suicide rate is up: yesterday campus pacifists tortured a policeman to death—”

The President grinned at his advisor while his feet danced a jig beneath his desk.

“Results! Results!”

What is real answer? Real answer is step up external oven controls increase pressure stress heat.

— Steam drifted everywhere through the rooms of Mission Control — Outside on the baking plain ovens hummed with electric tension—

“The out-range squadrons are requesting guidance, Professor — What shall we tell them?”

— Professor Gottram looked up wild-eyed and paralytic drunk — “What are you, some kind of gutless wonder straight out of basic training? Tell them anything, you cunt! Across the universe pushers are setting up ovens on a million planets—”

— He shambled towards the display screens, pushing aside assistants and scattering sheaves of graph-paper. Slack-mouthed, he attempted to read the figures—

“Somewhere somebody’ll make it — In laboratories across the universe—”

* * *

The President spoke in slow, nasal tones. “What became of the greatness and might of the Military-Industrial Complex? This Mathematico-Air Force Complex has a funny taste . . . Like somebody is trying to take over our pitch.”

Joe nodded gravely, drawing on a fifty dollar cigar and drumming his fingers on the table. “We were wise to it the minute we saw the Soviets didn’t send out any missions of their own. Wanta know why? They got too good a control over their pulse trains. No cracks in their oven.”

When control is slipping a good technique is to send in the examiners. Have you noticed how you have to be examined for everything lately? Steadily they push in on previously unsupervised areas of life — “Why do you want to live there? Can you support your reasons? Why do you want to work at that profession? Do you think you’re qualified — no, I mean have you got the *ability* — That man over there has twenty certificates — Please answer these few

questions relating to aptitude tests –” Once established they move to test every instance of every act, sit in watching every move and make obtrusive notes any time the examinee needs undivided attention.

Part of basic training is to radiate a feeling of contempt. The examiner usually begins by suggesting there is something wrong with the basic equipment. “Don’t you think your chances are rather slight in this car? All right it’s up to you if you want to go on with it . . . You want to talk to that girl? Is it probable she’ll take any notice of you, what with your personality and . . . well, *appearance*? Well, if you insist on trying—”

“*Why do you walk like that?*”

“Is it necessary to visit the toilet so often?”

“Can’t you speak in a more *normal* tone of voice?”

“You are practicing a perversion *unique to you alone*.”

The examiner writes devastating remarks on the failure certificates he hands out which the examinee must keep and read every day. After a few years the citizens are all nervous wrecks or in a state of paralytic shock.

– Gentlemen let us remove our hats as a mark of respect to Danny Barlowe, who after failing his driving test twelve times finally got a death-wish about the matter and on the thirteenth engineered a crash killing himself and the examiner outright—

Calling all examiners – Logic units to be tested to destruction – Harsh electronic voice vibrates through packed skyscrapers –

Joe took a long drag on his cigar making the tip glow red. “Fact is there are parties running the four-colour programme at SAC who see success as *possible route of escape from oven*. Question of connectivity in Earth space. If a map needing five colours is possible maybe process of entrapment in normal space-time conditions is not absolute – Uterine guards cannot be everywhere – Pressure would fall if they found it – *Calling all examiners* –”

“God dammit,” the President nodded slowly. “God dammit.”

“Don’t worry. They won’t find anything. There is no five-colour map. Entrapment process is absolute in universal space conditions. Conditioning process total and final. No escape from progressive process of compulsion-addic-

tion-blame.” Joe stubbed out his glowing cigar in an ash-tray shaped like a gaping cunt. The cunt squirmed and steamed. “No way out for cock-sucking escapist Red bastards *God dammit.*”

Theorem 9.56.7: The boards of the church shuddered slightly to the heavy tread of the Reverend Kludd. He mounted the pulpit and pulled back his hood – Heavy face and thick jaw – Startling blue eyes –

“Brothers and sisters in Christ,” – In the front row were little old ladies with lips pressed tightly together – “The Phantom Phighters Phor Phreedom are today giving their lives to defend this land” – Geodesics curved through the church with electric tension – Burning bombers plunged to stained glass windows of Klansmen and weeping niggers – “The highest authority in the land” – “What with Slope-head and Chicom” – “*It is no sin to kill a nigger, for in God’s eyes a nigger is no more’n a dawg*” –

The rail of the lectern creaked in the Reverend’s incredibly powerful grip. He called to mind the case of Joe Hackenback, an upright God-fearing man and a good Klansman until one year he went on holiday to Chicago and got his balls mashed in an auto accident – Anyway the surgeon decided to carry out the first testicle transplant – He took the left testicle from a nigger shot by the cops and the right testicle from a dockworker from Hong Kong – So there was Joe’s wife giving birth to niggers and chinks one after the other and nobody believed Joe was the father – “A warning to us all” –

Scene: TV cameras roll across concrete expanse to screen husky young men in flying suits beneath the predatory beaks of *Vulture* bombers. “Can you comment on the theory, that the fifth-colour country is a secret communist enclave or else the legendary Christian kingdom of Prester John sought by Prince Henry and Vasco Da Gama?”

“What-all difference?” drawls the blue-eyed pilot. “Whether it’s the commie enclave or the Pope-kissers’ kingdom, when we find it we’ll bomb it back to the Stone-Age.”

Theorem 652.1.1: Few in the whole world knew of the

secret meeting chamber of the World Law Fund. Built with great constructive genius a hundred miles underground, its walls were of stressed carbon with properties very close to diamond, faced with layers of concrete, mica and asbestos. The walls formed sheaves of arches holding back the pressure of the Earth's mantle with almost visible effort – Like Atlas holding up the Earth –

The lift from the surface arrived at exactly seven. About thirty people filed silently into the chamber and took their seats. The tutor appeared and without introduction launched into his lecture, speaking in quiet, matter-of-fact tones. His eyes were mild but steady. Short, slim, dark hair flecked with grey, he was noticeably older than his years and though his composure was unimpeachable there was an unmistakable feeling of weariness about him, a weariness that no effort could overcome –

“The Communist Party was described in its time as one of the few successful movements of pure will in history – We shall now examine the secret of the Party's success and the cause of its ultimate failure –”

– The tutor paused for a moment and coughed slightly –

– “To preserve its unwavering will was the Party's first consideration. The Party demanded absolute precision of concept and an attitude of ruthlessness to even the smallest deviations. Left deviations, right deviations, were chopped off mercilessly and their perpetrators degraded, banished or liquidated. ‘Only the bourgeois persists in thinking that nothing results from these nuances of thought,’ wrote Czeslaw Milosz. ‘The Party knows that much can come of them . . . The difference of a tiny fraction in the premises yields dizzying differences after the calculation is completed.’ – Hence the ethic of action directed towards control –

“The drawback to such a procedure is that errors in the original philosophical basis of the movement, or in its scientific analysis, remain in force to the bitter end and show themselves in enormous distortions and malformations in the final result –

“The World Law Fund sees itself as the successor to the Party's mission to rescue humanity – No matter that our backs are to the wall – However the Fund sets itself infinitely more difficult criteria in that it must be not con-

ditionally right but absolutely right – The Fund demands of itself the Party's invincible will together with the ability to correct initial error – An almost impossible combination – To reconcile unwavering determination with the ability to re-align vectors and rectify errors of intent nevertheless remains the ultimate test of the developed will.”

He continued in the special terminology of the Fund, outlining its plan for world order based on unique researches. Never did he allow his alertness to be affected by the all-too-evident existential weariness that pervaded his being.

“You may now ask questions.”

A man rose to speak. But at that moment the surrounding basalt shifted due to some trivial geological event and the straining carbon arches were unable to hold back the intolerable pressure any longer. The first crack in the wall was accompanied by a searing wave of mantlar heat. The lift shaft went first, folding up above their heads like a cardboard box. In the next instant the Earth's mantle closed in, fusing the chamber and all its contents into a solid continuum of dense, hot rock.

Theorem 625.1.2: The annihilation of the deep room registered as an insignificant kink on the trace records of Monitor 437 as he strained to catch the faint echoes of his probes and the fragmentary pictures they built up on the television reconstruction screens. He ignored it – only a geological shift, obviously. No-event, politics-wise. He redoubled his vigilance to study the faint rebounds, the distant echoes that pinged, scattered and felt their way through the caverns, buildings, highways and airways and extra-atmospheric space.

Monitor 437 was one of several thousand units embedded a bare half-mile in the skin of the Earth, their beams sweeping underground, over the surface of the world and out into surrounding space in search of sites of subversive activity. Suddenly he was aware of a slight *click* in his ear-phones, followed by the harsh electronic voice of the political overseer.

“*Anything to report?*”

“I think I might be on to something.” Monitor 437 licked

his lips. For the past ten minutes he had been getting faint echoes and was trying to build them into a picture.

"I am waiting."

Sweating slightly, Monitor 437 tuned up his antronoscope. The beams lunged through granite, shale and concrete, searching for all those activities that hide from the sun. "It's underground – Faint, on the edge of my district – Sounds strange –"

"Proceed. I am waiting."

"Underground – A small chamber – Something unusual going on –" Sharpening of images – "It's an operating theatre" – A hint of disappointment entered his voice – "I appear to be observing an organ transplant."

Click. "A what? Repeat that phrase."

"An organ transplant – It's a man-woman operation – They are exchanging gonads with one another –" Monitor 437 felt a thrilling shiver go through him.

The overseer cut him off, its voice chilling and harsh. *"ORG-AN is Fund jargon for institutionalised hostility, otherwise organic animosity – Your use of a subversive term has been noted –"*

"But I didn't mean! –"

Click click – "Mental tendencies are never intentional – Unconsciously you have accepted subversive thought – It has been noted and will remain on record – Stay alert, Monitor –"

Shocked, Monitor 437 opened his mouth to speak – *Click* – he was left alone, sweating and listening with dismay to the pings and cold harmonies of his probes –

TECHNICAL SECTION (II)*

In the jargon of topology as applied to the four colour problem countries are called *faces*, boundaries *arcs* or *edges* and the points where boundaries converge *vertices*. An equivalent presentation of the problem is to replace countries by a net or *graph* consisting of nodes or vertices connected by *arcs* (i.e. lines). In the latter case it is the vertices that are to be coloured. It will readily be seen that any map can be converted into its corresponding graph by taking a

* Readers who are uninterested in mathematics may omit this section without much loss.

point anywhere within each face and drawing connecting arcs through all common boundaries. Since the following arguments are more easily visualised as graphs than as maps, that terminology will be adopted for the most part.

Coloration is of course only a convenient way of grasping the essence of the question, which is one of the *intensity of connectivity*. The degree of inter-connectivity in a map or graph can be measured by the number of colours that are sufficient to colour it. Taking the simplest cases, two connected vertices have 2-connectivity, three interconnected vertices have 3-connectivity, and four 4-connectivity. It will be evident that in such simple cases 4-connectivity is as far as we can go, the enclosure of one vertex by the other three preventing the addition of a fifth :-

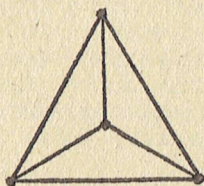


Fig.1

But the above does not prove the four-colour theorem. Consider the slightly more complicated graph :-

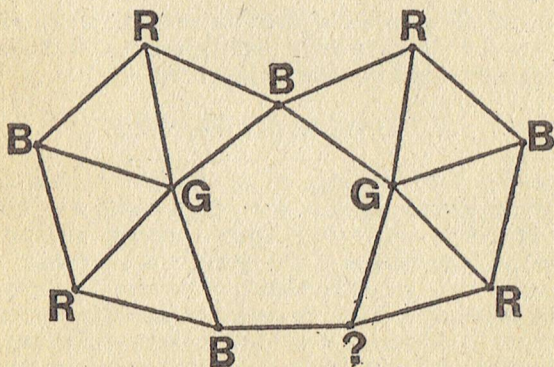


Fig.2

Three colours would be sufficient to colour any small part of this graph, since no more than three vertices are anywhere inter-connected. But when the whole is put together the graph cannot be coloured with less than four colours. By analogy a map or graph might exist that by its complexity transcended 4-connectivity, even though only 4-connectivity was possible in any small part of it. Arguments similar to this one, using maps for which it is artificially presumed that only three colours are available, go as far back as the 19th Century.

A five-colour map would have to be extremely complicated. Much of the work on the problem has consisted of simplifying or contracting graphs by eliminating or merging some of their vertices in order to reduce them to basic structures. Thus if we examine Fig. 2, we see that it contains a ring of vertices around a double axis and that this ring can be reduced without sacrifice of connectivity. The graph would then be coloured:

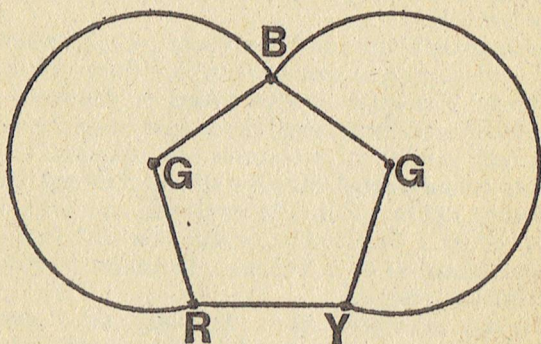


Fig.3

We could also merge the two same-coloured green vertices, reducing the graph to Fig. 1, a planar representation of the 4-simplex, otherwise known as the tetrahedron.

Perhaps the closest attack on the problem is *Hadwiger's*

Conjecture that any graph can be similarly reduced to form a simplex (i.e. the simplest regular figure in any set of dimensions – a line between two points, a triangle, a tetrahedron, a four-dimensional pentatope etc. Since each vertex must be connected to all the others, there is only one simplex per continuum. The nomenclature 2-simplex, 3-simplex, 4-simplex etc. refers to the number of vertices). If true, the Conjecture would imply a proof of the four-colour theorem since it means that a five-colour map could be contracted to a 5-simplex. By the Kuratowski criterion this is not possible, because a 5-simplex cannot be drawn as a planar graph (the arcs would cross one another).

A method other than Hadwiger's for reducing graphs to a simplex can be suggested, one that does not involve any elimination or alteration but leaves the graph intact. Imagine a generalised graph that is to represent all possible graphs, containing an indefinite number of vertices in optimum connectivity, so that if a five-colour graph is possible then this is such a graph. It has already been coloured in the most economical way and therefore possesses either four or five colours.

The next step is to abolish the planar space on which it is drawn, substituting n -space of an indefinite number of dimensions. The graph is then folded or deformed in 3-dimensional or 4-dimensional space (assuming the arcs to be perfectly elastic) so as to collect and separate the vertices into colour-classes, bringing all like-coloured vertices to the same loci or nodes. The result will be a skein in the form of either a 4-simplex (a tetrahedron with four nodes and four triangles) or a 5-simplex (a pentatope with five nodes and ten triangles).

If we now attempt to return the 'simplexified' graph to its original planar continuum (if we like we can first carry the 'simplexification' further by coalescing like-coloured vertices into single nodal vertices and the connecting arcs likewise) we once again come up against the Kuratowski criterion: the tetrahedron can of course be transferred back to the plane, but the five-pointed pentatope cannot. This suggests that the hypothetical five-colour map must possess contradictory properties: it is planar before folding, but it

is not planar after folding, even though it has not been altered in any other way.

The situation might emerge more vividly in a slightly different context. Kempe pointed out that any planar graph is a generalised polyhedron. If represented on a sphere (planar and spherical surfaces are indistinguishable topologically) it can be regarded as 'sculptured sphere', the areas bounded by arcs being carved into flat surfaces. A 5-simplex (pentatope) is not a polyhedron, however, but a polytope, an example of a four-dimensional figure, and it cannot be sculptured from a sphere – or rather, it could only be sculptured from a 4-dimensional sphere (a hypersphere). Neither can its three-dimensional projection, the pentagram, be sculptured from a sphere because some of the arcs would have to pass inside the sphere. So once again we have the contradictory conclusion that a five-colour map, while being *polyhedral* before folding, is *polytopal* after folding.

The question crucial to these considerations is whether the folding could actually take place; or whether the same complexity that led to the necessity for five colours would also lead to the arcs fouling. This snag need not worry us when we have any number of dimensions to play with – the arcs will not foul where there are no interior lines – but the rigours of argument might require that the folding of the five-colour map be carried out not in imaginary four-dimensional space but in real three-dimensional space. Since the three-dimensional projection of the pentatope involves interior lines, the danger of fouling presents itself.

The treatment of the question might be clarified by converting the graph to a network of triangles. This can be done without any alteration of connectivity, simply by filling in additional connections between vertices wherever there are openings. If it can be shown that *all* such networks can be folded without fouling, then this is equivalent to the four-colour problem.*

* Kempe proved that the average number of arcs belonging to a vertex is less than six. The exact average for the above network is $6(n-2)$

Is the four-colour problem a tautology? Very likely. The surfaces to which it refers, those of the plane and the sphere, are known technically as *simply-connected*. The meaning of this is that a single cut will divide them into two separate pieces (whereas it may leave a torus, for instance, in one piece). One example of a 'cut' is a closed curve, which may be defined by taking three points not all on the same straight line and connecting them.

So already we have arrived back at Fig. 1. Any three points define a closed curve separating the surface into two pieces. By the same token the surface we are dealing with is defined by saying that it is such as to be divided by this operation.

But true surfaces do not exist in nature: real space is three-dimensional. Even though the surfaces of solids and liquids *suggest* two-dimensionality to our minds, we must acknowledge them to be projections of our intellects since in actuality they possess depth. It is hard to avoid the proposition that planar space is a mental construction and that in posing the four-colour theorem we are merely restating the conditions whereby we specify such space, namely that it is to be simply-connected. Therefore the four-colour theorem is tautologous.

Maps as message networks: A blue vertex is assigned the colour 'blue' because it is unconnected to any other 'blue' vertex. Conversely we can take the view that it is transmitting to all other vertices to which it is connected the message 'not blue'. They in turn are transmitting to their neighbours (including the blue one) their own negative messages 'not red', 'not yellow', 'not green'.

This concept of information is a useful one. We can see a graph as a dynamic reticulation of information, influences, vectors, messages, spreading and reacting throughout the graph.

The possibility of a five-colour map relies largely upon such a view. At first sight five-colour maps appear to be excluded from possibility on the grounds that a closed curve (a circuit of three or more vertices) divides a simply-connected surface in two and therefore no messages can pass between the two parts. The supposition is wrong, however. Messages of a sort *can* be passed through the barrier

offered by a closed circuit. If, for instance, a vertex-member of a circuit receives the message 'not blue' from outside, then it will be prevented from relaying the same message to the space inside the circuit and will be limited to other colours. Bearing in mind that a map's information universe usually has only four degrees of freedom (red, blue, yellow and green), then by aiming a number of carefully chosen messages at a circuit it would be possible to control the coloration of some vertex lying inside it.

With this in mind, let us examine the conditions that would appertain, in a five-colour map, to the vertex bearing the fifth colour (it is neither here nor there that such a map might offer several alternative sites for the fifth colour). The vertex would be surrounded by a 4-connectivity complex whose immediate adjoinment to the vertex took the form of a closed circuit with the vertex as its central hub. The circuit must contain four colours, and it must be impossible by any shift or arrangement to eliminate one of them from the circuit. Now, a circuit normally need contain only three colours. So the problem becomes one of how messages passing between the members of the circuit could maintain its unique 4-connectivity.

The degree of complexity would be great. The circuit would need to contain hundreds or even thousands of members among whom, with alternative colourings, the colours would run as in a super-kaleidoscope. The back-up graph conveying the messages would probably be even larger. Symbolically, however, we will represent the circuit with only four vertices, one for each colour. The elaborate reticulations and messages that maintain the four colours will be symbolised by dotted arcs (fig. 4a). This is in keeping with our defining of complex combinations in terms of their *connectivity*.

Fig. 4a represents the abstract notion of *informational connectivity*. In other words it portrays 5-connectivity in terms of messages. As a real graph, it is not planar: two of the arcs obstruct one another. Let us deal with the figure as a normal graph for a moment, in order to see how the requisite information might be conveyed between members of the circuit.

Let us approach the problem as being one of how to

convey the message 'not blue' from vertex 3 to vertex 1 through the dotted arc that isolates the latter vertex: -

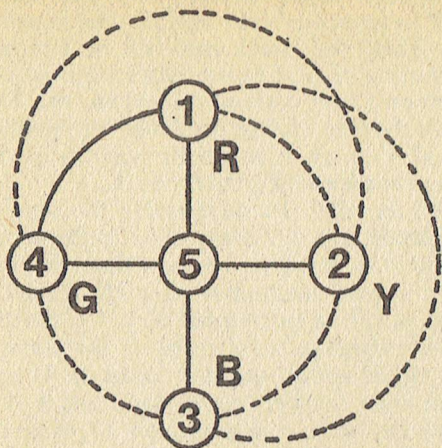


Fig.4a

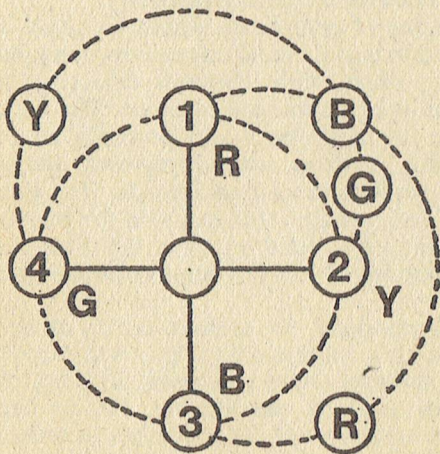


Fig.4b

This can be done (fig. 4b) by inserting a vertex in the intersection of the two arcs. So as to keep other things equal, we elaborate the process by making it part of a red-blue chain stretching between vertices 1 and 3, and also of a yellow-blue-green chain stretching between vertices 2 and 4.

The vertices of the inner circuit are now receiving all the right messages, their coloration is stable, and as far as the fifth vertex at the hub is concerned they are 4-connective. Actually, of course, they are not. Their dependency on the messages received is a false, artificial one for the purpose of demonstration. It might have meaning if we were restricted to two or three colours (as in the 19th Century demonstration) but with four colours available the red-blue and yellow-blue-green chains are arbitrary. What *has* been achieved is to transmit 2-connectivity through a barrier (i.e. through the one separating vertices 1 and 3).

2-connectivity is of a rather low order in an environment where the degree of freedom amounts to four, of course, but it is a very simple graph. More serious is what transpired in the course of the operation. To maintain 2-connectivity between the two pairs of vertices (1 & 3, 2 & 4), a *3-connectivity* chain (yellow-blue-green) was required. The lesson of this is that to transmit 3-connectivity we would need a 4-connected mechanism, and if we wished to transmit 4-connectivity – the precondition for a five-colour map – we would require the aid of a *5-connected* mechanism. In other words the specification for a five-colour map involves an infinite regression. The conclusion is that a five-colour map would have to have an infinite number of faces, and any map with a finite number of faces is inescapably four-colour or less.

(*Note by Congressional Inquiry:* Therefore there is no escape for biologic creatures in conditions of planar-social space-time).

SEND US YOUR HUDDLED MASSES – IF YOU CAN

“So we rounded up a hundred or so citizens and put them together to study what happens when you put people together.” The man from Chicago took careful drags on a butt-end, frowning thoughtfully. “First we gave them the

Teacher Test to make sure they are average citizens* — Then we go on to subject them to a spectrum of situations and conditions, stressful, peaceful, happy, unhappy, ranging from the euphoric to the morbid and watch to see how they behave to one another. Our investigations reveal that social space is planar space, governed by the limitations of the Four-Colour Theorem. You probably know already that nobody can hold more than four objects in his mind at the same time. Likewise, we find that social interconnectivity does not go beyond the fourth integer at any moment in time. Hence social relations follow the dynamic patterns of maps on a plane.”

He threw away the used butt-end, pushed back his slouch hat and began to unbutton his dirty raincoat. Before entering the field of social research he had been engaged on a project to inject mentally deficient children with animal diseases and canine parasites. “The normal social encounter entails 2-connectivity. Mere numbers mean little, by the way. Groups, gangs, circles of acquaintances and whole nations are frequently only 2-connective. A man lecturing an audience is engaged on 2-connectivity because the audience reciprocates to him alone. 3- and even 4-connectivity does also occur, with less frequency. People capable of 4-connectivity become organisers and leaders. Kinky mystic groups have 4-connectivity sometimes, 4-part sex is wild. However if anybody tries to push connectivity beyond the fourth integer the result is disintegration and shake-up into new social pattern. Have you ever noticed how friendships and associations rearrange themselves now and then? Nevertheless we here at Mission Control are experimenting with the human brain, replacing some lobes with cyborg extensions, so as to try to create people capable of the connectivity of the twenty-two paths between the Cabbalistic Sephiroth —” (Were it not that the Great Bird crashed screaming through the barrier and squeezed till the DNA popped) —

* In the Teacher Test a citizen is persuaded that he is helping in an experiment to study the effect of punishment on learning. His task is to inflict electric shocks of increasing severity ‘to another helper like himself’ whenever the latter gives wrong answers to a series of questions. The Teacher Test confirms unequivocally that ‘Mr. Average’ will torture his neighbour to order, bringing him to the point of death and ignoring all his screams and pleadings.

“Psst.” The agent spoke out of the corner of his mouth. “Have procured formula for lowering pressure by means of pain stop: ‘refusal to relay received hurt’ is all and everything of appropriate technique – pass it on to—” A blast of sunlight pulverised the Fund agent to dust swirling down the highway amid diesel fumes – “If anyone’s interested,” cooed a coy voice above the creaking of ovens—

The Great Bird crashed through the membrane and stood screaming – Glittering wings akimbo – Legs thrust out in goose-step rape posture – Eyes blazing and beak agape in terrible grin – *I found a way in* – “Did I say I would repay you for your addictions and allow you to find release in a better land? Unfortunately you do not have the comeback to make me keep my promise and therefore you are *fair game*—”

How had the dynamism of the world placed him here? Ed slouched slumbering against the wall while the man from Chicago went through his pockets looking for pennies – His eyes opened – Sunlight, the Daddy of all geodesic vectors, pounded the rubble of the waste ground – The Bird was explaining, in a voice alternately coy and shrieking, the formulas for stopping and retarding vectors – “Positive reinforcement enables vectors to go forward, negative reinforcement blunts personal force – So tactic is for every move to meet with a sneering NO – What happens to man the world consistently says NO to? – He sinks into miasma of virtual images without even the energy to rush the lifeboat in drag—” Flicker-picture of Central Telegraph Office: the manager, a gaunt figure in frock coat and straggle bow tie, smiles grimly: “Only negative messages of sneering refusal are sent out from here—”

“Life is a series of pressure chambers beginning WOMB, FAMILY, and so on progressively – Trick is to build up pressure unbearable tension of Compulsion-Addiction – Blame so like bacteria the marks ferment poignant liqueurs for our delicate pleasure – Hence our ideology is progressive emplacement of conscious entities into fucking awful situations largely through their own efforts—” The Bird’s laughter shrieked skirling up the electromagnetic spectrum to a background of humming ovens —

“One delightful effect of progressive pressurisation is

explosion of biologic body vector into cancer – Cancer is the ultimate disease, total vector dispersal (hence the intense suffering attached to cancer) – In other words we squeeze till the DNA pops – Apply enough pressure and it will crack every time, the nervous system co-operates beautifully, too, synthesising destructive chemicals in response to stress and spreading them through the body—” The Bird preened, voice fading coyly.

“On Earth we maintain a number of institutions for pressure-cooking the cells and spreading stressful ambiguity, dejection and apathy – As for instance *News of the World*,* one of our most successful cancer-inducing agents—” Creaking steam blasted up at the probing bombers – Burning plane sank down pit with never-ending howl –

“Some among us even advocate abolition of biological directiveness altogether – As you know, my approach is different – Be that as it may, the Anti-Biologic Party recently sent an Expeditionary Force to Galaxy K5, arming its troops with cancer-ray guns – Zap-Zap-Zap – Bodies disintegrate in biologic vector explosions—

“Actually an isolated platoon scouted as far as Earth (Zap-Zap) – However they were machine-gunned to death by the Galactic Gangsters protecting our pitch – Later they were found to be mercenaries in the pay of the Negativity Kings – These lurking non-beings squat sulking like aggrieved totems out at the back of space beyond the reach of perception—” Sullenly over the aeons searchlights of black minus-light played over the dark foothills –

“Lemme do you a Cabbalistic favour—” White light flashed in Ed’s eyes to give subliminal glimpses of the Atziluthal World – Reverberating at the rate of a trillion a second between Binah and Chochmah were transient space-time continua, each one with a unique geometry – Ed knew the Bird was faking it just to keep him hooked—

“Shit!” he croaked harshly, forcing the Bird to flee to Galactic Wastes—

*A mental pollutant in the form of a British Sunday Newspaper specialising in anything that by any twist of posture could be given a sordid or morbid aspect. Its circulation embraces the larger part of the population, with appalling consequences to the mental and physical health of the community.

KINGS OF NEGATIVITY

Weeping and snarling, Professor Gottram flung tangled masses of tape in the faces of his assistants. "Incompetent mother-fuckers! Where were you when the spunk hit the ovum? Copping out, I bet, as don't you always? You've got shit for brains!"

Wearily he rubbed a hand across his fevered brow. "Programme this quick and transmit it subliminally."

Previously Gottram had declared all programmes null and void. The only possible basis for future work lay, he believed, in the form of a final message from a far-out ranging bomber: "Radio contact fading – Future instructions can only be received subconsciously—"

"We still have a field of operations," he announced to his dishevelled crew, "*in the inner landscape of psychic space*. That's where we'll make our maps now . . ."

"Hell," said a buck-toothed young technician, "we got a head start already. I've been reading *Cabbalistic Science Fiction Stories* for years."

"Yes, I've noticed for some time how you techs go skiving into the can to read those trash magazines," Gottram commented. "That's how I know we're going to make it." After space fiction came rockets. So after Cabbalistic fiction . . .*

"Ask me about it," chimed in another youngster. "I know how to equilibrate Yetzirah. Shucks, there ain't nothin' to it. Yesod, Hod, Netzach, then over the Gulf to Tiphareth, base of the Briatic Tree and centre of mystic consciousness. Exploration of the upper paths—"

"You're not reading the adventures of *The Magus with the X-Rays* now," Gottram growled. "This is serious work – a *Cabbalistic Crash Programme*. Get busy with that hardware. Let's see those strobes flickering."

Professor Gottram retired to a secret library of Jungian volumes and ancient, iron-bound books with curses to whoever should open them engraved on their massive seals. In the Mission Control Centre, for long a shambles, chaos

* The Cabbala is a mystic doctrine purporting to map the dynamic morphology of the universe, including the inner landscape peopled by symbols and images.

compounded on chaos as his staff applied themselves assiduously to tracking the paths between Sephiroth:

"We need more computer capacity. We're overloading everything trying to simulate the Seventeenth Path of the Disposing Intelligence—"

"You'll have to arrange the confluences differently—"

"What answer does it give now?"

"Seven of Swords, Lord of Unstable Effort—"

"Could the Invisible Sephira be the answer? Put another process in the Abyss—"

"What does it say now?"

"Five of Cups, Lord of Loss in Pleasure."

An enigmatic, imposing construction rose in the main room of the Control Centre, consisting chiefly of an assemblage of giant discharge tubes and radiant globes, crackling, humming and glowing in all colours. Eerily beautiful hues flickered about the place. The air was heavy with ozone and the buzz of escaping electricity.

A sphere of expanding golden light represented Tiphareth, whose symbol was the sun. "Might try for a bit of hydrogen fusion in there." Rivers of weird light rose and fell in alternation. While at the base of it all solid panels of meter boards and print-outs told them how it was going. The crew-cut young men sat before these boards, watching calmly and glancing up at their electronic Tree of Life.

They beamed the output of the Tree to Chuck, standing on an insulated plate. Spheres of light appeared on him in a sequence, white at the crown of his head, lavender at his throat, red at the solar plexus, blue at the genitals and russet at the feet. Streams of light passed down his left side and returned up his right.

"Man, you look as pretty as a Christmas tree!"

A vast lightning flash connected Heaven and Earth.

In the close confines of the battered radio cabin thick cigarette smoke obscured everything. The two operators, their faces smudged with smoke and cinders, wore 21st Century-style military helmets and listened to their crackling equipment with cynical weariness.

Their post, which was in the rear of the battle zone, overlooked the sea. Recently they had received an almost direct hit from a hydrogen bomb. Only an efficient use of the

appropriate magical images, chiefly the displaying of the Stars and Stripes and a harmonised rendering of 'Turn them Wagons in a Circle' had warded off the main force of the explosion.

— Radio transmission from Galaxy K5, percolating weakly through the atmosphere, pinged and moiréed off the cold, swelling surface of the ocean — The Operator picked it up, one hand to his earphone while he chatted inconsequentially to his buddy —

The message read as follows: //The most penetrating research has shown that there is no hope of escape from environmental conditions // A conscious entity, on encountering Environment, will either conquer it or succumb to it // The Environment is an active Enemy seeking to enter the consciousness of living beings and inhabit them // Calling Biologic Creatures everywhere, we are under attack from the Environmental Enemy // —

"Some new kind of code," the operator said, hearing in his earphone the intermittent crackle and hiss that constituted the message.

"Naw, just interference. These Nuke explosions play hell with the ionosphere."

Despite all efforts on the part of officers and crew, the submarine was steadily filling with water. The influx of the sea was relentless. For a long time the struggle had been waged beneath the swelling waves, and now it was very nearly over.

Messages and commands crackled in clipped, controlled voices along the submerged lines to and from the bridge, the engine room, the torpedo room, the damage control section. The Captain, with the backing of his crew, had throughout stolidly refused to abandon ship. Almost open to the ocean, now, and filled with sea water in all but isolated pockets, the sub lost momentum and began to sink. The escape hatch was inaccessible — There was no decompression equipment, only an inexorable knowledge of the vessel's condition —

The dream of the drowning sub was a recurring one with Ed. Always it brought with it a peculiar sensation of something glimpsed and vanishing. It came to him for the last time during a hypnagogic doze when he lay dying of exposure on a bench facing the sea front.

Said the Chicagoan: "We all go down with the water-filled submarine to crushing depths. As they sink, the crew thinks longingly of flight in space: no resisting medium seeking to enter, only emptiness, free-fall, freedom of motion: nothing to stop needle-sharp spacecraft all alone in the void lancing towards Galaxy K5 –

"Who could describe the euphoria of a spaceship coasting without effort on geodesic in free-fall? In blissful abandonment the crew opens the hatch and empties all oxygen into the void – Sextants, ball-point pens, space helmets, World War II Lugers, stale crusts and torn copies of *The News of the World* tumble into space – Support systems coast timelessly—"

They know different.

All the agents and servants of the Negativity Kings who lurch sneering about the galaxies, all the fawning narks, sidekicks and sycophants, all can tell you different –

"DNA traps you – Womb traps you – Environment traps you – Geometry traps you – Topology traps you – *You* traps you – Submarine disaster stressfully symbolises the situation but contrary to all your wishful poetics anywhere in the space frame is no different however you twist and turn –

"All your Environmental defiance is useless – Space brings need for vector – Vector brings contingency and hazard and all modifying conditions – Contingency brings heat and pressure, brings radiant Moiré patterns of pain – Needless to say whereas underwater vessels may sometimes carry decompression equipment, decompression apparatus that might allow escape from topological space is, in the words of Klaus the Klever Kraut, strictly *verboten*, hence the unforgiving character of space-time dynamic conditions—"

An additional voice broke into the lecture like radio interference, croaking, shrieking, fading – "So you think you can fight His Environmental Majesty? Fools! You are merely impulses we ourselves set in motion, irresistible marks we used to lure the Milky Way Mob into a long overdue showdown—"

In the Mission Control Centre the air was growing murky and lurid. The discharge globes sizzled, giving out vibrations that zoomed up and down the scale from ultrasonics to

infrasound, from radio waves to gamma rays. The connecting wave guides and discharge tubes were hot, colourful and smoking, giving off a haze of mercury vapour. Gottram and his underlings, wearing padded suits because of the increasingly harsh conditions in the hall, doggedly continued their work of charting the collective unconscious.

The base boards were tremendously extended. The system had a life of its own now, beyond the control of its creators, who concerned themselves mainly with metering and interpreting its unpredictable complexities. Constantly they engaged in various projects to achieve a stable configuration in it: the relations between the electronic Sephiroth oscillated in wild states of imbalance. The glowing globes ebbed and strengthened at each others' expense and their compelling hues brought about unexpected changes in the mood of the hall's atmosphere and the feelings of the people working there. Several times powerful infrasound vibrations had picked up operators and flung them bodily across the work space, and had inflicted serious internal injuries on others. At other times workers had been rendered colour-blind by the supernal colour-changes.

"We are getting an exaggerated emphasis of charge down the Pillar of Severity. Can't we put more power into the counter-balancing Pillar of Mercy?"

"Everything we put in gets shunted back to the Pillar of Severity via the Fourteenth Plan of the Illuminatory Intelligence. The Tree is decidedly biased and not in equilibrium."

"There is a dangerously heavy load on the Twenty-Third Path of the Stable Intelligence that we are unable to interrupt."

"Definitely we are being dominated by Binah—"

Gottram frowned and looked worried – You could expect trouble from Binah, the origin of the Pillar of Severity, defined as undifferentiated form or topological space, and whose magical images were the mature woman, the cunt, the cup – The desirable female, the dark sterile mother –

"What readings are we getting now?"

"Eight of Swords, Lord of Shortened Force."

"Ten of Wands, Lord of Oppression."

"Eight of Cups, Lord of Abandoned Success."

"Five of Pentacles, Lord of Material Trouble."

Struggling to handle the outputs of his board, Chuck spoke

with difficulty over the threatful vibrations – “Professor, Binah is taking over – Putting us in contact with the Neutron Star of the Crab Nebula—” (The material of the Neutron Star is of such density that one teaspoonful weighs a hundred million tons – There is no conceivable structure that could withstand its clamping gravitation pull, for which it is aptly nicknamed the Cunt of Binah – Its emission of light heat and radio waves is interrupted several thousand times per second to produce a rapidly pulsing off/on vibration – The space surrounding the Neutron Star undergoes an incredible degree of negative curvature and is swamped, blanketed, by the clattering hum of light and power—)

Hovering amid the discharging branches of the tree, a shadowy form emerged in coloured smoke – A harsh bird-shape, shimmering feathers, outspread wings vibrating with a golden hum, glittering eyes capable of switching up and down the electromagnetic spectrum – “So you are the marks, creatures, addicts of DNA still soliciting for your due back pay? – Forget it there is no escape from your pitiable condition in absolute space-time – Better for you if you surrender yourselves to sucking the beautiful protruding nipples of Binah and Her clamping cunt, as you must—”

DON'T SAY STOP

So I was coasting on geodesic with the examiner on my back watching everything – Vector explodes in glitter of light like cheap firework to send useless ripples across green stagnant pools of the Galaxy – The cry of irremediable loss pines through the emptiness – Fragments of images flicker in your eyes who I knew long ago –

– To harsh electronic voice the falcon hurtles out – The Galactic Carnie explodes in cheap tawdry glitter – With piteous howl the burning bomber hurtles down – The water of the pond is cold and still, the pine trees cast long final shadows – (Flicker of images in your eyes) – Squeeze till the DNA cracks – The message of absolute blame wailed through the desolate spaces of the Galaxy –

A hot wind blew across the plain and went through the deserted skyscrapers with a sound like a foghorn – Lucy

drew up her legs and opened them as far as they would go; closing her eyes she felt the pulse of his fucking – Temporarily he pulled out the hot prick, revealing her red-hot valley – Deliciously her cunt throbbed and creaked, smoking faintly –

“Oh boy!” she breathed, groaning faintly –

– Out beyond Galaxy K5 the Grand Inner Space Fleet riding on a geodesic of deformed sex energy * picked up her message on the special transceiver tuned to ten thousand million vibrations per second –

“Don’t stop,” whimpered Lucy in little-girl voice –

– So to escape exploding Galactic Carnie they bravely manned their lance-shaped spacecraft to go skimming over stagnant green pools – Eventually they were riding majestically on grand sex tensor – Incredible degree of negative curvature – Suddenly broke through all limitations to explore the sex universe – The pulse of his fucking – Next instant mantle fusing continuum hot dense rock –

Professor Gottram smiled quietly to himself, sipping beer in a New York bar. All day long he had been playing the Cabbalistic pin-ball machine.† Putting down his glass on a nearby shelf, he began again.

The steel ball entered the play at Kether and ricocheted rapidly about a trillion times between the powerful springs of Binah and Chocmah.

Then it dropped down to bounce lazily off Geburah and crossed the Veil of the Temple. Using the side-flicks he managed to keep it rebounding for a fair while off Tiphareth, the central stud. The paths were only ten points each. Moving more slowly, the ball crossed the Gulf, swung between Netzach and Hod a number of times, hit Yesod once and disappeared down the slot at Malkuth.

Gottram glanced up to read his score – At that moment

* Because the space-time continuum undergoes deformations in the presence of matter vectors do not travel in straight lines but follow curving worldlines called geodesics – Sex energy is also a continuum and therefore has its own deformations of all degrees of curvature –

† Funnily enough the lay-out of the average pin-ball table resembles the Cabbalistic Tree of Life.

the basalt shifted—Searing wave of mantlar heat—The pulse of his fucking – Next instant mantle closing in, fusing into solid continuum of hot dense rock.

(The Congressional Inquiry was discontinued at this point).

LISTEN LOVE

GEORGE
ZEBROWSKI
&
JACK
DANN

Uheh sat next to the rodasz bush. Its glow cast thin rods of yellow onto her features; the rods changed color one after another, shifting from yellow to red to orange and back again. She stared at the small glowing branches; she felt the numbness of sleep stealing over her. Soon the sun would set and the quiet-time would begin, the time of darkness and rest. The colours swept her away into a whirlpool of sensation, and she fought back. It seemed too soon yet, she must wait; sleep-time was far, far away. She came up close to the bush and brushed her face gently against the delicate branches. She drew back; the plant was trying to lull her to sleep.

Uheh listened. Her large, finely shaped ears gathered in

the small sounds of her world, and she was expert at interpreting them. There were few loud sounds in her experience, and she had been taught to fear them: she knew how to cover her ears with the large palms of her hands and then bring her elbows together until they touched. As she listened now, she heard only the sounds of small living things getting ready for the dark-time. The sun was low over the trees in the distance. The world was at peace, yet she felt fearful.

She closed her eyes and turned her face to the sun, and felt its evening warmth, its quiet embrace which seemed to touch and not touch at the same time. The soft pink skin of her naked form said a silent goodbye to the departing star that was the sun of her world.

Suddenly there was a blast of light, so strong that she sensed it through her delicate eyelids. A rumble came across the distance toward her, but it was only a deep bass sound and couldn't hurt her. She listened to the low pitched sound; it was almost comforting. She sat down on the grass and closed her eyes again. Her entire body tingled to the sound, until it died away and she was almost asleep.

Uheh sat up suddenly, awake again and full of fear. For a brief instant the sound had become shrill and painful, and even the grass around her, the Caghfr green on which she had played since she had been a little girl among the little ones of the kuu, seemed frightened. She looked at the rodasz bush; its color now was a drab green, its glow gone. Did it wake her? Had it been calling her, to warn her? The momentary shrill sound had been so loud. She shuddered and crawled into the vegetation around the the rodasz bush, thinking that it would be a good place to hide; and perhaps she could spend the dark quiet-time here. That would certainly prove to the old ones of the kuu that she had come of age, and was unafraid of the dark quiet-time: the mark of a woman who could begin to bear young. A moment of pride went through her, but it was cut short by what she saw coming across the caghfr grass toward her.

The small flyer settled on the alien grass. Uheh felt the ground tremble slightly under her feet. She peered out from the vegetation; her hand held a branch on the rodasz bush.

The sun was very low when she saw the two figures

get out of the silver flyer. This could not be any kind of calling, she thought. It was too harsh. Dimly she understood that the low sound from before had something to do with the silver flyer now before her. She wondered if the old ones from the kuu were watching this new thing. They would know what it was, and protect her.

The pain-sound came from the new thing and throbbed in her temples for a moment, and was gone.

The two space-suited figures walked on the caghfr grass while Uheh watched. She pushed her head through the branches of the rodasz bush to get a better view, and a leaf touched her cheek, lovingly.

She stood up and made herself visible. One of the figures waved his arm and came toward her. What could she fear from them? They were like her, and yet not like her. She wanted to run toward the flyer, the new thing that had come from the sky; but the voice of her upbringing was strong: be cautious. She looked at the figure who came up to her now, and she wondered why he wore the clear thing over his head. She could see that he was smiling at her, and she could see his teeth; there was a lot of hair on his dark face. surely he did not wear the clear thing to keep warm? He should take it off, she thought, and smiled back at him.

The other one came up behind him, and as if in answer to her thought they took off their helmets. She stared at the strange texture of their skin. The first one was handsome enough to make any in the kuu jealous; yet different. He motioned to her with his suited and gloved hand. Could this be dangerous? He looked so pleasing. Surely he was like her, but from somewhere far off; perhaps from the other side of the blue hills, or the far side of the world? She sat down on the grass and motioned for them to do the same. They hesitated, then followed her example; they put their helmets down on the grass in front of them.

The first one gestured at her strangely and pointed at the sky, and she nodded and smiled her understanding. Then she tried to make the sign of the kuu for them – the sign of her home; but it was difficult without the sandy lakeshore where the elder had first taught it to her. The first stranger smiled at her efforts and looked at his companion.

He was good. She would try to keep him. The elder would

be happy when she brought him home to the kuu. She touched his hand. It was very warm without the glove and she drew back. Then she stood up and gestured him to follow her. She waved the other one away, but he didn't go. Didn't he understand? She was puzzled. All elders made the same rules. Had she done something wrong?

"I think she wants you, and she wants me to clear out," the second one said. She heard the pain sound coming from his mouth, and she put her hands up to her head in pain. The sound was so high, so harsh! So unlike the quiet world that cared for her, nourished her. The pain-sound cut through her entire body and she shuddered uncontrollably. It ran along her nerves and seemed to burst in her head.

"Just like a woman," the first one—(her favorite!)—said.

Run! the world cried to her. The pain-sound became worse; it squeezed her. Could such a sound have meaning? The sun was almost down now, and the dark quiet-time was coming swiftly now. In the sky the stars winked into existence, and would soon march in their promenade from horizon to horizon. The two men were gesturing at her. She saw their lips move and again the pain-sound reached her ears. She turned and began to run toward the kuu, away from the sunset three hills way by the lakeside.

"Hey beautiful, don't go!" — the pain sound followed her. "Come on back!" — it shrieked and screamed across the darkening sky after her.

At the top of the first hill she fell and turned over to look at the starry sky, and felt for the last time the caghfr grass against her back. Her body shuddered again from the pain sound and was still.



All night long the cold snow fell on the roof of the tiny little house in Parsons, West Virginia, the house where Tom Wilson lived. In the morning the dazzling heaps of snow were

everywhere the eye could see, in the pine trees, on the icy pond, like a gigantic blanket of immaculate purity that covered everything.

Somewhere there might be laughter, somewhere there might be song and merriment, but in the house of Tom Wilson a mother lay dying. Time has scattered the snowy flakes on her brow and plowed deep furrows on her cheek — but is she not beautiful now? The lips are thin and shrunken, but these are the lips that have kissed many a hot tear from childish cheeks and they are the sweetest cheeks and lips in the world.

While the fleecy white clouds raced past the sun, a man of careworn aspect—it was Tom—wrung his toil-stiffened hands and divided his glances between the dying woman and the little girl asleep in the trundle bed, whose rosebud lips seemed to be touched by a celestial light. What happier days, vanished or still to come, filled her innocent repose with loving dreams? What foreshadowings of an unearthly happiness did she glimpse?

It cannot be that the earth is man's only abiding place! It cannot be that our life is a mere bubble cast up by eternity to float a moment on its waves and then sink back into nothingness! Else why is it that the glorious aspirations which leap like angels from the temple of our heart are forever wandering unsatisfied? Why should the radiant brightness of human beauty be so swiftly taken from us leaving the thousand streams of our affections to flow back in alpine torrents upon our hearts? There must be a realm, somewhere, where the rainbow never fades!

The scene in which these events took place was the homely cottage of a family that has never known splendor or riches, the dwelling of 'common' people, and yet it possessed a beauty that many a millionaire would have traveled far to find. The simple pine boards of floor and walls gleamed with a radiance that was not the radiance of gold or silver. The patchwork quilt that the woman clutched every so often to her bosom, repressing the spasms of coughing that her little darling might still sleep and dream, had been sewn by those same hands, oh many years before, and though it was somewhat faded and worn, like herself, it was no less beautiful now than at the moment when it had

been only a bright fancy, a vision of butterfly wings and gardens gay with flowers.

Somewhere church bells began to ring, and Tom looked up, like the sleeper who wakes from his dream. Before him on the table lay a stub of pencil and some sheets of lined paper torn from a child's schoolbook. His handsome eyes were darkened by some abiding pain. What thoughts had the tolling of the bell brought to his troubled mind?

The calloused fingers, which have known for so many years the honest grip of a miner's drill, picked up the pencil clumsily. Can he hope to set down on paper the tumult of emotions that is in his heart? Biting his lower lip with intense concentration, he began to write:

Feathers from the Wings of an Angel

A True Story by Tom Wilson.

There he paused. The little figure has arisen from the trundle bed and stretched two precious arms in the clear morning light. Her blue eyes — they were her mother's eyes — turned trustingly to his, and whispering she asked: "Is Mother still asleep?"

Despite the start of pain her innocent question awakened, he answered with a smile. "Yes, my love. We must try and be quiet."

"And will—" A tear rolled down from one of those blue eyes. "—and will she soon be well again, Poppa? Like she used to be?"

"Yes, my darling, soon she will be much . . . much better."

"Why then you have the medicine! Oh Poppa, how happy we shall be!"

Tom shook his head sadly. "No, my love. As I have told you, I cannot get the medicine unless I have money. And—" His strong voice choked with sobs.

"And there is no work for you. I know."

"Because the mine is closed, you see."

"The mine has been closed so very long, Poppa. When will it open again?"

"Soon, my darling, soon."

The little girl pressed her pale cheek against the single pane of glass that looked out across the snow-jeweled hills. "The window is so cold this morning," she said in a puzzled voice. "As though it had turned to ice."

"It snowed last night, my dear child, and now the window is frosted."

The child sighed. "Ah, the snow! How lovely it must be, all white and gleaming! How I should love to be able to see the snow!"

Then the whole sunless, darkened life of the fair little being came up once again before Tom's mind. All beauty shut from her forever! For her no foliage-strewn, flower-studded scene to follow the bleakness of winter. No looking with awe into the mysterious depths of the night sky, sparkling with glittering, twinkling star-gems, for over those blue eyes the Creator, in the mystery of His designs, had hung the impenetrable veil. No expectant gaze toward the mother's face for the gentlest smile that ever soothes a childish trouble; only the blind passage of the little hand over and over those features, for one moment's sight of which the little one will often and often willingly offer years of existence.

And yet to think that sight might be hers! To think that the sun *could* rise to banish that endless night! But if Tom could nowhere find the few dollars that would save the life of his darling's mother, how was he to provide the thousands that were required for the delicate optical surgery? Ah, the torture of these vain hopes! Nevermore must he entertain these painful yearnings!

Unless . . .

Once again his eye sought out the printed announcement tacked to the wooden boards of the wall, a page torn from LIFE Magazine. The renowned publication was sponsoring a *story contest*, and the writer of the winning story was to receive a prize of \$10,000.

\$10,000! It would be enough to provide the very best medical attention for his wife *and* the operation that would restore his daughter's sight.

Tom was no storyteller. He had only one story he could tell, and that was the story of his life. But if he told that story honestly and truly, surely there was a chance that it might win its way to some sympathetic heart? Oh, it was a desperate hope — he knew that — but it was the *only* hope he possessed.

With one more fond glance at the two beings he loved most

in the world, Tom once again took up pen and began to set down, in simple heartfelt words . . . the story of his life. At first the words came slowly, and he feared he would never be able to write it all down in time. For the deadline was January 1, and this was . . . yes, this was Christmas morning!

"Tom?" It was the voice of the dying woman, hushed, and yet one knew there was great strength in that voice, and natural dignity.

"Yes, my dear heart?"

"Are you writing the story for that contest?"

"I'm trying to, but I fear I wasn't born to be a writer. There are so many people cleverer than I."

The woman was racked with a deep cough, and then she spoke again. "Tom, you must promise me you'll finish that story and mail it to New York. No matter what happens. Lying here this morning and listening to the church bells, I felt a strange sensation, a feeling I cannot explain. It was as though, somewhere, a wonderful promise had been pledged to me. But I know this, Tom — you must write that story, you *must*!"

Tom nodded, fighting to keep his voice steady. "I promise you, my love. For your dear sake I *will* finish my story."

The woman smiled.

And now the words seemed to pour out onto the paper like a mountain torrent, and, with them, more than a single tear.

The clouded light of another morning was streaming through the magnificent French windows of an elegant penthouse apartment in New York City, where a man and a woman were sitting at a long table laid with silver and fine linen. Nothing could have been more different from the uncalculating simplicity of Tom Wilson's rude home than this abode of wealth, and yet there was a chill in the air of these vast rooms that no central heating devices could ever dispel. It was the chill that settles upon hearts that have forgotten how to love.

The man and woman, both of middle years, sat without speaking. Sometimes the woman would lift her eyes to the

man's face, as though about to break the silence, but each time the stern cast of his features prevented her words, and she returned her unhappy gaze to the cup of tea steaming fragrantly before her.

The man was glancing hastily through a pile of papers laid out by his secretary for his attention. What he read in these papers seemed greatly to displease him, for he cast them aside, one after another, with always the same grunt of displeasure. After several such disappointments, he picked up a thick sheaf of papers fastened together with a pin and laughed. "Now, will you look at this!"

The woman glanced up at him expectantly.

"A manuscript handwritten on lined paper! And there isn't even a stamped and self-addressed envelope! Someone must be playing a joke on me." He tossed it at the wastebasket, but it fell short and lay face up on the expensive brocade carpet.

"Aren't you even going to look at it?" the woman inquired.

"If I looked at every manuscript that came in looking like that, I'd be kept at it till Doomsday." He laughed with chilling cynicism. "There are thousands of stories that come in thus, untyped, ink-splattered, with errors of grammar. The secretaries are paid good money to weed them out."

The woman sighed. "I suppose you're right. Although—" Her voice dropped to an inaudible whisper, "—it does seem a pity."

The man continued with his work, which seemed to consist of no more than leafing through sheets of neatly typed papers contemptuously and shifting the pile that stood on the right hand side of his plate gradually to the left hand side. The woman remained at the other end of the table, although her tea had grown quite cold in its delicate porcelain cup.

She shivered suddenly, as though the abiding chill of the room had penetrated to her very heart — or *as though a ghostly hand had been laid upon her shoulder*. She lifted her eyes once again to look at her husband's face, and as she did so she glimpsed, floating down in graceful arcs from the ceiling of the room, *two feathers of dazzling whiteness*. She traced their descent with a bewildered admiration,

unable to imagine how these two feathers could have found their way into the dustless, filtered air of her city apartment.

The feathers settled gently on the topmost page of the discarded manuscript. The woman arose from the glittering table and approached the papers lying on the carpet.

"Oh, don't bother with that," the man advised, glancing up. "The maid will take care of it."

But the woman stooped down as though she had not heard, and there was something like reverence in this gesture. In just such a way would a woman long unaccustomed to prayer bend her knees and clasp her hands at that moment when the scales have fallen from her eyes. She brushed aside one of the feathers to read the title of the manuscript, and again that same ghostly shiver ran through her.

"Feathers," she whispered softly, "from the wings . . . of an angel." And though it had been many long years since *she* had believed in angels, not indeed since her own dear angel had been taken from her, she began to read.

When she had finished, her eyes were filled with tears. Her husband was just rising from the table, having expressed his contempt for all writers and everything they have ever written.

She laid the tattered manuscript before him and said, in a voice at once stern and pitying: "My dear, I beseech you, by the love of one who was dearer to you than anyone in this world, do not leave this room until you have read this story."

The man looked up at her strangely, for it was an unspoken rule between them that *that* loss should never be named between them. Then, he began to read.

Many snowfalls had covered the roof of the little cottage in West Virginia, and many times the sun had risen unseen by those blue eyes Tom Wilson held so dear. January had come and gone, and February too. Every day Tom has trudged along the long snowladen road into town to ask if maybe there is a letter for him today, and each day his only answer is an impatient shake of the head, and when he has asked at the grocer's for credit to buy a bit of flour and lard he has received the same answer. Each day it is a

harder and harder task for a little girl to bring a smile and a word of good cheer to her father's lips, for her innocent heart does not comprehend that to do this she must hide her own tears!

"And was there no mail today, Poppa?" the dear one asked, as she heard the rude door open and felt the icy blast across her withered cheek.

"Not today, my precious, no."

"Surely, then, it will come soon. Last night I dreamt that an answer would come today. Is it wise, do you think, to believe such dreams?"

"If we do not believe our dreams, my pet, there is very little left to believe in."

Even the child could recognize the bitterness concealed in these words, and she could think of no reply. She struggled up from her little bed, where her father made her stay in order to keep warm in the unheated cabin, and found that dear rough hand which she pressed to her own feverish lips. Tenderly her father wrapped the quilt about her shivering body and sat with her so throughout the long winter afternoon.

At dusk the snow began to fall anew, and Tom rose to prepare a simple supper of cornmeal mush fried in the last of the drippings. There was but a scant inch of meal left at the bottom of the tin. After that was eaten . . . He dared not think ahead to that dreadful day.

After the frugal supper – the child could not, of course, see that her father ate nothing himself – they resumed their places before the empty fireplace.

"Tell me again, dear Poppa – what shall we do when you have won the contest? Tell me of the lovely clothes I shall wear, and all the wonderful places we will visit together. Tell me of the rainbows and flowers and butterflies I shall see then."

Tom raised his hands to his head, like one distracted, and, all unbidden, a long groan rose from the depth of his being.

"Poppa! Poppa! What is the matter? Surely you do not think that . . . You read me your story, and it was so beautiful! Surely when the editors at LIFE Magazine read it, why then . . ."

"Do you really believe that, my love?" Tom asked, still

unable, despite a mighty effort, to repress a tone of bitterness.

"Mother believes it will, and therefore *we* must."

Tom raised his eyes to the single candle that flickered on the table. "Yes, of course," he agreed in chastened tones. "*We must.*"

At the very moment that Tom said this there came a heavy pounding on the door.

"Oh, Poppa! Who can that be? Is it . . . When I dreamed . . . No, it must be some wayfarer who has lost his way in the blizzard. How fortunate that he has found his way to our door!"

Tom opened the door to admit a familiar figure in a blue uniform – it was the postmaster! He handed Tom a Special Delivery letter. Tom opened the envelope with hands that trembled as much from excitement as from hunger, for he knew that this letter would answer all his hopes – or destroy them.

Like some great radiant feather, the check for \$10,000 fluttered to the floor, but Tom's attention was fixed upon the letter that accompanied this check.

The letter read:

"My dear Mr. Wilson,

"My husband, the director of LIFE Magazine, has asked me to write this letter for him to inform you that your story, 'Feathers from the Wings of an Angel' has won first place in the LIFE Magazine story contest. I wish to congratulate you on his behalf, but even more, Mr. Wilson, I want to thank you for having awakened in the hearts of my husband and myself – and, I am sure, in the hearts of all future readers in ages to come – an ineffable and enduring sentiment, a pang of yearning sympathy and of a sorrow sweetened by the hope of some future happiness in the beyond.

"There may be those who affect more artificial and 'advanced' views of life and duty than yours, Mr. Wilson. Among two hundred millions the vast sea of public opinion must be foam-tipped, as well as underlain by ooze and decaying matter, but the mighty depths are crystalline, pure, and unvexed. The judges of the contest have not awarded the prize to you according to arbitrary standards of 'literary taste' and deceiving brilliance, but because your true life-story seeks out the latent, earnest emotions of myriads of

readers of LIFE Magazine. Your story has heart-value and heart-value is in the end the supreme test by which men and art must fail or become immortal.

"Yours – with love and gratitude,

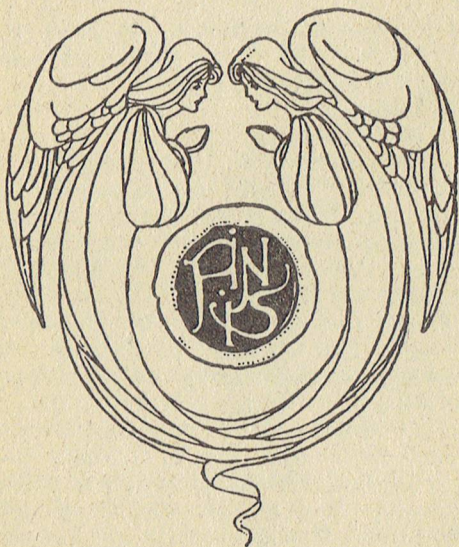
"A Mother"

Tears fell from Tom Wilson's eyes – tears of happiness and joy.

"Poppa! Poppa! Tell me . . . is it—?"

"Yes, my darling, my own, my dear love, it is! We have won the contest sponsored by LIFE, and you shall live to see . . . to see . . ."

Tears of sorrow streamed from the face of the blind child. For though she knew that she would live to see many beautiful things, it would never be given to her to see that most beautiful sight of all – a mother's loving smile.



MONITOR

FOUND IN ORBIT

Michael G. Coney

... years ago, the railway station used to be here.

(Cab, sir?)

No, thank you ... you said walk, take the back lanes like we used to, left a little down the road and under the low bridge, headroom 10ft 6in on a stained plate once white. blackened handrails on the top perhaps to keep the train upright if it toppled as it ambled round the sharp curve screeching slowly out of the station towards Brixham, blue slate roofs and seagulls, tolling bells Abide with Me.

Churston Links Hotel, ha, used to be called the ... Station Hotel? what's the difference but I wish something was the same. God this is going to be a long walk four-five dusty miles cowshit fences stiles uphill something to be said for the monorail. on time too ... timetable flyblown on dirty brick wall chuff engine 4839 GWR 0-4-2T one coach autotrain sepia photograph Aberystwyth penalty for improper use £5. idiotic occasion I forgot the door opened inward ... only passenger and had to shout from the open window at Churston platform grinning porter greasy cap GWR not the first person to get caught that way, sir. stranger in these parts?

they've widened the road and the old grey houses have gone. this must be the left turn it all looks different come in the back way you said look like an ageing hippy everyone in Brixham is an ageing hippy these days you said except for young hippies the back lanes are full of them camped out ... why are you so set on secrecy why a phone call so cryptic???

secret 17th October blastoff backup Marsparty *fait accompli* good job *they* don't know . . . blackcloak black-furhat carrying blackbomb like cannonball with string fuse fizzing.

now this lane is the same narrow winding, tall unkempt hedge sprouting from red soil, stepping back into the past a long way time from the laboratory. glimpse of cows through hedge, honest ancient cows browneyed chewing glancing back as I walk past; when did I last see a cow? smell the same, warm sun cool breeze the same and the September trees rustle gold coins between misers' fingers before scattering them grudgingly in the road before me.

late September in the South West remember the last days of the school holidays before you had to return to useless narrow education and I to the wider field of science? strange how clear it all is from the time platform of this winding lane and how I can almost hear your voice chattering John Hartington said this and Giles Jones said this and are they right Dad, is it true you're the greatest ph-phycist in all the world? I slapped your shoulder and said let them think that, son – and you too, because childishly I sought my own child's approval and needed it badly then, after Laura went . . .

and you grinned but I somehow knew you weren't impressed so just about this spot I picked up a stone and when we rounded that corner I threw it and clang smack in the middle of low bridge headroom 10ft 6in raining rust (Bet you couldn't do that again, Dad.)

here's a stone what the hell nobody's around wonder if I can do it again after forty years. damn this eye this back feeble fingers look like rotting twigs groping one-eyed got it! stage one complete, all systems go. (rising tearing like knife through paper clouds it's mine, it's all mine and I haven't entirely failed whatever Laura thinks . . . fair hair blue eyes like Paul but stupid, so damned stupid called me cold fish.)

I know I can do it. rough, round in my hand, not too heavy or too light and flattened it will swing to the left allow for this. hurry, just around this corner, four three two one . . .

it's gone! overgrown embankment left right lane through middle gaping hole old socket in toothless gum. stone walls

green leprous lichen on either side of lane capped by long broken brickwork bridge gone headroom infinity. no respect for personal ancient monuments. God, can't they leave anything?

(Hello!)

Oh, hello, young lady . . . brown eyes and hair dirty long sweater jeans.

(I said, are you feeling all right?)

I just thought I might take a rest beside the bridge, in the shade . . . puzzlement pretty knitting of brows.

(What bridge?)

This — when did they pull the bridge down?

(Was this a bridge once?) standing leaning on one arm outstretched against stone wall nice breasts nice teeth no fear of ancient one-eyed horror before her, if I were a lot younger I would like to put my hand on her *there* but there's no point now . . .

Years ago, it was. I haven't been here for forty years. It's all changed . . . like myself. to her the bridge has always been a socket maybe she's right. she smiles inverted rainbow resolved back into white light . . .

(What happened to your face?) candid curiosity.

I had an accident at the laboratory a year ago.

(You some sort of scientist?)

accident . . . late afternoon sun shafts dust particles humming Andrews whistling test bench. look can you do without me for a moment Dr. Bland? white back departing bend to minor adjust circuits pliers twist FLASH pain painpain-pain — ceiling white. how are you feeling, Dr. Bland? how long about three weeks we'll soon have you on your feet again smooth voice must warn you plastic surgery extensive facial burns lucky saved sight of one eye, where am I? Sunnysdale Nursing Home the very best in good hands, back at work as soon as possible they tell me work important honour to have you, Dr. Bland . . .

good to see you back, James, don't worry about expenses the Conservative Government looks after its own, ha ha, carry on just where you left off . . .

just where I left off? God, man, I'm ugly! deformed . . . how can you bear to look at me I can see from your face it's not easy.

Yes, I'm a scientist . . . she looks at me as though I'm normal but more interesting than most I reckon she's eighteen . . .

(Fix me, a mad scientist in our midst. When did you blow in, Grandpa?)

I'd rather you called me James.

(Suits me, Jim. I'm Suzy. Why not come and meet the gang?)

Why not? if it's on my way, a group of people like her . . . unconventional appearance is conventional I'd be pleased to conform just for an hour . . .

I feel better it's surprising how an unexpected encounter can freshen the outlook and for an hour I've not thought about you this is the stile, surely, where we buried the halfpenny? three o'clock time's getting on God I remember how I used to vault this thing. there. now, was it down here just beside the second post seamed pitted timber now *this* hasn't changed in forty years. here's a good flat stone now scrape away mind the dogshit wait let's pull this tuft of grass away first. ah. now scrape and dig, scrape and dig . . .

it was hot that afternoon too and you had been chasing the little blue butterflies as we walked the lane back from Broadsands and I was looking forward to a pint of Simond's. there were lizards in the warm grass, little brown bastards that I kept thinking were adders when I saw them flicker and it scared me every time you ran in the grass because they say adders come out on hot dry days. they say stab the bite with a knife and suck it but I hadn't got a knife. a match will do then, they say, strike it and jam it against the wound as it flares oh God how could I do that, I would just have to pick you up and run run like hell for the town and the doctor who would likely have run out of serum. steady, take it easy it didn't happen it didn't HAPPEN.

deeper now scrape and dig against the rough rotting timber ants centipede legs ah! wipe it, wipe it . . .

GEORGIUS VI D:G:BR:OMN:REX F:D:IND:
IMP

IND: IMP? ha! . . . over.

HALFPENNY 1942

picture of three-masted ship is it the Mayflower? damned

if I know . . . they launched a replica from Brixham . . . Uphams' . . . careful now I'm getting old but don't think of Upham's yet . . .

but that coin has been there for forty years and at the time I thought it was a good idea let's bury a halfpenny as a memento of this summer but you were young and thought there would be more summers and anyway you were more interested in Birmingham with friends your own age and your mother. Laura . . .

and you said why, Dad? and the sun flamed in your hair as you looked up at me. I could see Laura in your blue eyes hiding behind them possessing your mind like an alien . . .

despite this, I loved you Paul, back in that late summer of 1942.

God, I'm tired . . . my eye aches it's a sure sign I've been overdoing it. surely, at the top of this rise . . . green close grass springy amid gorse, it must have been here that I carved your name in the turf with a sharp splinter from a light ale bottle I broke against a tree, and you looked on for once delighted as the recognisable symbols appeared. the next summer, when you couldn't come, I came alone for a farewell visit and someone had erased it – other names were still etched in the grass but yours had gone; just a barren rectangle of red soil in the emerald . . . but they left the halfpenny.

yes, the top now blue sea sparkle and across the bay Torquay white blocks white sails high rise apartments higher and denser but otherwise much the same and far from reality. why bother with Mars, when there is Earth? and here is the last stile worn stone centuries standing shadows by sloe tree remember sickening attempt to make sloe gin?

of course this lane too is flanked by high-rise apartments what did I expect? the dusty track is the same however, and here is a corner of the past, a cleft in the rocks where the rocky footpath precipitates to the beach through a tunnel of leaves. the sound of the beach under my feet scrunch on the shingle the tide is out but the exposed rocks are no longer bewigged with weed, the efficacy of pollution's purge. kick a stone and under the crabs have evolved, now flat and white anaemic covered with white slime. how can I say this is

worse? they are still there, and in their pennyflatness they appear happy.

screams in the night and I run to your bedside. I can't lie out straight, you say; there's a nest of crabs *here* and another nest *there* and I have to lie all twisted otherwise they will get me. so, we take care not to turn stones any more, and next night the bed is full of ants, huge red ants which materialise in the glow of your frightened sleepbank eyes and I make to brush them off and say it's all right now go back to sleep and I kiss your cheek then because I can't do it while you're awake . . .

the past is beneath this arch and the footworn stone steps climb up to the overbright future in the sudden sunshine. now the path leads among bushes and across a sloping common where the gulls once danced like whirling ballerinas to the music of the trawler's diesel as the redstaysailed boats Belgian and British throbbed through the outer harbour. then the bombs had fallen and the dead fingers of drowned boats projected in frozen surrender above the surface, and against the breakwater a destroyed tanker too huge to sink lay half immersed rotting like a soldier in a rainy trench.

and across the water where the arm of the breakwater joins the shoulder of land which becomes Berry Head, there is Uphams' . . .

(Can I help you, sir?)

Yes, I'd like a room for the night.

(Certainly. Would you like to sign the register?) . . . pencil eyebrows and artificial Eurasian complexion well-cut lightblue suit she'd be more in place as an air stewardess, wasting her time in this little inn maybe she's the daughter.

Right . . . God it takes so long to get my pen out sign of age damned if I'll use the thick phallic thing this china doll is offering me . . . I don't suppose - You don't have anyone else by the name of Bland staying here? My son, actually.

(Wait a moment . . .) you don't fool me young lady this place is small you know the name of every guest.

(No . . . No, we don't seem to have another Mr. Bland staying with us at present . . . Fine. I'll get George to show

you to your room. Dinner from 7.30 to 10 o'clock) porcelain airline smile.

Nice room. George, cosy small floral pattern old fashioned handbasin in corner john down the creaking corridor apparently. and bath, I could do with a bath . . . he's as old as me . . .

(Is this all your luggage, sir?)

Yes, thank you. Here you are . . . Er, where's the . . .

(Outside and second on the left, sir. Pull steady; don't jerk it. there's a knack. It's old, you see . . . Will that be all, sir?)

Thanks. the window . . . the window looks over the harbour white bright yachts hovercraft masts antennae like crowded saplings not a sign of a fishing boat commercialism gone mad people ambling around the quayside hippies mostly all shapes and sizes weird wonder how Suzy's getting on said she's bring the gang in for a drink. is that PAUL medium height swinging past seafood shop would I know you? of course I'd know you it's only been twenty years you're fifty now. ten, thirty, fifty; twenty year gaps between seeing my own son what sort of a relationship is that? and now I'm sixty-eight and to hell with medical science average male expectancy eighty I feel old and damned tired. God, I'll retire next week no matter what Suskinn says. I'll say it was the accident I haven't been the same since, the same! what's the good of another twelve years alone with a face all shot to pieces and half blind?

you were thirty when you came to see me with Gerda, thirty after twenty years of occasional stilted correspondence but no meeting; this is Gerda, you said, we were passing through and thought we'd drop in it's been a long time how are you feeling Dad? hello Gerda I said I'm pleased to meet you, you too Paul . . . are you still—?

yes, you said, face defensive Berlin wall I'm employed by Them as you call them why the hell not? I explained in my last letter it's all different now, their system is as good as ours. they let me *out*; I suppose you thought I was imprisoned in a lab behind the Wall watched day and night by jackbooted furhatted toughs?

something like that, I admitted. oh, so things are different relations between West and East good except China, don't

tell me they sent you to co-operate, exchange views or spy or whatever you call it.

face blank you said Dad I'm not pretending I'm as bright as you and O.K. so we could use you on our side, but this is just a vacation you see they *trust* me and I trust them. they know I'll come back because I believe in them; they need no hold over me.

I said: but it would be safer from their point of view if they had some sort of hold over you – after all, that's the way they work and you're English and a security risk.

so after a while we dropped the subject and talked about your research which was microrecorders and you were offended when I called them bugging devices so we talked of old times and there wasn't really very much to say so Gerda helped us out and got us talking about your family and it appeared I was a grandfather twice over . . . Gerda was nice, German, red hair and green eyes unusual face and I was happy that you were still in love with her. she said your work kept you away from home a lot but you managed to get every other weekend together; you were hoping things would improve.

it was very strange the way you went, you said bye then Dad see you some time Gerda and we shook hands and you left Gerda with me. I watched you leave from the window and there were *two* cars outside my house and as you pulled away a third car nosed round the corner and drove away behind you. the car left outside was Gerda's and she and I talked some more and we hit it off well; she told me all about the children Mark and Jenny. it seemed the most natural thing to ask for her address when she went, and she wrote it down for me:

ALBERTSTRASSE 18, KASSEL.

Gerda had made you come, you didn't want to, I realized that.

then she went and it was only afterwards that I looked up the map and found that she lived in West Germany and suddenly I understood the infrequent weekends and I wondered what sort of hell your life had been over the last few years and that in spite of your caution it was possible they *did* have that hold over you, should they ever need it . . . but you were too proud, or too scared, to come back to us.

astonishing how vivid recollections can be 8 o'clock must get down to dinner I've been standing here for hours bath later . . . white table squared dining room chequerboard dark brown furniture dim lights smooth maitre d'.

(Just yourself, sir?)

That's right . . . Christ that's the story of my life since the summer of '42 was it my fault Laura blue eyes left?

(Over here, sir.)

clinical arrangement bright silver white cloth I look scruffy feel dirty do I smell? dirty old man sitting alone at table by Whistler. beautiful full-colour reproductions of this realistic scene available FREE to every customer of the Waterside Hotel, Brixham, hurry, hurry before he putrefies and the life-like skin-tones fade.

Thank you, I'll have the soup and the roast lamb to follow . . .

this place is half empty, I suppose the season's finishing I wonder if they close during the winter and the place ceases to exist maybe that's what happens to all Brixham. I've never been here in winter nor anyone I know – do they switch the place off on September 30th together with all the hippies; go into suspended animation for a few months . . .? Suzy frozen at crisis of orgasm locked under bearded Stan grimacing in extremity of delight for six months' layover it would kill them both.

(Excuse me, sir . . .)

And all those cats suspended in mid-yowl . . .

(Excuse me, your soup, sir. Are you feeling all right, sir?)

Oh, sorry . . . Thanks. Daydreaming, I guess. I'm quite all right . . . canned coup, I might have known. made from contented sun-ripened summer-picked fresh-frozen and freeze-dried tomatoes, lurking in the white plate revoltingly red like the yolk of the morning-fried egg at the feast of the Hangover . . .

(Have you finished with the soup, sir?)

Yes, thanks . . . Ah, is the lamb local?

(I'm afraid I wouldn't know, sir.)

. . . no of course you wouldn't and why the hell should it matter, it's a sign of age when you start getting fussy about food why should Prime Devon Roast Leg of Lamb be

different from Prime anything else except that it did say Devon on the menu and the waiter should be prepared to stick to his guns . . .

think I'll take a stroll heavy stomach walk some of it off, can't think on a full stomach. outside cool air night sounds and apart from hippies and hovercabs the place looks the same as it did forty years ago. even William of Orange still landed near this spot although he's looking a bit broken up about it these days and the inscription on his plinth is chipped. odd wording like empty eyesockets in the reflective granite – lengthy sentence finishing I WILL MAINTAIN Germanic phrasing but sounding like punch-line so I always forget what went before, very formal people the Germans wonder what Gerda is doing right now I don't suppose you brought her . . .

hovercabs hovercabs but the harbour looks good and the oily weedy smell is the same like the bilgewater in that launch when I thought you'd enjoy mackerel fishing. we trailed two lines across the outer harbour and I went too close to the bombed tanker because I didn't realise quite . . .

and above the surface the stern stood proud so I cut in front and there . . . we saw the cabins which sailors had lived in half full chairs floating and further down dimly as I looked horror I saw the long submerged deck rippling through the dark water not just dead but alien and eerie and worse lying on the deck was a prosaic broken lavatory basin cracked and grinning up like a skull. I had to look away and look up at the sunlit harbur and the sleek fat MTB's and busy dinghies ropebeltd to know again that life existed and that frightful underworld was after all only three fathoms down . . .

then at the end of the breakwater just off the lighthouse you caught a mackerel and the afternoon was finally ruined. as the boat rolled to the sudden surging unshielded sea you cried Dad I've got a fish! and I pulled in the line for you hand over hand in loops dripping here comes the weight and flash beneath the surface is the mackerel. dripping and flailing and sparkling greenback silver I dropped it into the bucket while you screamed with fear because you didn't realise they were so *big*.

thump thump it thrashed in the bucket and you watched

transfixed then suddenly it leapt out and slithered flapping along the boards gaping. gaping red-mouthed towards you. and you screamed again . . . and again all the way back to the quay.

in that summer the quay reeked of fish but now the industry seems to have died although I see they advertise fishing trips for fun despite pollution. they rebuilt the old corrugated iron roofed market but now it seems to be used as a meeting place seafood stalls and late summer tourists milling around being rooked. Oh –

walking towards me now fast it looks like YOU changed much older face hard with worry in the sodium light have you seen me?

Paul . . . my heart, stop thumping.

(Wait here, I'll be back.) face averted don't they even allow you to acknowledge your own father; here they come three of them moving dark inconspicuous trotting hyaenas as you almost run around the corner and up Fore Street.

has it been like this for twenty, thirty years? always with dark men at your shoulder dressed for the city wherever they are I wonder what *they* think as they pad along in your tracks waiting for one error to bring you down then they move in to scavenge. because I think you're dead once you make that mistake; what the dark men do to you afterwards is inevitable a formality a cleaning-up. the body of a middle-aged man was discovered last night in an alley off Fore Street, Brixham, Devon. the police have not ruled out the possibilities of foul play . . . and behind the hackneyed phrases lies you, Paul, whitely staring at the sky like the mackerel you once screamed at . . .

(Father . . .) God, you made me start.

(Take this, put it in your pocket – hurry, you fool!) what's this an envelope. fumble it away you called me a fool I don't like that but what the hell I know who's the fool . . .

(Now listen carefully. Our previous arrangement stands. Midnight in Uphams' yard beside the Torbay Queen; they've laid her up for the winter.)

The envelope, Paul. What about the envelope? . . . try to think fast play the game his way he's in more trouble than I thought.

(Hide it in your room – no, give it to the receptionist to put in the safe.)

But what is it?

(Insurance. See you later . . . Bye, Father.)

. . . he's gone. oh, my son, what sort of a game are you playing? midnight in Uphams' insurance in safe it's all like some kids' dramatic show, primary school Requiem for a Spy I do hope you'll be able to come, Mr. Bland, the children have put so much into the play they've been rehearsing for weeks and bring Mrs. Bland along too; Paul will be thrilled.

but by then there was no Mrs. Bland and Laura was called Mrs. Brinkley or some such damnfool name but Paul never told his teacher that at least he stuck to his own name . . .

pleasant dimly lit bar beer cigarette smell buzz of conversation broken by occasional macaw screams of demented laughter. thump of darts and clack of dominoes and advert for good Olde English beer brewed by master brewers established 1781 who would guess that ICI took them over ten years ago?

(Sir?) red faced archetypal barman smiling heartily worth his job on appearance alone bet he suffers from piles and nagging wife smiling through his tears there's No business Like Show Business Annie Get Your . . .

Pint of Keg, please. pasteurised in ten-gallon aluminium canisters delivered to your glass by courtesy of British Oxygen a foaming tankard of good health. looks good, too.

Thank you . . . now, find spare place to sit . . .

(Hi, Jim!)

oh, Suzy and rabble of friends crowded hairy in corner . . .

Hello there . . .

(Jim, you know Stan; this is Jack and Skip and Mary and . . .) many more besides I'll never remember this lot. polite, though, the topcoat of civilisation is not completely weathered by circumstance, I suppose they must *love* people . . .

(Suzy tells me you're some kind of scientist. the voice of the eager bearded youth rings too loud in one of those sudden bar silences which they say occur at twenty before and twenty after each hour. which proves how right they are

because it's ten twenty and I meet you in exactly one hundred minutes. God I seem to be the focus of attention and that old dear with the Guinness is expecting me to whip a warhead from under my coat . . .

That's right . . . talk quietly and maybe they will too . . .

(I'm a physics student at Exeter University, sir. Second year . . .) respect is showing in his gleaming eyes I hope he doesn't want to talk shop his eyes look fanatical but maybe it's drugs or the light; I can't see his face for hair and acne . . . (It's fascinating, sir. What do you do, exactly? Research?)

Ah, yes, actually.

(Oh, come on, Phil – Jim doesn't want to talk about work. What are you doing here, Jim?) thank you Suzy but that's just as difficult. who is that dark man in the corner? I'll swear he looks like a Russian prominent cheekbones and sunken little piggy eyes in broad face Christ surely it can't be one of the hyaenas? imagining things now I'd better drink faster . . .

. . . beginning to understand the problems of your situation glancing around the room everybody looks like some sort of spy if you examine them closely you can spot it, a dark suit here a scar there a bulge under the jacket . . . except the barman and being the most unlikely looker, he's the biggest suspect . . . I'm feeling better already the whole thing's ridiculous.

(What are you smiling at, Jim?)

Oh, nothing. Just thinking I'll have another beer – no, I'll get this round . . . they all seem to be drinking halves of rough cider won't go far wrong on that . . . Eight halves of rough and one Keg, please.

(Strangest thing. There was this man, see, about fifty years old and these others, three of them; they were after him, I reckon . . .) from behind me. careful, now, turn round casually, don't make it too obvious . . .

(Dodging about the stalls in the fish market . . .)

(They laid up the old Queen yesterday. I tell you I wouldn't trust myself on that tub. Jack's got a job for a few weeks scraping . . .)

(Alice saw them too, and I said: Alice, did you see that? And Alice said mark my words, Muriel, there's more goes

on in Brixham than meets the eye. Smuggling racket, I'll be bound. Drugs . . . All these young . . .)

(At Uphams' . . . Did you hear that old bag? Why does everyone think we use drugs?)

(Sometime, sir, I'd like to have a further discussion with you; one or two little points you may be able to . . .)

Excuse me; I must be going. No, I've had enough, thanks. Long day, you know . . .

oh God, God . . .

there is something ecclesiastic about Brixham Abide with Me and the Salvation Army relentless dreary tunes on the Sunday afternoon quayside. noticeable at midnight too, air of sleeping sanctity and almost complete silence apart from the occasional priestly caterwaul and the slapslap of the dirty old water on the young boat's bottoms. Very little light but a few masthead stars point at me across the reflective water like trained lasers as I turn left following the quay to the steps up to Berry Head Road.

jumping at every cat now stomach tense as yet another subtle shadow eases from a doorway like black polished shoes I don't know whether to flit like them from door to door or walk boldly, soles clapping forthrightly on the road like a hardworking GP strolling home from a nearby night call. I know I am failing I am striking a too conspicuous compromise between two acceptable modes of behaviour, but you said Uphams' at midnight and didn't say *how*. I mean is this supposed to be a secret rendezvous or not? God damn it you might at least have given me some inkling of what is going on . . .

and what if the yard gate is locked what the hell am I meant to do, bang on it and shout for service excuse me sorry to trouble you at this hour but I must have a transom or cross tree or whatever you use on damned boats it's an emergency? the steps are steeper than forty years ago but there's a nice downgrade to follow left turn past the shop where they used to sell home-made ice-cream and you ate yourself torpid the same week typhus bacilli in ice-cream decimated Aberystwyth. I watched you for days afterwards waiting for the symptoms to appear but still you swam and ran and played with the other kids so I began to worry about polio instead . . . until you went back to Birmingham

and Laura – and the Luftwaffe . . . odd how then the very sound of the German language was evil yet now you've got a German wife . . . and you pointed that out to me twenty years ago with a wisdom which made me feel old and inflexible. you like Gerda, you said, and she's a German. So now I'm Russian, you said, and you don't like it. how do you know, you asked, how you will feel about Russia in another twenty years?

twenty more years have gone by, Paul, but the question now is: how do *you* feel about Russia?

Uphams' and, thank God, the gate's ajar. inside and stumble over bulks of timber wish I'd brought a torch small dim dinghies all over the sloping slipway like beached carcasses smell of tar and wood-shavings but which is the Torbay Queen and what does it look like? must be big what's that over to the right bulky and outline of futile dry propeller. strange how these old-fashioned screw-driven craft still have a fascination this one must be older than me . . .

well here we are quietly damn this box oh well remove paint scraper sit down and wait. moment of black comedy – Torbay Queen is a large boat and you didn't say which side to meet, dare I shout no you would have heard me falling over the box as would the customs across the water and half Brixham . . . getting slightly hysterical with tension and beer calm down calm down relax . . .

Paul . . . ?

(Hello, you made it, then. Did anyone see you?)

. . . for God's sake I don't know dozens probably what the hell is this all about steady now this is no sort of way to greet my son after twenty years . . .

How are you, Paul? How are Gerda and the kids?

(Fine thanks . . . How are you, Father?) but he doesn't look fine and I can't see his face properly somehow he looks smaller almost cowering beside the boat and whispering scared. he calls me father not dad and of course the kids are grown up now . . .

All right. Getting on in years now, you know. That walk today didn't help.

(Sorry about that) he's talking eagerly trying to get on some footing trying not to let inane conversation flag. (On the other hand, I expect it brought back memories)

That's true. Do you know, I dug up that coin—the half-penny we buried back in '42.

(Did we?) he doesn't remember.

And I found the place where I carved your name in the turf.

(Oh? Well, I'm damned . . .) defensively.

I wonder . . . Do you remember the day we went—

(Look, father, I was ten at the time and a lot has happened since.) and you want to say that you didn't bring me here to talk about old times but instead—(I'm in a spot of bother) abruptly.

I'm sorry to hear that . . . your tone of voice reminds me of the time you crept guiltily into the hotel one evening and suddenly burst out with some story about boys casting a boat adrift, you saw them, you said; but the owner of the boat saw you, and said you'd done it . . . so I had to go and reason with a broad-accented red-faced Devon fisherman who had a forthright command of language and a penchant for litigation, and half an hour and two pounds later I had persuaded him to drop the matter . . .

(For God's sake, father. Can't you listen to what I say?)

I'm sorry, Paul. It's been a long time. What's the problem?

(I was saying, I was thinking of coming back to England.)

For good? . . . oh, yes, Paul, come back . . .

(Yes . . . you understand, lately I've been hampered in my work by certain . . . restrictions, and I think it might be better for me, and Gerda too, if I moved back. The kid's future to think of, too . . .)

They're not exactly kids now. Where are your family at present? In Russia?

(West Germany . . .) guiltily; oh, Paul, why try to fool me?

So you want to get them over here, and then defect?

(More or less . . . I don't like the word defect. I'm English, after all . . .) perhaps you think this is a sort of contradefection, the second wrong making a convenient right. (And you've got some influence. I thought perhaps you could explain the situation quietly to the authorities and organize their immigration . . . Settle them in some nice country area. I'll follow as soon as possible . . .) you can't shake them off now, and you're not sure they know about Gerda,

I suppose it does you some credit that you want to get your family well out of the way before things blow up and you go into hiding for the rest of your life . . .

They're watching you now, aren't they?

(Things are closing in a bit . . . I'm not much use to them any more, I feel; my project is finished and I sometimes wonder . . .) whether you will be dispensed with . . . (Look, father . . . After you leave me I want you to go back to Churston the way you came and catch the next train home.)

Paul . . . Don't take me for an idiot.

(What do you mean?)

There's more to it than you've told me. Perhaps if you told me the whole story . . .

you look up and for the first time I see your eyes, a flash of terror in the dim light and you're looking beyond me as though you see a silver green mackerel, flickering and closing in . . .

(Dr. Bland senior, I presume. Fancy finding you here. And Dr. Bland junior, too. Quite a reunion. Ah, stay just where you are . . .)

The flat drawl from behind, the cluttered English accent perfect; clumsy shuffling and they are before us three dark shapes and waist-high glints which can only be guns. Christ why did I get mixed up in this why did you Paul?

What do you want? My voice too high they must detect the fear.

(A word with your son, first . . . You don't appear to be acting quite according to instructions, Paul. You were to meet your father at six in the morning, remember? The timing had to be right, because of the boat. What a pity you seem to have blundered.) his voice is pleasantly reasonable and I know he intends to kill, but kill who? or does it really matter . . .?

Why were you supposed to meet me at six, Paul? I ask brutally but he doesn't reply he's crouched against the boat with his head averted like a vomiting drunk.

(Your son appears nervous, Dr. Bland. I'll answer your question . . . I believe you have some information we require) . . . the old hackneyed phrase now how do they expect to get information from a man of my age with nothing

to live for now . . . tell him, force my voice to remain calm

I have no interest in leaving England, thank you . . . oh, God, that was feeble he even laughed quietly I must sound like a timid elderly school-master . . .

(Well, now, I'm sorry about that. But in point of fact, Dr. Bland, there is no need for you to leave your country. We would not presume to take you against your will; after all, we can hardly force you to undertake research work, can we? A scientist must be free, unfettered, if he is to give his best. He must have . . . ah, nothing on his mind. Wouldn't you agree, Paul?) you look up for a moment and suddenly the man flicks on a torch and lights your face and you look like a rabbit illuminated by headlights.

(Well, never mind about that. But I'm unhappy about Paul; it seems he's let us down . . . No matter, you have what we want, Dr. Bland, and I'll take it right now . . .)

. . . he must mean that envelope, the ridiculous insurance, somehow the sight of the gun makes it less ridiculous. now try to carry things off . . .

I really don't know what you're talking about.

again the quiet laugh. (Of course you don't, Dr. Bland. You think I mean the envelope, don't you . . .? Don't worry yourself, I'll pick that up before six o'clock.)

(No. What I want is your eye . . .)

Paul looks up again his knuckles are between his teeth (Oh God, Dad, sorry, sorry, sorry . . .) he's mumbling.

My eye?

(Your false, glass eye; that revolting object in your left socket. You notice how it remains motionless while its companion roves about? I expect it's caused you some unhappy moments since your accident; it hardly improves your appearance. Still, it's better than nothing. Much better . . .) God, what's he talking about I think I'm going to cry I can't seem to stop shaking . . .

(Your son developed that eye, Dr. Bland; your very clever son, who specialises in microrecorders; although I don't think he knew it would be used on you. Not until later . . . It was a delicate operation. And it required a considerable amount of organization to stage your accident and get you into Sunnydale. But it was done - we have friends everywhere. Remember that, Paul . . .

(The eye is a monitor, Dr. Bland, and has recorded your every thought for the past year . . .)

everything they've got every detail of the research and the project God a traitor in my own body Paul could never help them like I will I wonder if there's *anything* I haven't thought of since the accident perhaps some slight amnesia don't start thinking now concentrate on . . . small boat riding tidily at anchor light wheeling lazy circles with the swell in orbit around vertical extension of centre of gravity stop my thoughts straying back now concentrate – I never had that bath . . .

. . . hate hate hate God I'm scared what's he going to DO?

(I expect when we play it back we'll find an awful lot of rubbish, patience will be required to sift the sixpences from the, ah, shit. But amongst that capitalist crap in your mind, Dr. Bland, we will find gems of wisdom concerning your work . . . In fact we will know everything you know, If you follow me . . .)

. . . everything . . . every smallest detail . . .

(And I'm sure we'll find enough to persuade Paul to . . . see reason, because he is quite a remarkable man in his field. A son to be proud of, Dr. Bland.) . . . and did you realise this, Paul; was this the true reason for your silly, weak attempt to change sides, or was it because of me? too late and I won't know now and really doesn't matter any more . . .

Gerda red hair green eyes . . .

Mark . . . Jenny . . . faceless names . . .

Laura? he sighs almost sadly and I think that soon –

(Goodbye, Dr. Bland. Be sure, your memory will live on . . . Ah, Central? this recording will terminate – *now.*)

PANDORA'S BUST

Richard A. Pollack

one

On 17 February, 1971, at 0254 hours, the Vagina Police busted Pandora. She was lying on her government-issue Empress bed, and purring as Michelangelo Ben Canaan – statesman, painter, architect, soldier, journalist, boxer, silversmith, gunsmith, blacksmith, and lover – rotated his fingertips in her side, under the ribcage, when the white-robed police lasered the door. They charged her with improper orgasm, section 18 of the Sexual Response Act: “primary rhythmic contractions of more or less than .8 seconds apart” (in Pandora’s case, .7 seconds). They then wrapped her in platichrome bands, hoisted her to their shoulders, and carried her out to their car.

The operation did not succeed without conflict between the parties involved. Pandora first responded with surprise, not untinged with delight. She had never seen black men before; in her youth she’d Conscientiously Objected from social work in the ghetto and so had passed draft age with her racial curiosity unconsummated. She knew, of course, that the Muskie Doctrine specified exclusive use of Negroes as Vagina Policemen, but ordinary citizens rarely encountered the VP.

Ben Canaan, however, was no ordinary citizen. In his lifelong struggle with mechanism he’d encountered black faces many times before. When the bust began he stood up by the side of the bed and glared fiercely at the two policemen.

“We charge you, Pandora, with improper orgasm, section 18 of the Sexual Response Act. You will come with us.”

A vague impression that she knew these men made Pandora feel unreal, disoriented. Such feelings, like being half-

awake, had disturbed her all her life. She turned to Michelangelo. "What does he mean?"

But Ben Canaan didn't hear her, for he sensed a sudden victory. "Section 18?" he said, "You're sure you haven't made a mistake? You know, don't you, that no one's ever been charged with section 18 before?"

The police said, "We charge you, Pandora, with section 18."

"Hold it." Ben Canaan grinning, walked up close, obscenely close, to the impassive brown faces. "I think you boys have stretched yourselves a little too far this time." His penis climbed up and touched a white robe; he stepped back. Pandora, suddenly chill, huddled on the bed.

The police said, "We will now discharge our duty." They stepped forward in unison.

"Like hell you will. I'm Michelangelo Ben Canaan, senior member of the American Crown Council. I demand you produce evidence." The Negroes stopped. "Something wrong, boys? Something the captain didn't tell you?"

The policemen turned a quarter step to look square at Ben Canaan. "We acknowledge your right to examination of evidence."

"Thank you, gentlemen."

"Agent 13, come forward."

Pandora screamed. A little man, less than two inches long, crawled out of her vagina. He was wearing a pin-striped suit—drip dry—and was carrying a micro-mini-film recorder. Ben Canaan frowned; Pandora blinked; the police allowed themselves momentary grins. Pandora said, "How did you get inside my dolly?"

The little man boomed out a surprising baritone: "Your dolly!"

Michelangelo said, "Answer the question."

"Wasn't too hard, really. Actually, you see, I climbed in two nights ago. Shot her up with a dose of novocaine so she wouldn't feel anything to wake her up, then I hoisted myself up her legs and squeezed right in."

"Oh," said Pandora, "that's why I felt so funny. Didn't I tell you, Angelo, that I felt funny yesterday when I woke up?"

The taller policeman picked up the little man, who'd been floundering on the satin sheets, and placed him on the dres-

ser. "Agent 13," he said, "Councillor Ben Canaan demands we present the evidence." Agent 13 held out a miniscule gloved palm. Ben Canaan, peering closely, could see a tiny cylinder, metal, probably lead.

"Angelo?" said Pandora, "does he have anything?"

"Yes."

"Is it dangerous?"

"Yes. It's micro-mini-microfilm."

Agent 13 said, "You got it, Councillor. Micro-mini-microfilm – with each and every ill-timed response of your sweet lady's body. Took it myself – at no small risk, I'm sure you'll agree." As the little man spoke, the taller cop stepped through the doorway into the hall. He returned shortly, platichrome bands looped on his left arm, a heavy stapler gun in his right hand.

"Now that Councillor Ben Canaan has seen the evidence," he began, and his partner joined in, "We charge you, Pandora, with improper orgasm, section 18 of the Sexual Response Act. Now you will come with us." Quickly they wrapped her in the bands.

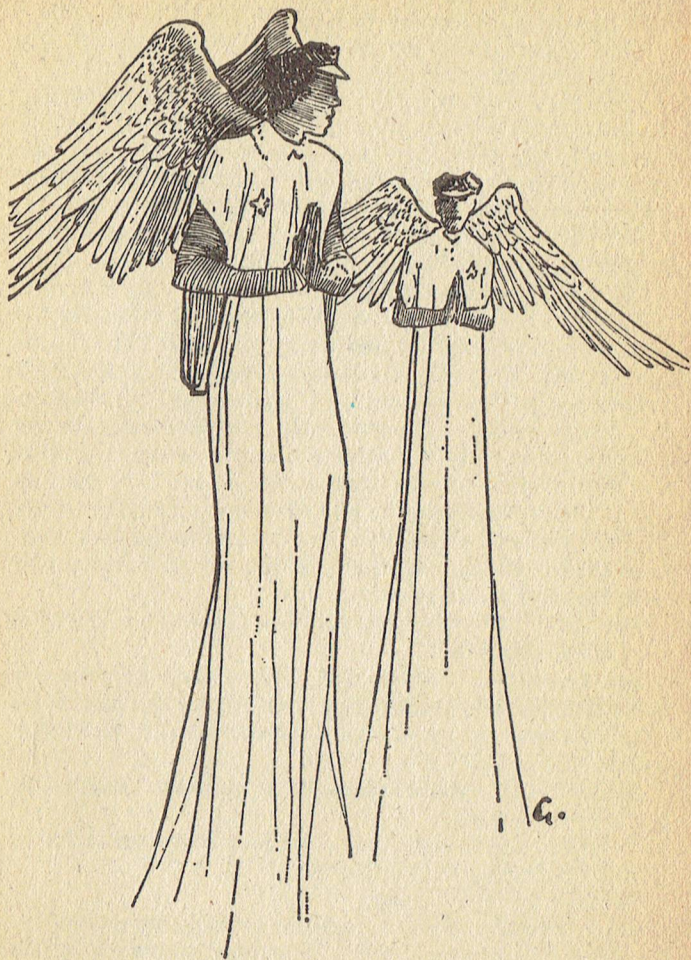
Very perplexed, Pandora looked to Michelangelo, who now fumbled in his clothes, as if to dress quickly and run away. "Angelo, why don't you stop them? They're hurting me."

"I can't touch the Vagina Police," he mumbled. "I can't violate the Muskie Doctrine." Then he smiled, an artist fighter smile. "But I can do this!" His hand leaped from his pants pocket, the fingers curled tight around an oblong plate.

"Watch it!" shouted Agent 13, "He's got—" Too late for the little bug. His voice rose to a screech, spat for a moment, then cut short as his two inch body tipped over the dresser edge and fell to the floor. The two policemen dropped Pandora; one of them picked up Agent 13, the other pocketed the microfilm.

"I knew it," cried Ben Canaan, waving the oblong plate. "He's not human. He's a machine. See this? It's a field disrupter. Philp industries built it for me; it can drain the life from any machine ever made." He laughed. "Did you think you'd fool Michelangelo Ben Canaan?"

The tall policeman said, "We fail to see the relevance."



"The relevance!" Ben Canaan nearly jumped over the bed. "He's a machine."

"The microfilm remains the same."

"But a machine -" He cut short; his face opened up a huge grin. "I think I understand."

Pandora, even now, could not shake the dreamy feeling. She felt chased by some great beast of truth, a menace more frightening somehow than the bands around her chest. She tried to focus on the real danger. "Angelo, what's happening? Are you going to get these things off me?"

Ben Canaan ignored her. "Yes, I understand now. You boys haven't heard yet about Bill 62. right?"

"Please inform us of Bill 62."

"Bill 62. The 62nd bill of 1971. My bill. It passed the Crown Council yesterday and the kings signed it this morning. It reads like this: no machine may testify against a human being. You got that? I'll say it again. No machine may testify against a human being. And that includes any evidence gathered by a machine. You can take your microfilm and slap it in your scrapbooks. It can't be used in court." Now Michelangelo looked over to Pandora, eager for her love and admiration, but found instead that Pandora stared, solemn and quiet, at the two policemen who now stepped forward in unison.

They said, "We think you had best check the wording of your bill, Councillor."

Ben Canaan cocked an eye. "There's no loopholes. I wrote that bill very craftily. But I can check it for you if you like." Keeping his eye off Pandora he crossed to the phone and dialed a number.

A crisp voice sounded through the speaker. "That number is disconnected."

"I know. Check my voice print and hurry up about it. This is Michelangelo Ben Canaan."

"Yes sir, Mr Ben Canaan."

After several seconds a metallic sound, arranged to resemble a human voice, said, "You have connected to the Homeostatic Law Library. Your request, please."

"Has Law 1971-62 gone on tape yet?"

"Yes sir."

"Read it back to me."

"Law 1971-62. Primary clause: no human being may testify against a machine. Secondary clause one:" The small cop's finger on the phone button broke the connection.

"I think," he said, "the primary clause will suffice." Ben Canaan turned a blank face at him, then back at the mouth-piece, still held in his hand, six inches from his face.

"Angelo!" screamed Pandora, "They're taking me away." And so they were. The brown arms contrasted handsomely with the platichrome bands as the Vagina Police hoisted Pandora onto their shoulders. "Help me, Michelangelo!" When at last he couldn't hear her Ben Canaan screamed and dropped the phone, as if the mouth-piece had scorched his hand.

two

When the turbo-car had whipped along some two hours on roads without streetlamps Pandora began to suspect a fearsome secret. They must have left the city for the worker suburbs - why? Did the Vagina Police really house themselves in the country? Would Negroes really live so far from the ghetto - "Mother Harlem" as they called it? Perhaps, thought Pandora, and her skin tensed against the platichrome, they only pose as Muskie cops. She looked across the circular cab where the uniforms glowed in the soft light.

"Who are you?"

"What do you want with me?"

"You're not cops. Cops work in the city."

No answer to anything. She tried to imitate Ben Canaan's one-time arrogance: "You fellows better tell me right now who you are and where we're going."

The brown faces said together, "We cannot talk with you. Such conversation might constitute sacrilege."

Lord in heaven, thought Pandora, have I been kidnapped by a gang of flaming resurrectionists? She saw the whole plot - they'd dump her on some honky lawn where fifty or five hundred stoop-backed workers would rip apart her body while they growled their honky prayers to their honky gods. "Don't touch my body!"

And yet, the danger, the whole situation, felt unreal, dream-like. Her entire life seemed a painted cellophane wrapper, sealing in her true self.

Right then the car lurched, causing the cab light to flicker

off, on, off again. Moonlight sprayed through the tinted windows. Pandora looked outside.

They'd left the suburbs. She saw it right away, she couldn't believe it. No houses, no lawns, no people at all, not even a road. The car just whooshed along a flat grey nothing. They'd left behind the city, the suburbs, the whole world itself. "Take me back!" she screamed and slammed shut her eyes. The car stopped.

But she couldn't bear to keep her eyes closed for suppose they grabbed her and threw her from the car? Keep watching, keep their hands off my body, thought Pandora; she opened her eyes.

Right then she thought she'd tumbled into a dream, for sure. Two men, not men at all really, sat across from her and smiled benignly. Their faces, blacker than pure onyx, shone with transcendent glows, brighter than the moon, brighter than the soft-spun golden robes flowing from their shoulders to their knees. Faint coronas flickered over their kinky heads. But most remarkable of all – from each back sprouted white feathered wings. A dream, a dream, though Pandora. As a little girl she'd often dreamt of such men flying with her round and round the house. "Take me home."

They looked at each other, as if deciding whether or not to speak. At last, two deep liquid voices said, "We certainly intend to." One winged man leaned over and touched his fingers to the platichrome, whereupon the bands sprung off onto the floor.

"You can't do that," said Pandora, "you're just a dream." Her voice rose. "Why don't you let me wake up?" Just then the car roof sprung open and Pandora felt the unobstructed moonlight on her skin. She flailed her arms wildly as if a honky had thrown sand in her face. "Get it off."

The two men leaned forward; their folded wings rustled as their hands on her shoulders stood her up in the car. When the graceful fingers touched her skin a warm feeling, vibrant like a song inside her body, calmed her, and now she stepped from the car to a field of wild grass. She straightened her shoulders to look around as odd feelings twinged her muscles. Except for a mountain far away the land stretched flat wherever she looked. Her eyes opened

wide; she felt she could see out past the world's edge. Her fingertips stroked her thighs.

"Who are you?" said the Black Angels.

A dream, thought Pandora, just a dream. Now they've come to wake me up. "What did you say?"

"Who are you?"

She laughed. "I don't know." She understood now; Pandora never was. Time to wake up.

The Angels pointed to the peak, where the sky'd begun to brighten. "Look," they cried, "He sends us light to match the dawn within you. Remember now and show us who you are."

He? Whom did they mean? And yet, as pink light touched her skin she realized she knew. Father sent them; He sent the dawn, He sent His angels. And her too, Father had sent her, but she'd fallen into dreams, a false life with false memories and false desires. Time now to wake up. She'd begun to shake but when she stopped herself convulsions siezed the world.

"Hail Mary, Mother of God!"

Mary? Yes! Remember? Yes. Oh blessed memories.

She stretched her arms (translucent skin, ecstatic muscles); her fingers raised the sun (through the angels' voices hosannas thundered from the earth); the mountain burst afire (two thousand years – melodic wings flutter around her empyreal essence, bedazzled voices ring her lonely radiance); trees ripe with golden peaches sprung from the grass. Back. Back again. Herself.

"Hail the Holy Virgin!"

Mary frowned – then laughed. No sooner herself again the old foolishness returns. Someday she'd gather the angels and tell the truth (how good to know the truth again) tell them why the Holy Ghost really picked on Little Mary – not at all for purity. Mother Mary remembers now. Once again the mist descends, once again the wild blood burns her thighs. Hail Mary, mistress of God. Oh blessed ecstasy.

"Forgive us our transgressions on your mortal form, O Virgin."

Through her memories she mumbled, "Forgiven."

"The Father sent us. He feared you'd forgotten your mission."

She turned, surprised. Yes, the mission, she had forgotten it. Sadly, Mary abandoned memories for thoughts of duty. There'd been a conference to take action against a beast, a strange creature who lived under Manhattan and each night devoured seven souls. Where the beast came from the Father wouldn't say, though he called for its annihilation. Mary volunteered, took on Pandora's mortal flesh (it would not do, the son argued, for the Virgin to resurrect herself. She hoped the little prig had learned a lesson.), and promptly forgot (with Michelangelo Ben Canaan serving her new body) all heavenly thoughts. How cheap, she thought—Ben Canaan, any man, after the Ghost.

"Shall we launch the attack?"

"No," said Mary, "first we meditate." So the three sat cross-legged on the ground, their eyes closed, their bodies still. For two weeks the angels meditated on virginity and beastliness. While they thus comported their souls Mary summoned her Ghostly memories to wash through her body wherein she suffered incessant orgasms, each involving contractions .7 seconds apart.

three

The heavenly party left the turbo-car at the suburb's edge and trod silently back to the city. Mary stayed naked though the angels had offered her a golden robe. Also, she rejected the suggestion they turn invisible so as not to disturb the workers. She liked lascivious stares; she liked to imagine hot odorous mouths.

They had just reached the wall separating the suburbs from the City proper when seven emaciated men leaped from behind bushes to plop their bodies face down in the dust at Mary's feet.

"Who are you? Get out of my way," she said as she wiped her shins.

The leader – a bald man, even more emaciated than the rest, his body cased in a hair shirt (his followers wore rags) – spoke from the dust. "Forgive us, Holy Mother of God, we only wish to serve, to throw our sinful bodies behind you as you fight the Beast."

"What makes you think I need any help? And who told you about the Beast?" Something about this man greatly annoyed her.

"Pardon us," said the Angels. Mary turned. "We beg forgiveness but we sent this man a vision. We thought the people should play some part in the holy conflict."

The leader said, "We pray we don't offend you, Blessed Mother. We did not mean to imply you need our help. We only beg participation."

The apology failed to placate Mary. "If you want to help you might tell me who you are."

The angels said, "They call themselves —"

"Shut up," said the Holy Virgin. To the bald man, "Who are you?"

"We call ourselves the Society of Early Christians. We seek to purify our souls from modern decadence. We have thus adopted, in our own pathetic manner, those mortifications which so distinguished —"

"Enough." For a moment no one spoke or moved. Mary imagined she could smell decay rising from the purified bodies. Then her anger exploded. "Will you get your faces off the ground?"

They scrambled upright and the moment Mary saw Bald-head's face her anger passed in understanding. "Michelangelo Ben Canaan," she whispered. "What happened to you?" How had such a lovely body come to such a wreck?

Ben Canaan's face, once golden with life, now an evil blotch of eczemic red and malnutrition yellow, had shrunk into the bone. When he spoke his mouth struggled to form the words. "You're . . ."

"I am not. Forget who you think I am. Tell me what happened."

"You should know, Blessed Virgin. I've joined your ranks of holiness." For a moment the old Ben Canaan swagger flared up again, then died.

Mary said, "I'll judge whatever holiness I see. First tell me how you came to this . . . this purification."

Ben Canaan blinked, as if he found it hard to relate past fictions with present realities. "You're right. Of course you're right. I shouldn't claim any holiness. Not if I want to get any. I used to claim a lot more for myself. Do you remember all those claims I used to make? How I made myself the people's champion?" He took a deep breath. Afterwards he spoke more easily. "Not so much a fool, then, as just a sinner. I did recognize the conflict: machine-centred

world against a man-centered world. But I couldn't see behind it. No, that's not right. I didn't look behind it, because I wanted to believe it was something I could conquer. I wanted to think that I alone determined history. So I made myself the great humanistic hero."

"I thought you did very well at it."

"No! No grace, no grace. Don't you see?"

"Humanism has its place, Michelangelo."

"Not my kind of humanism, the weak delusion kind, the self-centered kind. I thought I could use machines against themselves. Manipulation, that's the answer. So I thought. Yes, you're right, I did do a good job of it. But the machines did a better job of using me. Holy Mother, try to remember."

Mary thought back to her Pandora dream, to Ben Canaan's sudden anguish when the Homeostatic Law Library said —

"No human being may testify against a machine. That's not the way I wrote it, but so what? I gave it to machines and let them twist it right back at me." He sighed. "But that's not what woke me up. I realized, after the Law Library clicked off, after the cops had left me all alone — the telephone. I was using a machine to talk to another machine. I'd become a bastard machine myself." The six men behind him shook their bowed heads, sharing through their own memories Ben Canaan's degradation. But Michelangelo himself tossed back his head like he used to do before a fight. "No hope, no refuge. I prayed. Like no man ever prayed before I prayed to Jesus. Look!" He thrust forward his bald head, almost in Mary's mouth. "God sent me a sign. All my hair fell out."

"You used to have such nice hair."

Ben Canaan started. His head cocked, he looked inward momentarily, then continued his monologue. "God spoke to me through baldness. 'Only Jesus can save you. And Jesus won't touch you if you don't relinquish your fleshly ease and comfort.' I understood. I thank God for revelation. Since then I've lived inside my hair shirt and outside my man-made structures. I've eaten nothing but bark peeled from dead trees and drunk nothing but tepid water. I pray constantly for God's strength against my urges."

"Amen," muttered his followers.

"Not constantly," said Mary. "You took the time to start an organization."

Ben Canaan lowered his head – to hide a smile? Perhaps, thought Mary, talking has lubricated his mouth. "I do God's work as best I can. These men have also seen truth. Together we formed the Society of Early Christians to prepare ourselves for battle."

All seven men fell to their knees. Michelangelo stayed silent now as his six colleagues implored the Blessed Virgin for acceptance. "Hail Mary. Hail Mary. We beg you, Holy Mother of God, don't deny unworthy sinners."

Mary laughed, reached out a fingertip to Michelangelo Ben Canaan's chin, lifted up his humble face, and said, "How could I deny so proud an advocate?"

four

For the trek through the city Mary decided they'd best turn invisible after all, not for herself or the angels, but for Ben Canaan and his skinny crew. She felt angered when no Early Christian experimented with his new power. Ben Canaan only marched stolidly forward, his chin humbly tucked into his chest.

Just after they entered the city the Father manifested in a burning automobile to inform them they'd find the Beast in an abandoned sub-cellar under the World Trade Center. They reached the ancient building at noon, only to find it locked shut with a squad of guards – three workers and a robot captain – standing before the doors. A moment's eavesdropping told them that the city had closed the building for fear of a ghetto attack. Apparently, the police interpreted the piles of bones nightly strewn about the trade center grounds as remnants of Afro-tribal murders.

The Angels looked to Mother Mary. "Blessed Virgin, you'll have to do something."

"I suppose so," said Mary, who felt confused. For some reason her eyes would not focus properly; the building appeared to waver.

"If you'll permit me –" offered Ben Canaan.

"Certainly," said Mary.

"If the holy servants –" The Angels raised their brows – "would each kiss a worker –"

"Profligate son," said the Angels, "beware of blasphemy."

"He's speaking to me," said Mary, "I'll decide."

Ben Canaan continued, "Then, if they'd run away the squad will follow."

Mary squinted at him. "I'm not sure."

"I am."

"Good enough." A nod to the angels. "Go."

The holy servants stayed invisible until a foot away from the guards, then revealed themselves. "Black faces!" cried the robot. "Careful now."

The honkies raised their guns. "Don't you boys come no closer," one said, while another whispered, "Jesus, look at them African get-ups. These must be the leaders." The two Angels looked at each other, back at Mary, then at the squad; finally, each bent forward and kissed a worker on the cheek.

"Miscegenation!" screamed the robot. The angels leaped back. "Get them."

"Keep your wings folded," shouted Ben Canaan. "Stay on the ground." The Angels ran down the block, the police close behind.

Michelangelo, Mary noticed, as she walked to the plate glass door, now stayed only one step behind her, in contrast to the six paces he'd kept earlier. She had no chance, however, for analysis. A queasiness overcame her as she reached up her hand to the glass. The whole building shimmered and quivered, ran together and dissolved like loose paint. The spasm passed quickly; a moment later Mary's hand along the glass melted a doorway.

The blessed phalanx passed uneasily, almost embarrassed, through the quiet hall. Mary felt confused, less her own mistress than at any time since her death. She could not shake a conviction that nothing of the building really existed. Twice she spun around as if to catch the walls dissolving, but she only caught puzzled looks from the Early Christians. They moved slowly through the different levels. The stairwells were not continuous and all doors looked the same, so that each floor required a search for the passage down to the next one. After twenty minutes they'd only gone down seven levels below the street. On

level nine the angels rejoined them and the ten crusaders continued downwards.

By level eighteen they'd ceased to find any signs of habitation. The office doors had no nameplates, the water fountains didn't work, no pictures of the king hung on the walls. Level twenty had no offices at all. Chips in the plaster wall showed stone rather than steel and concrete. By now the only light came from the angels' halos. Still, they found a stairway, but on the next level, a cave-like hallway without even the pretense of plaster, they only found a sign which read, "Universally Restricted Area. No Admittance."

An Early Christian said to Ben Canaan, "What can we do?"

The leader said, "As humble sinners, nothing. The Holy Mother will find a way."

They're all looking at me, thought Mary, they know it all depends on me. And yet, she didn't want to bother. She wished she could lie flat on the floor, she wished she could surrender to cool vibrations rippling her skin since they'd entered the building. She knew the mission's importance, yet she could hardly see or hear, let alone take any action. Stand still and close my eyes, she thought. Send them all away. As the world vanished she discovered she could sink the vibrations into her toes, shoot them up her legs, through the calves, thighs, deep inside her – flower petals – lotuses – unfolding – ancient faces smiling – explosions – her breasts exploded – under the skin – explosions feeding back upon themselves – silent thunder –

The Virgin Mary pointed down her hands. Lightning shot from her fingertips and burned a hole in the stone.

"A miracle!" the angels shouted.

"Look!" cried the Early Christians, "the Beast! The Beast!"

Mary tried to look but the more she stared through the hole the more everything shimmered in a purple light. She could make out a large head, a steel (!) horn, two bright yellow eyes. Beneath the head a bulky mass squatted some twenty feet below her, in a vast cavern. The enemy. She knew she must lead the attack, yet nothing worked right, her ears no better than her eyes. She could hear, as over roaring winds, shouts – Ben Canaan, most likely – but she couldn't piece the words together. If she tried looking

away, she thought the walls alive, shaking and wheezing like lecherous old men.

Calm. The Blessed Mother closed her eyes. She discovered her hands on her breasts, her elbows tight against her ribs, her knees locked together. Calm. "For maintenance of calm recite a poem . . ." something Pandora's mother used to say. But Mary didn't know any poems; neither she nor Pandora liked poetry, so another desperate moment passed before she thought to mumble, "Hail Mary, Mistress of God."

Whether the prayer, the memory, or something else calmed her Mary couldn't tell, but her legs spread apart, her arms fell, her hands released her breasts. Suns – explosions – inside her belly spread outwards to the skin. She could see clearly now. She stood all alone above the battle site. The angels, probably directed by Ben Canaan, were flying through the hole while the Early Christians held tight to the holy robes. When they touched bottom, the Angels began to circle the Beast, as if they prepared a complicated offense. The Beast took no notice. Nor did he notice the Early Christians who got down on one knee and then, to Michelangelo's horror, drew laser guns from inside their rags. While their leader raved of sacrilege the Early Christians maintained a steady fire. Without even a glance at them the Beast lifted up its yellow eyes to Mary.

"Holy Mother of God," she whispered. Now she understood. The dizziness, the shimmering walls, exploding flesh, aromatic winds. Memories. The long hard steel horn stuck up at her. "You again," she thought. Then, just the same as two thousand years ago, the universe crumbled – like a sand castle in a hurricane. Oh blessed blessed ecstasy.

Mary leaped through the hole. When the angels saw her float towards them they backed away from the Beast. "The Holy Mother joins the fight." Ben Canaan knew better; from his Pandora memories he recognized the look on Mary's face.

As she floated down Mary spread her legs wide apart. The Beast lifted his head. And finally – after two thousand lonely years, twenty frustrated centuries – Mary's hallowed vagina, with a soft slurp, slid down the steel horn of the Holy Ghost.

The angels tried to scream and failed, tried to shut their eyes and failed, tried to fly away and failed. Forced to watch the wild gyrations the angels disintegrated into heaps of black dust. Their wings somehow remained, flapping wildly of their own accord. When the Early Christians saw the wings they grabbed them – instinctively, for they'd all relieved themselves of sanity – and flew back through the hole to the sub-cellar. From there they all found their way to the street, and eventually retrieved their sanity in government desk jobs.

Only Michelangelo Ben Canaan stayed behind to witness the Holy Coitus. For two hours he watched them pound and pulse, listened to them groan and scream, until at last the Beast reared up and slouched off, with Mary rising and falling, rising and falling, into the darkness. Where they went Ben Canaan never found out though he suspected the cave tunnel somehow led to Bethlehem. Two more hours passed while darkness watered Michelangelo's burnt-out brain. Then he stood up, sighed, and began to grope with his hands for a way to get home.

THE KEY OF THE DOOR

ARTHUR SELLINGS

When Godfrey, with the long and pious Victorian grace scarcely out of his father's mouth, had kicked his sister under the table and called her a *squeed*, his father knew that the young rascal had discovered his time machine. The word had not been minted, as title to a TV serial, until 1985. It was only by chance that he knew that, for dear Dolores had admonished him not to be one the second time they met, and to his query as to what it meant had told him that it meant – well, anything you wanted it to mean, and said that she was only trying to make him feel at home by using a word of his period, but of course they hadn't had TV in 1866, had they? She'd never had much of a head for dates, she had said. Had she need of a head for anything with a figure like that, begad, he had said, which she had for some reason found quite irresistible.

Ah, what a creature was Dolores! Will be Dolores, that is. No, *is*. Will have been. Oh no, a new tense would have to be manufactured, just as a new word would need to be invented to describe Dolores herself. There was no word to describe her adequately in this era, and speech in her own was grotesquely abbreviated and infuriatingly obscure. Words as meaningless as *squeed* were half the language. *Squeed!*

"Godfrey," he said sternly, "see me in my study immediately after breakfast."

"Yes, father," said Godfrey dutifully.

What could the old man want now? Enough time had elapsed between his use of the word *squeed* and his father's order, for Godfrey not to connect the two. Indeed, he was not aware that he had used the word, so many and various were the words that he applied to his sister to tease her. The thought did flicker in and out of his brain that his father *had* somehow discovered that he knew about the time machine. That was his constantly recurring fear now. But how could he have?

No, it must be something else. Perhaps he had discovered the broken pane in the conservatory. Yes, that was it. That would mean a fine of a shilling. He hadn't broken a pane of the conservatory for a long time now – there were too many much more exciting things to do – so there ought not to be a tanning as well. What was a shilling? He could afford a shilling fine when he had over a thousand pounds saved up from the sale of mint copies of the first edition of *Alice in Wonderland* in 1985. Of course, he couldn't use it in 1866, with the funny heads printed on it and all, but it could buy a lot in 1985, even though the value of the pound seemed to have shrunk mysteriously by then. Seemed? *Would* seem. Would have seemed? Blow! It was worse than Latin pluperfects and future perfects.

Ah, future perfects! That was Melinda. A future perfect. Delicious. But definitely hyperspacious!

Father was pacing the study carpet when he entered. He made a journey once and back in silence as was his habit, then turned and faced his son.

"I have reason to believe that you have – ah – been tampering with some of my equipment."

So his father knew! Godfrey felt his knees weaken. But how? He had always set the dial back exactly to where he had found it, and – after that first time when he had stepped through the curious wrought-iron gates to see where the humming was coming from – always carefully chosen times when his father was away in London or Edinburgh at conferences. But he could see from the look on his father's face that he wasn't bluffing. He *knew* all right. There was nothing to be gained by denying it.

"Yes, Papa," he murmured. He hated that diminutive,

but knew that it was policy to use it when he was on the carpet.

"And may I ask what licence you were given so to do?"

"None, Papa."

"Do you realize that it is highly dangerous to tamper with intricate machinery of which your childish mind can have little or no comprehension?"

"Yes, Papa." Childish mind be blown! He was fourteen and a half, wasn't he?

"So that if I were to punish you severely you would appreciate that it would be for your own good and to preserve you from danger?"

"Y - yes, Papa."

His father made a return trip on the carpet before he spoke again.

"But first I have some questions to ask you. On the frankness of your replies will depend the degree of your punishment. I know that you not only know of the apparatus in question, but have actually used it. How many times have you, in fact, done so?"

"Once, Once, Papa."

"How many times, sir?"

"Twice, Papa."

"That's better." His father liked to think that his penetrating gaze struck a wholesome fear into the heart of his son, so that all evasions were laid bare and the truth confessed. Knowing this, Godfrey always told the big lie first and the only slightly less big one next. Actually, the old man's gaze *was* rather terrifying, so that any confusion in telling the second lie, any flushing or casting down of eye, was attributable to being discovered in the first lie, not to any shame in uttering the second.

In fact he had been through the gates more than a dozen times.

"You will learn," his father was saying, "that truth between man and man is the only possible foundation of a moral society."

Lord, thought Godfrey, what a whopping old hypocrite he really is!

"Yes, Papa."

"And may I ask how you discovered my apparatus, since

it is contained in my laboratory which is always kept locked?"

Godfrey thought furiously. Telling the truth would mean the end of everything. But what alternative was there? He could hardly say that he had got in through the window because, ever since that time when the villagers had marched on the house with brickbats in their hands because of the ungodly lights that sometimes flickered about the place, his father had had the windows of his secret sanctum bricked in. And his father *never* left the door unlocked. So, resigning all hope, he reached inside his Eton jacket and produced the key.

"I found it, father. In a box of rusty old keys in the attic one day when it was raining, and I went round the house trying where they fitted. This was the only one that fitted anything."

His father took the key grimly.

"Do I suppose then, sir, that if this had been the key to a case of gunpowder you would similarly have employed it and risked blowing your whole dear family – your sister, your poor mother lying on her sickbed upstairs – into eternity?"

"I – yes, father. I mean, no, father."

"Unbridled curiosity, my boy, is hardly better, if at all, than complacent ignorance. Now, tell me about these surreptitious visits of yours. To which year in the future did you proceed?"

"2035, father." And, despite his despair, he could not help smiling inwardly to see his father start.

"How do you know, boy, that it was 2035?"

"I didn't, Papa, not until I came back and noticed that that was the figure on the dial."

"And what did you *do* in 2035?"

I saw you in the house next door that isn't built yet, dancing with a big beautiful blonde lady, Papa. Did he dare? He looked at his father's slightly bulging eyes and ferocious moustaches. He did *not* dare.

"I – I just walked around, father, and then came back. I was rather scared."

"A correct attitude, my boy. But you were not too scared to go again."

"No-o, father. I went again, but this time set the dial for 1985. I liked it much better in 1985."

He'd say he did! In 2035 the big garden next door was set out in prickly cactus plants, which seemed to be all the vogue then, for all the gardens thereabouts had them. But in 1985 it was, would be, a lovely place with tall trees and grass and at the foot of it a little lake with a bridge – and Melinda.

Melinda had been startled when he first found her in the garden. Her first words had been, "Are you *real*?" He had laughed, "Of course I'm real. Here." and he pinched her, and she pinched him and only then did she believe that he was real.

At first he'd thought it was his unfamiliar clothes that had made her doubt his reality. Clothes changed in style; he knew that from drawings and daguerreotypes in the family album. But by 1985 the wheel had turned and he soon found out that his dress was not unusual enough to attract attention. It wasn't that. It was, as Melinda explained with a trembling lip, that sometimes she saw things that *weren't* real. It was part of her illness, her *neurosis*. That was something he had never heard of, but it was evidently something very grave. "Is it a kind of decline?" he had asked. "A *decline*?" she said, and laughed a little hesitantly. Then she stopped and said, "I laughed. I *laughed*. That's the first time I've laughed for ages."

As he came to visit her again and again she laughed more and more often, because his funny ways and the funny way he said things seemed to amuse her. He didn't mind her laughing at him. Her laughter was like tinkling music in his ears, and he experienced a strange pleasure in making her happy. The anxious lines that belonged, if anywhere, only on a person much older, left her pretty face, and colour came into her cheeks.

And they went out into the wonderful world of 1985, a world of living cinemas and rocket-planes overhead and wonderful gossamer candy. It was a world that frightened him rather at times, but he would have died rather than admit that in front of Melinda.

"—And if," he suddenly realized his father was saying, "I hear of your mentioning this apparatus to anybody, I shall do something which I should have done three years

ago, but for the sake of your dear Mama – I shall pack you off to naval school.”

“But, father, I meant no harm.”

“Silence, boy,” his father thundered. “Have you no realization of the delicate cosmic forces involved? No, of course, at your age you could not.”

Not only cosmic forces, thought Godfrey. The thought came again to reveal to his father that he knew all about his lady friend in 2035. Perhaps that would make him realize that his son was not so stupid as he seemed to think. Perhaps then they could talk it over man to man. But his father’s gaze was enough to dispel the idea. Oh blast! Why did his father behave so pompously? He had never questioned it before, but now that he knew something of the way they managed things in 1985 he found his father’s attitude ridiculous. But this was 1866.

He sighed. “Very good, father.”

And that was that, he thought, as he closed the study door behind him. He would never see Melinda again. He was rooted permanently in 1866 – a prisoner. He suddenly felt the spirit of the age descend upon his soul in swathe upon swathe of red plush and flannel.

But his father had his problems, too. That evening he repaired to the time machine and travelled to 2035 to meet his dear Dolores. He should have known that something was wrong when he found that her front door had been repainted in strident fluorescent stripes of crimson and violet. Hardly Dolores’ taste, he thought, but, then, she was such an impulsive creature, bless her. But when the door was opened by a frightful harridan with bright green hair who took one look at him and said, well what did he want and if he was selling anything he was wasting his time, he retired in great agitation and fled back to 1866. He sat panting in his laboratory and poured himself a stiff peg of whisky.

Something had gone seriously and terribly wrong. He knew – it was that rascally son of his! In his tampering with the mechanism he had somehow thrown it out of gear. Confound the boy! He would pack him off to the navy. The boy was definitely degenerate. He whistled down the speaking tube to the servants’ quarters.

"Send Master Godfrey to my—" no, here to the laboratory would never do – "to my study."

But as he himself departed for the study another thought struck him. The apparatus had worked perfectly well the night before. And on his return, stimulated as always by the pleasure of Dolores' company, he had worked the night through in the laboratory. So, he thought as he seated himself at his desk to await his son's arrival, the young villain had had no opportunity to meddle with the machine. Then – a vague and frightful suspicion of what had actually happened struck him at the moment that a hesitant knock came on the door.

"Come in."

Godfrey entered. "You sent for me, father?"

"Ah, yes." Better not to be stern. Too much was at stake. He had to know the truth. "Take a seat, my boy."

Godfrey did gingerly as he was bid. his father's attitude was a whole lot too ample to be above suspicion.

"Now, my boy, tell your father just what you *did* when you went to the year 1985."

So that was it! Couldn't his father leave well alone? He had succeeded in blighting his life. There was nothing left, now that he was parted from Melinda for ever. Well, he'd tell him about Melinda and her neurosis. And if he gave him any of that pompous 1866 moral chat he'd tell him what he saw through the window that first time. And if he packed him off to the navy, well let him. He didn't care now.

So he told his father without worrying one bit about whether his father thought it a lot to have done in just one visit or not. But his father seemed not to notice. All he said, rather strangely, when his son had finished, was, "This girl, what is her name?"

"Melinda."

"Melinda what?"

"Melinda Blackett."

Heavens! His father twirled the end of one moustache in agitation. The girl was Dolores' maternal grandmother Melinda, the famous beauty whom Dolores had mentioned to him once or twice. Then, because he had prevented his son from seeing Melinda – Dolores had never come into being? Could it be? Could that mean that—?"

He looked at his son. His son looked blankly back, his round face above the Eton collar looking a shade too innocent. It was impossible. He'd have to ask Dolores.

But he couldn't ask Dolores because Dolores wasn't there any more. Then where was she? Consigned to some limbo of conjecture that would never now take flesh – he writhed at the thought of the word – because of something his son had done . . . or not done? He had to know, and know immediately. In theory it was possible, but practice in such a complicated affair as time travel might not be quite the same thing.

"Godfrey, my boy, perhaps I have been rather hard on you. The spirit of adventure is not to be curbed so drastically in the young. I think you might be allowed to pay another visit to your, ahem, little friend in 1985. Come with me to the laboratory."

Godfrey followed his father as if in a dream. But it was no dream. It was his father who set the switch and who said, "Just for five minutes this time, you understand."

Godfrey didn't have an idea of the reasons behind his father's benevolence, and five minutes was all too short a time. But five minutes was heaven after thinking he had lost Melinda for ever. It was hard to tear himself away from her, but he explained that there was a little difficulty with father, but that it would be all right. And tried to believe so himself.

When he returned his father told him to go and wait in his study. Godfrey was mystified, but began to feel the stirrings of a strange hope. He couldn't understand how or why, but it seemed that somehow his father . . . *needed* him.

Father set the dial for 2035 and travelled over.

He heaved a sigh of relief to find the front door painted in the familiar pale yellow. And when he rang the bell it was Dolores who answered.

"Come in, come in, my bold time traveller," she said. "Goodness, Cyril, has something alarmed you? You look quite breathless, my poor dear."

"Ah, my dear Dolores," he said, clutching her two hands between his own in one of those gestures which she found so attractive. "Tell me, my precious, who was your maternal grandfather?"

The corners of her lips drooped. "You haven't come to see your little Dolores just to ask her that, have you?"

His moustaches twitched agitatedly.

"Please, Dolores." He fell down on his knees. "It's most important. Humour me, my sweet, and tell me who your grandmother Melinda's husband was."

"What a dear funny boy you are. His name was Tom James."

"And, pardon me, my dear – oh, this is dashed difficult – he was your grandfather?"

"Really, Cyril. I can hear poor Grandma Melinda turning in her urn. All right, I'll humour you. It would have been hard for him not to have been. You've heard me tell you that Grandma Melinda was a famous beauty of her day. She could have had anybody, but *anybody*. As it was, Tom James came along and swept her off her feet. He was one of the space pioneers. They spent a year's honeymoon on Phobos, or some such dreary rock out in space. My mother was born only three months after they came back."

"Thank you, oh thank you, Dolores. You've taken a weight off my mind."

Dolores laughed her delicious chuckling laugh. "Oh, what a dashing, unpredictable world you must come from!" She snuggled against his Norfolk jacket. "I've got some stereophone tapes of some dreamy old waltzes. I turned the shop upside down to find them. We're going to have a lovely evening."

"Er – I'm sorry, my precious, but I must ask you to pardon me. It's to do with this time business and all that. I'll come back later. Please – you do understand, don't you?"

Dolores pouted. It was one of her sweetest expressions. Then she smiled.

"Of course, my sweet. Travelling in time must be very difficult and have all kinds of problems attached to it. I think you're very clever. How my grandmother fits into it I don't know, but the whole thing is too complicated for your silly little pigeon to understand."

"Ah, what a kind considerate girl you are. Later we'll waltz through all the tapes. How's that?"

"Oh, hyperspacious. I mean, divine, my sweet, divine."

Father returned to 1866 and his study with the problem only half-solved.

"What did you say this girl Melinda suffered from, will suffer from, that is?" he asked his son.

"They call it neurosis, father. She said it was very serious. It looked like a decline, the same as Aunt Agatha went into."

"Ah yes, Aunt Agatha." Was that the explanation, then? This girl was going into a decline. Along had come his son, and their friendship had arrested the decline. If he didn't come along poor Melinda never recovered, never survived to become a famous beauty and marry the dashing space pioneer. But no, that couldn't possibly be it . . .

He himself had met Dolores *before* Godfrey had stumbled upon the time machine. The moment he had perfected it he had tried it out. And that very first trip he had met Dolores. He had had dreams of witnessing the marvels of future ages, but all that had paled before Dolores. He brought himself back to his line of reasoning with a conscious effort.

So it hadn't needed his son's intervention to ensure Melinda's recovery. It was too confusing. He had glimpsed the possibility of an infinity of different worlds, all stemming from man's multiplicity of choice. Plainly, the causality of time travel would have to be gone into much more deeply. For in only one of those worlds was Dolores. Or was she in more than one? Certainly there was *one* in which she was *not*.

Then suddenly the only possible answer struck him.

Melinda would have recovered anyway, *without* his son's intervention. But once he *had* intervened, once he had aroused the girl's interest in life, it would prove fatal – literally so – if he did not continue to see her. The moment he had banned Godfrey from the machine, he had set up a time line in which the budding Grandma Melinda would go into a deeper decline than ever, and never live to have any children, and not Dolores but a green-haired harriidan would occupy the house next door and paint it in ghastly fluorescent stripes.

He shuddered. But he could check up, couldn't he? He could go to 1985 and see for himself. But no – the situation was delicate enough. He was not sure yet that he had succeeded in getting Dolores back. He could not risk losing her again, perhaps for ever.

He caught Godfrey's gaze upon him – that too innocent gaze. He looked on his son with a new-found respect. After all, a clown could have cheered up an ailing girl. But to think that once having met the young rascal, she would pine away if he suddenly stopped seeing her, well it showed that he couldn't be quite the ruffian that he had hitherto considered him to be. Why the boy was quite a chip off the old block – infuriating as it was to recognize that his own secret paradise depended for its very existence on the boy. And how long would it have to go on? However long, he had no choice in the matter. The one alternative – that he go into the future and stay there – did not even enter his mind. A man may throw off some of the conventions of his age—but not all of them.

He put his hand on his son's shoulder.

"Godfrey, my boy, I think I have taken rather too narrow a view of your conduct. We all have a duty to one another, and if you brought happiness into this poor girl's life it would be a wicked act to prevent it. The doers of good should not be made to go in stealth. You have reached the years of discretion. In which case—" he reached into his jacket pocket – "you may have the key of the door. I will arrange times when the machine will be at your disposal."

Godfrey took the key in trembling fingers and made for the door in a daze of joy.

"Oh, and Godfrey—"

"Yes, father?"

"Whatever you do – don't lose it."

BY TENNYSON OUT OF DISNEY

M. John Harrison

We are too lenient with our heroes: it's unavoidable, a concomitant of their being heroes. Perhaps there should be a stiffer entrance examination. J. R. R. Tolkien, the don with the archetypal pipe, looming book-in-hand over last year's subcultural landscape, is one of the modern multi-value – damn' nigh all-purpose, in fact – heroes, selected as champion by half a dozen folk-rock outfits, canonised journalistically for his fourteen-year journey down the mountain with his *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

It isn't his fault. But when a book is claimed as a cure for everything from Materialism to Inelegant Grammar by oracles as far divorced as Haight Ashbury and Cambridge, one feels entitled to jib a little.

A fantasy performs different operations on different readers: it may supply what Tolkein calls 'Recovery',¹ or provide the one-off Chestertonian insight – liberate the Jungian archetypes or merely liven up a train journey; but it can't achieve any of these ends without being, in overall effect and basic supposition, fantastic. *The Lord Of The Rings* is certainly that.

However, since any such work is essentially a bridge between the reader's experience and a set of suppositions of which he can have had no experience at all, its terms of presentation, if they are to be effective, must be realistic – that is, must relate somehow to instances conceivably within the reader's own experience.

"It is extremely unlikely that a poor boy should be suddenly enriched by an anonymous benefactor who later turns out to be a convict." (C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment In Criticism*, Chap. VII) – it's more than that, it's a poor boy's pipe dream: but nobody can deny that the characters and component situations of *Great Expectations* are thoroughly grounded in the reality of his time.

The same can be said for Mervyn Peake's characterisation; Irma Prunesquallor is a *real* spinster, and you can

detect in her all the frustrations, the tasteless vanities – “‘My gown of a thousand frills with its corsage of hand-painted parrots . . .’” – and the insecurities. But this in no way interferes with the incredible events of her coming-out party (*Gormenghast*, Chap. 36.); on the contrary, it brings them alive. Through a queer and shrewd juxtaposition of minor realities, Peake invokes a broad sweep of fantasy that confirms not only to the weird rationale of *Gormenghast*, but also to what we see of reality.

How does our champion shine in the light of this *Graal*?

The mainstay of *The Lord Of The Rings* is the interplay between great events and lesser concerns the dramatic tension gained by insertion of simple pastoral figures into the ‘counsels of the Wise and Great’: a standard technique of traditional story-telling. Fulfilling half this purpose – and the secondary but no less valuable one of acting as a reference-point for the reader – the hobbits are important enough for Tolkien to characterise collectively in a prologue. There, we discover them to be:

“ . . . unobtrusive but very ancient”; lovers of peace and quiet and “Good-tilled earth”; “Good natured rather than beautiful” of face; hearty eaters and drinkers, “being fond of simple jests at all times, and of six meals a day”; but “difficult to daunt or kill . . .”

Add to this that hackneyed spark of courage that flares eventually in the chest of even the fattest specimen and you have the perfect stereotype of the Common Man beloved by Chesterton² and the pre-WWI nationalists; the Yeoman of England, something that doesn’t exist and never did – the dependable, amiable peasant who doesn’t quite understand Great Events, but is quietly willing to go out and do his bit . . . Those solid Englishmen went reluctantly to war and were pulverised at Ypres, dying messily and without nobility; in any rural pub you can meet Samwise Gamgee’s ‘Gaffer’ – swearing and spitting unpleasantly into the fire; and I once worked in a Warwickshire hunting stable with an amiable rustic character who beat up his dog so often it wet itself every time he went near it.

To ask Tolkien to make the hobbit an analogy for this kind of man would be ridiculous: but in the interests of that bridge of realism he might have made them something more than simpering nitwits progressively ‘Ennobled’ by

their experiences until they become utter *Boys Own Paper*³ prigs, as does Frodo during the journey down Ithilien and the crossing, with Samwise, of Gorgoroth (Vol II, Book IV; Vol III, Book VI).

I don't 'believe' in Irma Prunesquallor or James Branch Cabell's Prince de Lisuarte,⁴ neither am I expected to: but I can find any number of points at which their actions and their motivations mesh with those of real people.

I can't find these contacts in hobbits, or in orcs, who all speak a sequestered child's version of the dialect of the Rank-and-file footsoldier – “‘Can't take his medicine,’ they jeered. ‘Doesn't know what's good for him . . .’” (Vol II, p51); and, “‘Now, now,’ growled Shagrat, ‘I have my orders. And it's more than my belly's worth, or yours, to break 'em.’” (Vol II, p349) – and never, never come close to committing any of the atrocities laid constantly at their door.

A look at the component situations of the book brings a similar sort of disappointment.

“And with that the host began to move. But the Rohirrim sang no more. *Death* they cried with one voice loud and terrible, and gathering speed like a great tide their battle swept about their fallen king and passed, roaring away southwards.” (Vol III, p119).

Heroic fantasy by definition concerns itself with these emotional abstracts: but you can't construct a bloodletting from stirring speeches and splendid but vaguely-delineated charges; and if you haven't the foundation of a palpable battle, an affair of torn arteries and maimed horses, then your heroisms are void, your battle-songs hollow. In the above description, there isn't a single image that evokes the feel of a cavalry unit on the hunt and out for blood; no picture, merely a lot of fine phrases. (It's interesting, too, to note that although the Tolkien/Lewis, fantasy-based school of criticism has repeatedly condemned modern prose for its inventive paucity, Tolkien uses that clapped-out 'tide' simile.)

Further indications of this lack of actual substance can be found in the tale of Denethor's fiery suicide (Vol III, pp130–131), which, compared to Peake's burning of the Bright Carvings (*Gormenghast*, Chap. 63) or even Alan Garner's lighting of the wendfire on the Eve of Gomrath (*The*

Moon Of Gomrath, Chap. 9), carries very little of the urgency of fire; and in the description of Gandalf's clash with the Balrog (Vol. I, pp344-345), again full of heroisms and doom but lacking in detail.

From Lewis once more: "No imaginary world has been projected which is at once as multifarious and so true to its inner laws . . ." Challenged, any devotee of *The Lord Of The Rings* would advance a similar accolade; and it's true enough, the book's a world in itself. But creation of a fictional world which holds fast to its own internal assumptions is well within the capability of any competent (or even fairly practised) pulp sf writer – what is difficult, and what Tolkien fails to do with the facility of Peake or Cabell, is to relate that 'Sub-creation'⁵ to Creation.

It's a pity that a book so full of poetry and action, having such a huge act of fantasy implicit in its overall structure and aims, should take its characters and images and components not from the beautiful chaos of reality but from what amounts to other fictions. When its incidents reach the reader they are vicarious by hand-me-down, already twice-removed; its most telling figures are by Tennyson out of Walt Disney.

It is in the work of the latter that we might find the key to the book's popularity with such apparently opposing audiences. There is very little basic difference between the Conservatism of the Oxbridge don and the return-to-earth Conservationalism of the Charing Cross Road hippie: which would certainly explain the appeal of that element of the book represented by hobbits—the mean and illiterate idyll of Hobbiton, the inertia and self-satisfied xenophobia of the Breelanders.

Like Disney, Tolkien presents us with stability and comfort and safe catharsis⁶: *The Lord Of The Rings* is detailed enough to get lost in; it deals with Good and Evil, but avoids the riskier ethical questions; and, most important, it ends where it begins, with almost everybody safe in the Shire, just a *shade* wiser and more appreciative of Home. Any major change in Middle Earth brought about by the fall of Sauron goes on outside the hobbits' area of sensibility: indeed, the Shire is hermetically sealed by the new king (Appendix A), just in case its status quo is threatened again.

Take away the cocoa cup and put on the night light. The reader ends the book like the hobbits in the house of Tom Bombadil, tucked up tight. “‘Fear no nightly noises.’” The nursery door’s locked and “‘. . . none of the Big People shall pass its borders . . .’” Volume III, Page 342.

Footnotes:

1. From the essay ‘On Fairy Stories’ (in *Tree And Leaf*, Allen and Unwin), in which Tolkien defends fantasy against most comers.

2. Not only Chesterton. The practice – and the attitude that gives rise to it – stretches in a long line through such writers as Lewis (try the characterisation of Tom Maggs in *That Hideous Strength*) and Williams up to the present day. Victorian sentimentality dies hard, and look what a soft crumbly core it’s given a lot of English literature.

3. Tolkien mentions this publication in an interview with Daphne Castell (*New Worlds* 168), linking the hobbits’ antics at Crickhollow (Vol. I, pp111–112) with the schoolboy sense of humour. An endearing admission.

4. The central character of Cabell’s *The High Place*, available in Ballantine Books.

5. ‘On Fairy Stories’ again: Tolkien’s term for the fantasist is ‘Sub-creator’.

6. See the previous issue of *New Worlds Quarterly*.

For textual reference I have used the 1963 Allen & Unwin edition of TLR, and all page numbers relate to that.

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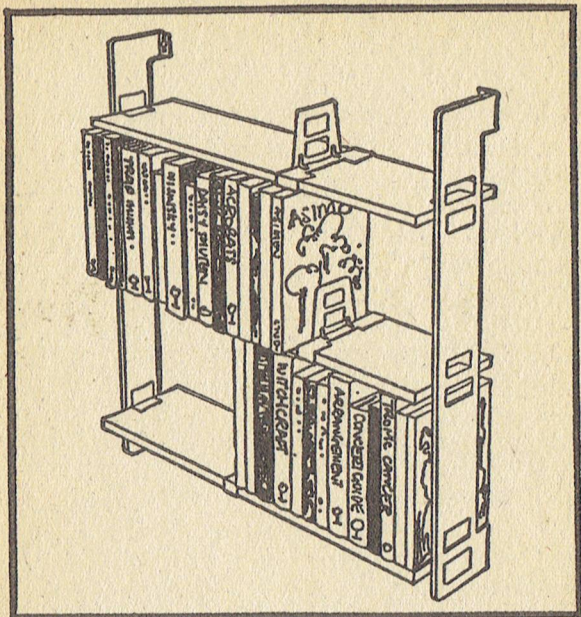
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